

**Berkman/FIR Series: „Learning a Foreign Language“
2010 Workshop: „Research Methods in the Digitally Networked Information Age“**

Revised Agenda (4/27/10)

May 10-12, 2010 -- Brunnen (Switzerland)

Workshop objectives:

Our mission for the two days is to address and assess the promise of and limitations on a core set of methodological approaches that can be used to study complex research questions in the digitally networked information environment, and to discuss lessons learned as well as future trajectories, including multi-disciplinary research methods. The workshop is based on the working hypothesis that the digitally networked information environment – symbolically represented by the “Internet” – poses both a number of distinct methodological challenges as well as a series of new opportunities, including the potential of a more holistic methodological repertoire. In a first step, we will take stock and look into selected examples from various disciplines to discuss how traditional disciplinary methods have been applied to the current information ecosystem in general and the Internet in particular. In a second step, we will discuss the promises and limitations of such approaches – and the ways in which the subject of study has challenged and, eventually, changed the methods used. The third step looks ahead by exploring more holistic, multi-disciplinary methodological approaches. More specifically, we aim to:

- (1) Learn about traditional methods across important disciplines as applied to the digitally networked environment;
- (2) Discuss the promises and limitations of such disciplinary sets of methods in the thematic context of information and the Internet;
- (3) Understand contemporary methodological challenges and explore ways in which disciplinary methods can evolve over time;
- (4) Discuss the promise of truly multi-disciplinary methods and explore the implications for knowledge dissemination (“digital scholarship”);
- (5) Use the insights from this workshop to test them out in the context of two concrete research projects in the sense of a “reality-check”.

Each segment will be led by two workshop participants in the role of expert moderators. The moderators will briefly (5-8 minutes) introduce the topic of the segment, structure the discussion, and summarize its results at the end of the session. Please note that we are not planning to have formal presentations. However, we will compile a list of materials and provide hand-outs if you have materials you would like to share with the group.

It’s the hope of the organizers that the workshop will inspire and motivate the participants to further collaborate on the topic in the future as they see fit (e.g. co-authored paper across discipline, multimedia-piece, interview sequences, etc.).

May 10

5:30 pm

Introduction

Introductions of participants
Framing the discussion on research methods

7:00 pm

Drinks

7:30 pm

Welcome Dinner

May 11

9:00 am

Segment I: “Taking Stock”: Traditional Methods

Using examples from various disciplines, including social science, ethnography, law, communication science, and economics, to discuss how traditional disciplinary methods have been applied to the current information ecosystem in general and the Internet in particular.

Moderators: Christian Sandvig, Colin Maclay

Suggested discussion issues: What are core methods in the traditional repertoire of important disciplines as applied to information phenomena and the Internet?

10:10 am

Break

10:20 am

Segment II: “Evaluation and Reflection”

Theme I: Performance

What are the insights that the (traditional) methods have produced?

Moderator: Martina Merz, Helen Margetts

Suggested discussion issue: What type of insight, knowledge, and understanding has resulted from the application of “traditional” disciplinary research methods? How can we benchmark this “methodological performance”? What is the promise, what are the limits of traditional, disciplinary models? What are the key challenges?

11:25 am

Break

11:30 am

Theme II: Evolution of Methods

Has the subject of study impacted the methods used to explore it?

Moderator: Anne Helmond, Eszter Hargittai

Suggested discussion issues: Has the information environment – the Internet – changed the ways in which we think about methods? How we apply our methodological repertoire? Has it led to methodological innovation? If yes, what are illustrative examples? What are the effects of such advanced methods?

12:40 pm

Lunch

1:40 pm

Theme III: Looking Ahead: Future of Methods

What are possible futures of methods aimed at studying the information ecosystem and the Internet?

Moderators: Mira Burri, Miriam Meckel

Suggested discussion issues: What are potential paths of evolution of Internet-related methods? What's the interplay among them, and how likely is an integration of them? What are the contours of a truly "multi-disciplinary approach" aimed at gaining a deeper and increasingly holistic understanding of the digitally networked information environment?

2:50 pm

Break

3:10 pm

Segment III: Digital Methods and Forms of Knowledge Dissemination

How do new methods not only shape the questions we can ask and the research we produce, but also call for new forms and modes of knowledge dissemination?

Moderators: Mary Lee Kennedy, John Palfrey

Suggested discussion issues: If research methods are input variables, how does innovation in methods change the output side as far information dissemination is concerned? What are the implications of emerging "digital methods" for knowledge sharing? How do new digital methods impact practices of data preservation and archiving?

4:20 pm

Session ends

5:00 pm

Free time

7:30 pm

Dinner

May 12

8:15 am

Segment IV: From Theory to Application – Use Case "Russia"

Moderators: Rob Faris, Gerhard Buurman

Suggested discussion issues: Using a concrete and ongoing research project from the Berkman Center and the Research Center for Information Law, respectively, how can the insights from this workshop be applied?

09:30 am **Wrap Up**
Reflections and future directions

10:00 am **Workshop ends**