

# INFS 615 - REFERENCE AND INFORMATION SERVICES WINTER 2025

Time: Thursdays 8:35 – 11:25  
Dates: January 9 – April 10  
Room: EDUC 433

## INSTRUCTOR

Prof. Rebekah (Becky) Willson  
[rebekah.willson@mcgill.ca](mailto:rebekah.willson@mcgill.ca)

Office hours: Thursdays 11:45-12:45 (<https://calendly.com/rebekah-willson>) or by appointment

## DESCRIPTION

This class will cover reference services and collection development. This includes conducting reference interviews, design and evaluation of reference and information resources and services, collection development, and resource management.

This course is about learning to work with people and materials, particularly how to connect people with materials that will help to address their information needs. This includes:

- Reference services
- Assessing information needs of individuals and communities
- Collections development and management – including selection, maintenance, and de-selection
- Using technology to conduct reference work and provide access to resources

## STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Conduct a reference interview
- Locate, use and evaluate bibliographic and factual information sources
- Evaluate reference and information services
- Apply advanced search strategies
- Discuss the development and maintenance of collections
- Put together a collection development policy for a collection
- Value the importance of understanding users, and providing user-centred resources and services
- Reflect on their work, including being able to describe and analyse their work, as well as reflect on what their future professional practice

## CLASS PARTICIPATION

The course is based on **active** contribution and participation of students. Students are expected to contribute to their groups and participate in the class discussions and activities.

## STATEMENT ON GENERATIVE AI

An important part of education is actively engaging with course materials, integrating new learning into previous understanding, as well as applying learning in new situations. An important part of demonstrating this learning and application is undertaking the assignments. Therefore, **generative AI (such as ChatGPT) cannot be used to write assignments or to contribute to their development in significant ways.** However, similar to talking with others about the course work, generative AI can be used as a tool to help generate ideas, clarify what you have written (e.g., structure or grammar), etc.

Additionally, attribution of sources is important. **All assignments require a statement on the use of generative AI detailing if you used it or not and, if you used it, in what ways.**

## READINGS

### Required texts:

Weekly assigned readings will be available through McGill University Library. The reading schedule is available through myCourses.

### Recommended texts:

- Cassell, K. A., & Hiremath, U. (2018). *Reference and information services: An introduction* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). ALA Neal-Schuman, an imprint of the American Library Association.
  - \*Please note that this text is freely available as an ebook through the McGill University Library; the entire text can be viewed but only 100 pages are available to download (<https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/v2/oclc/1047729241>).
- Cooke, N. A. (2016). *Information services to diverse populations*. Pearson Education.
  - This book is freely available as an ebook through the McGill University Library; the entire text can be viewed but only 100 pages are available to download (<https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/v2/oclc/963581024>).
- Johnson, P. (2009). *Fundamentals of collection development and management* (2nd ed.). ALA Editions.
  - Several readings will be taken from this book. It is freely available as an ebook through the McGill University Library; the entire text can be viewed but only 100 pages are available to download (<https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/v2/oclc/828418559>).

## EVALUATION

Evaluation is based on 4 assignments and in-class activities.

### 1. Reference Transaction and Analysis Assignment (20%) – due February 4

- Students will conduct a reference interview with a classmate, then individually search for sources to meet their information need, and create a document for their classmate that provides recommended sources. After the transaction, students will write a report discussing the transaction.

### 2. Subject Guide Assignment (Pairs) (25%) – due February 25

- In groups, students will create an online subject guide on a topic of their choosing that includes a range of sources on the topic and present those sources to a target audience. After creating the guide, students will write a report discussing the creation of the subject guide.

### 3. Collection Policy Assignment (25%) – due March 21\*

- Students will select a target organisation and create a collection policy that will include several different sections such as purpose, audience, goals and objectives, materials collected, selection principles, collection levels, management of collections, and evaluation criteria, as well as making two recommendations for purchase. Students will write a brief report about the creation of the policy.

### 4. Group “Pitch” Presentation (Groups) (20%) – presentation April 10\* in class; materials due April 15

- In groups, students will select a specific library and a collection to add or work with (e.g., assess). Groups will make a “pitch” aimed at the specific library for that collection. After the presentation, students will hand in their presentation, write a brief report about the creation of the pitch, along with the role each member played in the group.

### 5. In-Class Activities (10%) – various due dates

- Activities are varied and may include evidence of work completed, worksheets, brief reflections, etc.
- Each activity is worth 1% and graded as Pass/Fail
- Students will be informed of the activity at the beginning of the week

## LATE POLICY

For all assignments, 5% will be deducted for each 24-hour period the assignment is late after the due date.

Assignments will not be accepted more than 2 weeks after the due date, unless arranged prior to the due date.

**\*\*This class has a No Questions Asked 2-Day Extension**, which will extend the due date by 48 hours. Students may choose to extend the due date for any assignment, **except the Group Presentation. Students may use the extension as many times as they would like.** There is one caveat – you must **email me before the deadline** to inform me you are taking the 2-day extension. (There is no need to explain why you want it or wait for my response, you automatically get it but the request must be made in writing.) Assignments handed in after the extension deadline will be considered late.

## EMAIL

### Email

When emailing the instructor, **please include the course code (INFS 615) in the subject line.** I will get back to you within 24 hours Monday to Friday. If, in the unlikely case you have not heard back from within this timeframe, please prompt me.

## ACCOMMODATIONS

### Students Needing Accommodations

As the instructor of this course, I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and [Student Accessibility and Achievement](#) (formerly the Office for Students with Disabilities) 514-398-6009.

## CLASS CONDUCT AND MCGILL POLICY STATEMENTS

In line with McGill's Policy on E-Mail Communication with Students, any official McGill email sent to students will be addressed to their McGill UEA (Uniform E-Mail Address). It is the student's responsibility to ensure that time-critical e-mail is accessed, read and acted upon in a timely fashion. The E-Mail Policy applies to all McGill students and to all McGill employees, who manage official communications with students.

### Class Conduct

This class follows McGill University policies, procedures and guidelines (<https://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/policies-and-regulations>). Class participation is a valued aspect of this course. Discussions on class-related materials and business, whether they take place in the classroom or online via the discussion board on myCourses, should be conducted in a **respectful manner**, reflective of the School and the University policies, procedures and guidelines.

- Be considerate of your classmates by arriving to class sessions and group meetings *on time*.
- Be an active and respectful participant in discussions.
- Be prepared for class by completing the assignments and readings.

### Academic Integrity

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [McGill's guide to academic honesty](#) for more information).

Instructor-generated course materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions, etc.) are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor. Note that infringements of copyright can be subject to follow up by the University under the Code of Student

Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures. No audio or video recording is allowed in class without the explicit permission of the instructor.

For assignments, reports, presentations, or whenever the words or ideas of others are used, *sources must be properly quoted and cited.*

### **Language of Submission**

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives.

### **Assessment**

The [University Student Assessment Policy](#) exists to ensure fair and equitable academic assessment for all students and to protect students from excessive workloads. All students and instructors are encouraged to review this Policy, which addresses multiple aspects and methods of student assessment, e.g. the timing of evaluation due dates and weighting of final examinations.

### **Extraordinary Circumstances**

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the control of McGill University, assessment tasks in a course are subject to change, provided students are sent adequate and timely communications regarding the change.

Students are encouraged to review student supports and services offered by the Office of the Dean of Students (including Student Rights and Responsibilities) <https://www.mcgill.ca/deanofstudents/>.

## **LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

McGill is located on unceded lands which have traditionally served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst diverse Indigenous Peoples. The Kanien'kehá:ka, a founding nation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Anishinabeg are recognized as the traditional stewards of the lands and waters on which Tiohtià:ke (Montréal) is located.

I recognise myself as a settler and this land acknowledgement is not only a way to pay homage to those who were here before us but my commitment to work toward decolonisation.

Rebekah (Becky) Willson, MLIS, PhD  
Assistant Professor  
School of Information Studies – Winter 2025  
McGill University