

MIS 761: Foundations of Research in Information Systems

Class Times: TBD
Venue: TBD

Instructor: Andrew Hardin
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Office Hours:

Prerequisite: Admission to the PhD in Business Program and consent of the advisor

Course Description

This doctoral seminar introduces the intellectual foundations of Information Systems (IS) as a research discipline. The course examines core theories, paradigms, and debates that shape IS research, with emphasis on understanding the nature of the field, its epistemological roots, and its relationship to reference disciplines. Students will critically engage with seminal and contemporary IS literature and develop the skills needed to conceptualize, position, and defend rigorous IS research.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the seminar, students should be able to:

- Articulate the historical evolution and identity of the IS field.
- Compare and evaluate major research paradigms and epistemological positions in IS.
- Critically analyze foundational and contemporary IS theories.
- Understand theory-building and theory-testing.
- Identify different types of research topics and methodologies
- Demonstrate critical understanding of literature in a chosen area of research
- Identify theoretical gaps in a selected body of literature.

Course Focus

This seminar examines the seminal and contemporary IS literature, with emphasis on:

- The history and evolution of IS research
- Understanding IS research and paradigms
- Rigor versus relevance in IS research
- Theory development foundations
- Topics and methodologies used in the IS discipline
- Individual, group, and multilevel theories
- Emerging topics in IS research

WebCampus

Course information, including the syllabus, class assignments, and notes, will be posted on [WebCampus](https://www.it.unlv.edu/webcampus), <https://www.it.unlv.edu/webcampus>. Students will also submit their assignments electronically using WebCampus.

Grading Scale

Percent Grade	Letter Grade
93% and over	A
90%	A-
88%	B+
82%	B
80%	B-
78%	C+
72%	C
Below 72%	F

Grading

The following table shows the breakdown of the grading components and the relative weights:

Component	Weights
Weekly written work	15%
Seminar participation and discussion quality	30%
Discussion leadership (2–3 times)	20%
Research proposal milestones (Option 1 or 2)	15%
Final research paper (Option 1) or literature review (Option 2)	20%
Total points	100%

Weekly Written Work

Each week, students must

- Prepare a brief, 1-page summary for each required reading (due before class begins)
- Prepare a 2-4 page reflection and synthesis of the seminar discussion (due by the end of each week)

Seminar Participation

Seminar participation is a core component of doctoral seminars. Students are expected to come fully prepared each week and contribute thoughtfully to the discussion. Participation will be evaluated based on the quality, depth, and sophistication of contributions rather than frequency alone. Strong participation reflects careful engagement with the readings, critical analysis of arguments and assumptions, integration across ideas, and professional, respectful interaction with peers.

"Inspiration" - the path to a "30%" seminar participation grade – involves such actions as:

- Demonstrating that you have carefully read the assigned readings
- Applying information from outside readings to the discussion
- Integrating multiple students' comments to form a critical analysis
- Reaching back to something said previously in the discussion that is pertinent to the current discussion
- Pulling together material from several of the assigned readings
- Drawing parallels or distinctions from previous readings
- Not dominating class discussion

Discussion Leadership

Each student will serve as a discussion leader 2–3 times during the semester. The goal is to facilitate high-level theoretical and methodological critique.

Discussion leadership evaluates your ability to think and act as a journal reviewer and as a future scholar.

Research Paper

Research Proposal Milestones (Option 1)

The research proposal project will be a series of structured deliverables throughout the semester. The purpose of these milestones is to scaffold the development of a theoretically rigorous and empirically testable research project.

1. **Milestone 1: Research Problematization:** The first milestone focuses on problem framing and theoretical positioning. Students must clearly describe a real-world phenomenon of importance, provide evidence of its practical relevance, situate it within the appropriate literature stream, identify an explicit theoretical gap, and articulate a clear research objective.
2. **Milestone 2: Theoretical Framework and Model:** The second milestone develops the theoretical foundation of the project. Students are expected to identify and justify the core theoretical lens, define key constructs, articulate the underlying causal mechanisms, present a conceptual model, and formulate research questions and hypotheses. The emphasis is on logical coherence and theoretical contribution.
3. **Milestone 3: Research Design and Method:** The third milestone outlines how the proposed study will be executed. Students must specify and justify the research method, describe the proposed measures and data collection approach, address validity considerations, and explain the planned analytical strategy. The central goal is strong alignment between theory and empirical design.
4. **Milestone 4: Proposal Workshop and Refinement:** In the final milestone, students present their integrated proposal to the seminar for structured peer feedback. This stage is intended to refine theoretical clarity, strengthen contribution claims, and improve methodological rigor before submission of the final research proposal.

Literature Review Milestones (Option 2 – Recommended for First-Year Students)

Reading the field requires an in-depth examination of topics beyond what we explore in our class sessions. To help you build your skills in reading the literature and synthesizing research, this research paper option takes the form of an annotated bibliography and literature synthesis. You will create an annotated bibliography of these papers, essentially writing the article summaries you prepared for our regular class sessions. You should model your review on existing literature reviews published in top journals in our field (e.g., *MIS Quarterly*, *Information Systems Research*, the *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, or the *Journal of Management Information Systems*).

1. **Milestone 1:** One-page description of topic and direction
2. **Milestone 2:** Preliminary outline and description of proposed methodology to find articles.
3. **Milestone 3:** Reference List
4. **Milestone 4:** Presentation to the seminar class for feedback

Final Research Paper (Option 1)

The final research proposal is an individually authored, journal-style manuscript that integrates and refines the work developed through the milestone sequence. The proposal should present a theoretically grounded, empirically testable study that addresses a meaningful human or behavioral phenomenon in information systems.

The manuscript must clearly articulate the research problem and its significance, position the study within the relevant literature, develop a coherent theoretical framework, and specify a rigorous research design aligned with the proposed hypotheses or research questions. The proposal should demonstrate conceptual precision, logical consistency, and methodological feasibility consistent with expectations at leading research institutions.

The final document should approximate the structure and quality of a submission-ready paper, including an introduction, literature review, theoretical development, proposed method, and a clear statement of expected contributions to IS theory and practice.

Final Annotated Bibliography and Literature Synthesis (Option 2)

You will create an annotated bibliography of these papers, essentially writing the summaries you prepared for our regular class sessions. There is no page limit for your submission, but a typical paper would be approximately 20 pages (double-spaced), including 10 pages of summaries and then 10 pages of discussion. The final literature review should reflect an early attempt to understand a specific body of literature that a student is interested in.

Disclaimer

If required, the course content and schedule may be changed at the instructor's discretion. Announcements made in class will override any statement made here.

Class Schedule (subject to change)

The topics for the class are summarized in the table below:

Week	Theme	Key Topics
1	Introduction to the IS Discipline	What is information systems research? Views of top journal editors. Scope and boundaries of the IS literature
2	Historical Evolution of IS Research	Early days of IS research Shifts in dominant research streams
3	Research Paradigms in IS Research	Positivism, interpretivism, and critical research
4	Epistemology and Ontology	Knowledge claims in IS research Objectivist versus subjectivist perspectives
5	Theory in IS Research	What is theory? Levels and types of theories
6	Theory Building in IS	Conceptualization and abstraction Variance versus process theories
7	Reference Disciplines	Psychology, sociology, economics Benefits and challenges of borrowing theory
8	Diversity, Rigor and Relevance	Conceptualizing the IT artifact Socio-technical axis of cohesion
9	Human Factors in IS	Human-computer interaction Individual-level theories
10	Collaboration and Communication	Technology-mediated collaboration Group-level theories

11	Quantitative Methods	Lab Experiments Field Experiments Surveys
12	Quantitative Measurement	Experimental manipulation Instrument development Measurement methods
13	Emerging Topics and Future Directions	Artificial intelligence Quantum Computing
14	Presentations and Discussion	Research paper presentation

UNLV Policies

<https://www.unlv.edu/policies/students>

