INF1005H - Information Workshop Description

The Liberal Arts Hobby

Section 0104, Wednesdays from 1-4pm (week of January 11, 2016 to week of February 22, 2016)

Instructor: Jenna Hartel

The liberal arts hobbies (LAHs) (Stebbins, 1994) entail the systematic and fervent pursuit during free time of knowledge for its own sake. People engaged in LAHs are not academics or researchers, but citizens who relish the quest for a profound understanding of arts, sports, languages, cultures, histories, sciences, philosophies, literary traditions, or politics. This activity attracts sometimes eccentric aficionados of quirky subjects such as an obscure historical figure, ancient religion, or particular baseball team, among innumerable possible topics. Liberal arts hobbyists are avid users of public information institutions such as libraries, archives, and museums, and are among the most active consumers and producers of content on the Internet. They constitute an exceedingly interesting and important population for the information professions because they have turned the acquisition and expression of knowledge—usually seen as a problem or work-driven scenario—into a form of leisure.

This 6-week workshop focuses on the liberal arts hobbies and their information dimension. We will begin with a broad view of the leisure universe, drawing upon a theoretical framework of leisure that brings the distinct features and practices of the liberal arts hobbies into clear view. Further insights will be gained by applying interdisciplinary concepts from the field of education, as well as quantitative data about LAHs specific to the Canadian context. To synthesize the core curriculum of the MI program, we will explore the social, technological, and material information phenomena that underlie this hobby realm. Over the duration of the semester, working in teams, students will learn and apply original research techniques to produce a state-of-the-art report on information phenomena within one LAH community. The final session will have a celebratory spirit and include presentations from the groups and a synthesis of discoveries about the liberal arts hobbies.