**RESEARCH PROJECT ASSIGNMENT**

**Definitions of “information technology”** *(noun)*

*…the study or use of systems (especially computers and telecommunications) for storing, retrieving, and sending information.*

[[https://www.google.com/search?q=information+technology](https://www.google.com/search?q=information+technology+definition&rlz=1C1CHBF_enUS815US815&oq=information+technology+def&aqs=chrome.0.0j69i57j0l6.5952j1j9&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)]

*…the technology involving the development, maintenance, and use of computer systems, software, and networks for the processing and distribution of data.*

[<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/information%20technology>]

*…the development, implementation, and maintenance of computer hardware and software systems to organize and communicate information electronically. Abbreviation: IT*

[<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/information-technology?s=t>]

[<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/information-technology?s=t>]

**ILR260 Final Research Project**

***Explore an ethical or social issue surrounding some aspect of information technology.***

**DUE:**

Last day of the course.

**OVERVIEW:**

*You will develop your Research Project in a series of clearly-defined, manageable steps over the four weeks of the course.*

One of our course objectives in ILR 260 is to “explore ethical and social issues surrounding information technology,” and your research projects—pieces of which you will share with classmates—will serve this objective and become part of the content of the course.

Often students will select projects that relate to their academic majors or current jobs, but this is not a formal requirement. The most important thing is to pursue **a research question that genuinely interests you**. Information technology now touches just about every area of life.  The point of your paper will be to craft a response, however preliminary, to a real question about some aspect of information technology.

A “real” question is one that has no single, straightforward answer, and that will require you, in addressing the question, to draw upon and synthesize information from a variety of sources. Another way of saying this is that you will be addressing a significant issue in your paper; an issue is any claim or statement that is called into question. A significant issue is one that might be considered controversial; that is, reasonable arguments may be advanced for opposing or alternative positions on this issue. While you will not be presenting an argument for one position or another, it is helpful to keep this in mind while deciding on and researching your question.

Questions that lend themselves to simple explanatory or “how-to” answers (for example, “What is Twitter?” or “How can people protect their computers from hackers?”) will not work for this assignment. Neither will questions that have obvious or commonly known answers. Think about this way: there should be a worthwhile purpose for taking the time and effort to research and write about.

Questions that will work for this assignment appear near the end of this document.  Choose one of these for your Research Project. Don’t worry if a classmate selects the same question. Each of you will inevitably turn up different kinds of sources and produce very different final projects.

*If none of the questions interest you…*

There should be at least one question on the list that interests you, or that you can modify so that the question interests you. But if you’d like, you may propose a question not included on the list. Make sure the question you are proposing addresses an ethical or social issue related to information technology. Also make sure it is not overly broad. Ask yourself:

\* Could an entire book potentially be written on this question? If so, the question is too broad for a short research paper.

\* Does the question contain multiple components? If so, select one component to focus on in your paper. (Hint: If your question includes a comma, it is probably too broad.)

As you develop the project, keep in mind that our focus in ILR 260 is inquiry, not argumentation. Argumentation is a worthy area of study and is a focus of other courses you may take at the university. In your ILR 260 research project, however, your primary goal is to explore your research question with depth and sophistication rather than to persuade an audience of a particular viewpoint. While you will need to propose some sort of answer to your question in the final version of your project, that answer may be tentative. It may, for example, point in the direction of further questions and further research. It may identify contradictions in your research that are at this time irresolvable. Again, in writing this paper, focus on exploring, interpreting, and synthesizing ideas rather than on “defending” a thesis.

Keep in mind, too, that you will carry out your research using published information and opinions. You should not try to do primary research of your own, such as surveys or experiments. This kind of research is specialized, varies from one discipline to the next, and is beyond the scope of ILR260.

As you progress through each stage of the project, you might find it helpful to keep in mind that the skills you are practicing have applications well beyond this course, and also beyond the academy. Whether you are writing a college paper or a workplace report, or simply explaining something to another person, you will want to be able to connect ideas in logical ways, to illustrate those ideas with clear explanations and examples, and to explain the nature of any sources you’ve consulted.

**EXAMPLE**

For an example of a completed ILR260 Final Research Project written by a past ILR260 student (and shared with the student’s permission), see  [https://tinyurl.com/y7ek5zjc](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1GYiwqJYoCmOHZ3bTl4TmRrV1E/view?usp=sharing)

**COMPONENTS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

1. Project Introduction  (due end of Week 1)
2. Library Research Report  (due end of Week 2)
3. Draft of Research Project  (due end of Week 3)
4. Final draft of Research Project (due last day of class)

**FINAL DRAFT SPECIFICATIONS**

LENGTH  
900-1200 words (not including citation page)

FORMAT  
Please use APA citation style. (If you are majoring in English, you may use MLA instead.) Your final project will not include an abstract (but if you’d like an abstract-writing help resource for the future, here is one you might want to check out:  [How to write a research abstract](http://tinyurl.com/kf45z64) )

AUDIENCEAddress your paper to a general audience. Your ILR260 classmates have a wide range of backgrounds and academic interests; assume this kind of broad readership when you write your paper. Assume that your readers are not specialists in your topic area. Ideas must be fully explained and made accessible to a general readership.

SOURCESYour research should emphasize **peer-reviewed, scholarly journal articles** from the NU library’s databases. (Be assured that the database search skills you develop will have applications beyond NU.)  Reference as many sources as needed in order to substantively explore your research question, but no fewer than 4. For additional guidance, see the source-selection criteria included in the Week 2 Library Research Report assignment.

The GRADING RUBRIC appears in the final section of this document.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

**Law and Society**

* How does anonymity affect online debate?
* What is the future of military robots?
* Should public libraries filter internet access?
* Is internet shaming a legitimate mode of social criticism?
* How is the dark web challenging law enforcement?
* Is a catastrophic cyber terrorist attack imminent?
* What is the future of the United States Postal Service?
* What is the future of predictive policing?
* What is the future of facial recognition technology?
* Should humans use identity chips?
* How effective is internet mediation compared with face-to-face mediation?
* Why are internet connection speeds in the United States slower than those in many other developed countries?
* What is the future of cryptocurrencies?
* What is the future of brick-and-mortar retail?
* Do we still need public libraries?

**Media and Culture**

* How does the digital divide affect low-income communities?
* Should everyone consider internet access to be a basic human right?
* How is online advertising changing?
* Will local journalism survive in the internet age?
* Can competitors challenge Google’s market dominance?
* Can Facebook’s market dominance be challenged?
* Can Amazon’s market dominance be challenged?
* What is the future of television technology?
* What has been the effect of declining traditional media coverage of local issues?
* Do media portrayals of violence desensitize people to real-life violence?

**Health and Healthcare**

* Can therapists effectively deliver psychotherapy over the internet?
* What motivates people to fake illness online?
* How will sociable robots change caregiving?
* Do internet-based workplace wellness programs lead to improved health?
* How effective are telemedical interventions in the treatment of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_? (choose a focus )
* How effective is virtual reality therapy in the treatment of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_?  (choose a focus–for example, PTSD, or phobias)
* What is the future of network-based patient-driven medical research?
* How does electronic medical record (EMR) use affect office visits?
* Are electronic medical record systems adequately protected?
* Do electronic medical records improve the quality of patient care?
* How is “big data” changing the management or treatment of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ ? (choose a focus).
* How does social media use affect school performance?
* Do fitness trackers improve health?

**Interpersonal Communication / Relationships**

* How does online infidelity affect relationships?
* Is face-to-face communication still necessary for forming bonds with others?
* Do texting and social media lessen our in-person communication abilities?
* What are the social consequences of texting while in the company of others?
* Should we be concerned about people forming emotional attachments to robots?
* What is the future of sex robots?
* How has online dating’s dramatic expansion of choice altered the mate-selection process?

**Education and Parenting**

* Is the internet affecting the attention span of young people?
* How should school authorities treat “sexting” among teenagers?
* What should be the role of schools in preventing cyberbullying?
* What should be the role of memorization in internet-era education?
* How has internet pornography affected the sexual attitudes and behaviors of adolescents?
* Should parents use surveillance technology to monitor their children?
* Will MOOCs replace traditional higher education?
* How is social media research changing child custody disputes?
* Does software-based personalized learning improve K-12 education?
* What is the future of online learning?

**Work**

* Will computers replace \_\_\_\_\_\_ ?  (Choose a focus. Many possibilities. For example: cashiers, lawyers, pilots, accountants, teachers… )
* How is big data changing \_\_\_\_\_ ? (Choose a focus. Many possibilities. For example: teaching, cancer research, policing, literary studies, marketing, historiography, engineering…)
* How will/does [identify specific information technology] change [identify specific occupation]?
* Should telecommuting become the norm for people with desk jobs?
* Should social-media profiles be used in hiring decisions?
* How are computerized scheduling systems affecting service-industry employees?

**Grading Rubric**

[Note: Points will be deducted for deviations from assignment requirements/specifications. Greater deviations will result in greater deductions. Per course policy, scores of 50% and higher are reserved for submissions that attempt to meet assignment requirements/specifications. Rubric starts on next page…]

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| **A** | **B** | **C** | **D** | **F** |
| Focus is clear, specific, and sustained. | Clear and sustained focus. | Focus is basically clear; some content may deviate from stated focus. | Focus is unclear and/or unsustained. | Lacks focus; lacks coherence. |
| Approach is sophisticated. | Approach is appropriate to college-level research writing and to the ILR260 project specifically. | Approach is somewhat simplistic and/or somewhat too broad. | Approach is overly simplistic and/or overly broad. | Approach inappropriate to college-level writing and/or the assignment |
| Source selection meets assignment requirements; sources are strong and skillfully chosen for direct relevance and for the substance and complexity they bring to the inquiry. | Source selection meets assignment requirements; sources are strong and relevant to the inquiry. | Sources meet assignment requirements. A small percentage of the sources may exhibit problems such as insufficient currency, relevancy, or depth. | Source selection suggests attempt to meet assignment requirements, but a significant percentage of sources exhibit problems such as insufficient currency, relevancy, or depth. | Sources mostly do not meet assignment requirements.  Many source-selection problems. |
| Source identification (Who?) is precise and smoothly handled | Source identification (Who?) is competently handled | Source identification (Who?) may be imprecise or awkward in places | Source identification (Who?) is imprecise or awkward, and occasionally missing | Source identification (Who?) is mostly missing, or is mostly incorrect |
| Explanation of source content is complete (What? How? So What?), accurate, and concise. | Explanation of source content is complete (What? How? So What?) and accurate. | Explanation of source content is sufficiently well-developed and sufficiently accurate. | Some source content is misrepresented or is not sufficiently well-explained. | Most source content is misrepresented or is not sufficiently well-explained. |
| Strong source integration. Paper demonstrates sophisticated sense of when to use a direct quote versus a paraphrase versus a summary, and of how to incorporate source material into sentences and paragraphs. | Good source integration. Paper demonstrates a good understanding overall of when to use a direct quote versus a paraphrase versus a summary, and of how to incorporate source material into sentences and paragraphs. | Uneven source integration. For example, occasional excess use of direct quoting, or incorporation of sources in ways that are occasionally unclear or that make the material difficult to understand. | Poor source integration. Overall, paper demonstrates an inadequate understanding of when to use a direct quote versus a paraphrase versus a summary, and of how to incorporate source material into sentences and paragraphs. | Sources are not incorporated effectively in most or all of the paper. |
| Strong synthesis; paper makes a contribution to knowledge | Good synthesis of ideas | Synthesis is present, but underdeveloped, or may take form of an overly-simplistic structure (such as a pros-and-cons summary) | Minimal synthesis | Compiles rather than synthesizes |
| Strong organization | Good organization | Some organizational problems | Poor organization | Little organization |
| Clear and well-crafted transitions | Clear transitions | Some transitions are unclear, or ill-fitting | Most transitions are unclear, or ill-fitting | Weak transitions throughout |
| Strong conclusion | Good conclusion | Some problems with the conclusion (for example, overly abrupt, or not well-aligned with the body of the project) | Significant problems with the conclusion. | Inadequate conclusion |
| Confidence in use of Standard English, language reflects a practiced and/or refined understanding of syntax and usage. | Conveys a good understanding of Standard English; the writer is clear in his/her attempt to articulate main points, but may demonstrate moments of “flat” or unrefined language. | Presence of sentence-level errors and awkwardness of expression, but not of such frequency and severity as to significantly impede understanding. | Awkward expression and sentence-level errors occur frequently, often impeding understanding. | Awkward expression and sentence-level errors occur throughout the paper and significantly impede understanding. |
| Adheres to APA citation format (MLA for arts/humanities majors) | Adheres to APA citation format (MLA for arts/humanities majors); occasional citation errors are minor and at level of presentation. The errors would not prevent a reader from being able to connect in-text and end citations, or from being able to independently track down the references; and they would be unlikely to detract from the author’s credibility. | Evidence of attempt to adhere to APA citation format (MLA for arts/humanities majors), but with some errors in presentation and content that might detract from the author’s credibility or prevent readers from being able to understand or locate sources. | Insufficient adherence to APA citation format (MLA for arts/humanities majors); significant/communication-impeding errors in presentation and content | Major deviations from APA or MLA citation format |