

Multimedia Approaches to Learning the Foundations of Library and Information Science

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SHORT ABSTRACT

This paper identifies, analyzes, and critiques three multimedia resources for learning about the foundations of Library and Information Science (LIS). It answers the research question: Beyond traditional pedagogical strategies such as lectures and text-based readings and assignments, how might students, practitioners, and the general public gain a sweeping understanding of our field? The paper will help LIS educators to diversify their pedagogical strategies and engage new communities.

Keywords: Pedagogy, multimedia education, foundations of Library and Information Science, *History of Information* (University of California-Berkeley online course), *In Our Time* (BBC Radio 4 program)

LONG ABSTRACT

This paper identifies, analyzes, and critiques three multimedia resources for learning about the foundations of Library and Information Science (LIS). Multimedia pedagogical strategies have many benefits. They overcome a long-standing reliance upon read-write learning; can be economically reused; are student-centered (allowing greater personal control); and extend seamlessly beyond classroom walls.

Our paper answers the research question: *Beyond traditional pedagogical strategies such as lectures and text-based readings and assignments, how might students, library practitioners, and the general public gain a sweeping understanding of our field?* It draws upon the authors' ongoing experiments to enhance masters and doctoral courses on the foundations of LIS at the Faculty of Information, University of Toronto. After a brief statement on the use of multimedia resources in post-graduate education, three different types of audio-visual content specific to LIS are critically discussed, namely: 1.) The *History of Information* online course mounted by the University of California (Berkeley) School of Information; 2.) A curated playlist of episodes from the BBC Radio 4 program, *In Our Time*; and 3.) A sample of YouTube-based lectures by luminaries of LIS. Due to space limitations, sketches of two (out of three) of these multimedia resources follow.

Multimedia Resource #1: The History of Information online course

The University of California (Berkeley) School of Information offers an undergraduate course, *INFO 103: History of Information (HoI)*. It is taught by Drs. Paul Duguid and Geoffrey Nunberg, a business historian and linguist, respectively. In its original format, *HoI* was delivered biweekly across a semester in a large lecture hall at the School of Information. The course has been audio-recorded in its entirety along with synchronized PowerPoint slides and both are available on [YouTube](#) and as [iTunes podcasts](#).

HoI delivers a social or popular history of information spanning from the creation of writing to the current Information Age. Example segments include *Manuscript Culture*, *Emergence of the Public Sphere*, *Technologies of the Image*, *Storage and Search*, *Big Data*, and *Social Implications of the Internet*, among others. Professors Nunberg and Duguid effectively carry a theme of technological determinism throughout, and regularly return

to the question, *Why* a history of information? LIS educators should be aware that the course is geared to undergraduates and is not an account, *per se*, of the LIS discipline or profession, though both are oft-mentioned.

At the Faculty of Information, University of Toronto, the authors assigned the entire lecture series to doctoral students enrolled in *Information Research: Foundations*, many who were new to information studies—essentially creating an online lecture series within a course. At the end of the semester, the doctoral students wrote an essay on the strengths and weaknesses of *Hol*. In the final paper for the ALISE Conference, a more extensive summary and critique of *Hol* will be provided as well as highlights from the doctoral students' commentaries.

Multimedia Resource #2: Curated playlist of episodes from the BBC Radio 4 program, In Our Time

In Our Time (IOT) is a live radio discussion program exploring the history of ideas; it is produced by BBC Radio 4 and hosted by Melvin Bragg. Each episode entails a 42-minute discussion of an historical, philosophical, religious, cultural or scientific topic among Bragg and three world-class academics. Episodes are structured as follows: a short opening statement by Bragg; introductions of the participating scholars; Q & A period/discussion; and then closing remarks by one of the guests. The wide-ranging, 700+ episodes to date of *IOT* are available for streaming or download at the online [In Our Time Archive](#).



The authors curated a collection of *IOT* episodes, coined the “LIS Playlist,” to complement the masters-level course at the Faculty of Information, University of Toronto, *Foundations of Library and Information Science*. To that end, the complete *In Our Time* Archive was first analyzed for relevant subjects using the course syllabus and the *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences* as frameworks for inclusion.

The LIS Playlist identified twelve themes of relevance to the foundations of LIS (e. g. Writing and Print Culture, Information Technology, Great Texts in Context) and then five episodes of *IOT* that fit within each theme. The twelve themes were synchronized with the twelve-week course schedule. For example, during the week of the course devoted to “Organizing Knowledge” there are *IOT* episodes on *The Encyclopedie*, *The Natural Order* (scientific classification), *The Calendar*, *The Measurement of Time*, and *Chemical Elements*.

The one hundred graduate students who took the course listened to three episodes per week, as outlined on the LIS Playlist. Further, a major assignment for the course was directly inspired by *IOT*. Working together in teams of six, students imitated the program’s format and style to produce and record a 10-minute mini-episode on a relevant foundational topic of their choice. While creating the broadcast, individuals assumed roles as: producer, host, world-class academic #1, world-class academic #2, world-class (information) professional, and technical manager. The mini-episodes were played and celebrated during the last session of the course and also mounted online for wider audiences to enjoy. The students’ impressions of the assignment were measured in an online evaluation form and will be reported in the final paper.

There is not enough space to address the third multimedia resource—a sample of YouTube-based lectures by LIS luminaries—which will remain forthcoming.

Overall, this paper helps teachers of LIS to embrace multimedia formats that delight students and more easily reach curious citizens outside our classrooms. At the ALISE conference, our presentation will feature many entertaining audio examples that will motivate the audience. An Appendix to the final paper will include the detailed assignment handouts associated with #1 and #2 (above), enabling turnkey uptake by educators.