Researching Researchers:
Avalon Media System's Ethnographic Study of Media Collection Usage

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What is Avalon?

Avalon Media System enables libraries and archives to easily curate, distribute and provide online access to their A/V collections for purposes of teaching, learning and research.

www.avalonmediasystem.org

What is Avalon?

Open source software system currently directed by Indiana University & Northwestern University

Hydra Solution Bundle

Project Funding

- 2010-2011: IMLS Planning Grant
- 2011-2015: National Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services
- 2015-present: Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

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Early Planning Decision

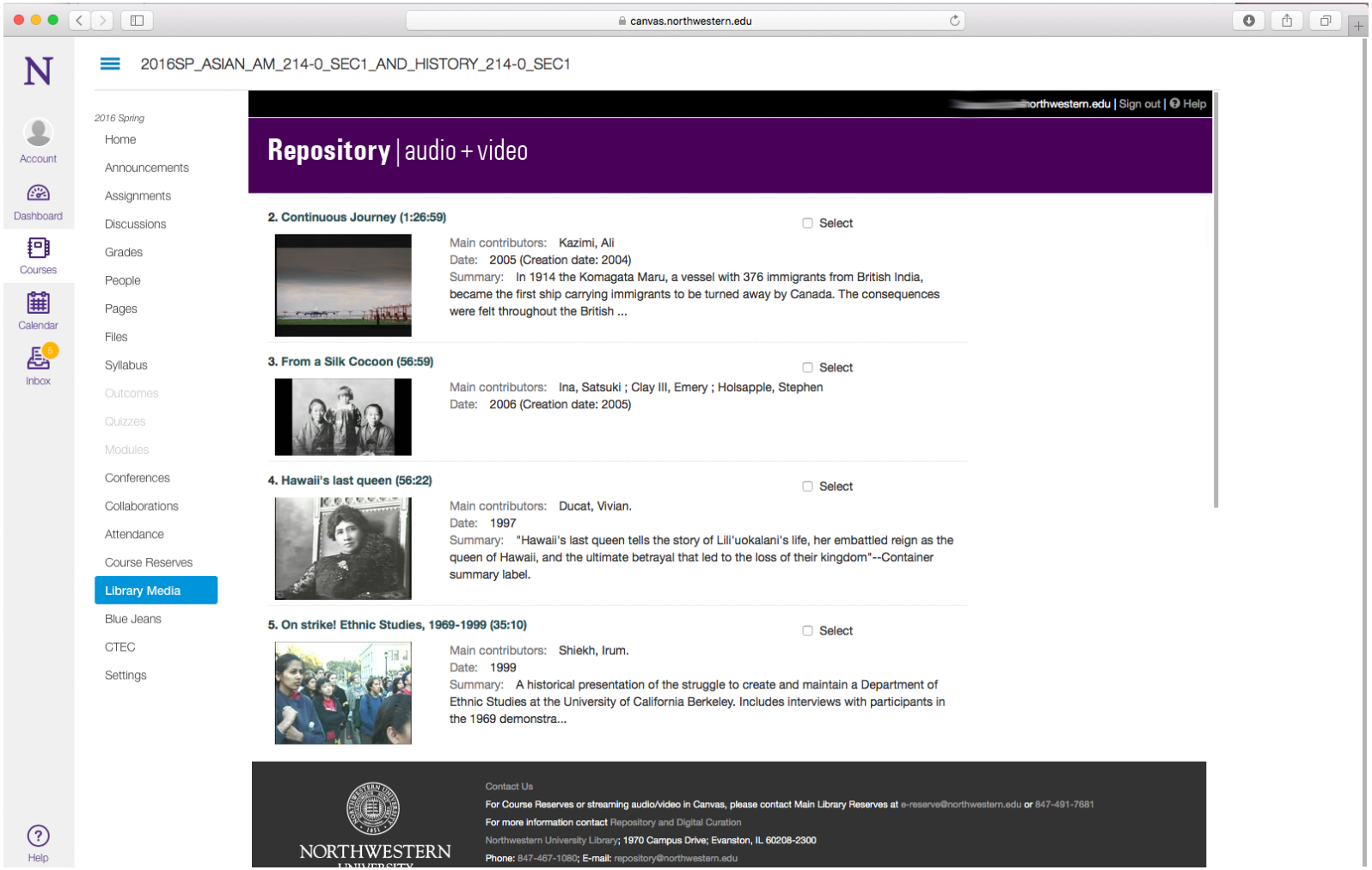
- Focus on:
  1. Infrastructure for media collections management and delivery ***OR***
  2. End-user tools for teaching, learning, and research use?

- Chose to focus initially on option 1

Goals of current Mellon grant

1. Develop additional Avalon functionality
2. Conduct studies of use of audio and video collections by humanities researchers
3. Develop and implement a community-funded business and governance model
4. Deploy Avalon in a hosted SaaS model for testing/pilot

Learning Tools Interoperability



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From Our Mellon Grant Proposal:

- The proposed user research will be multi-method, though primarily ethnographic in character:

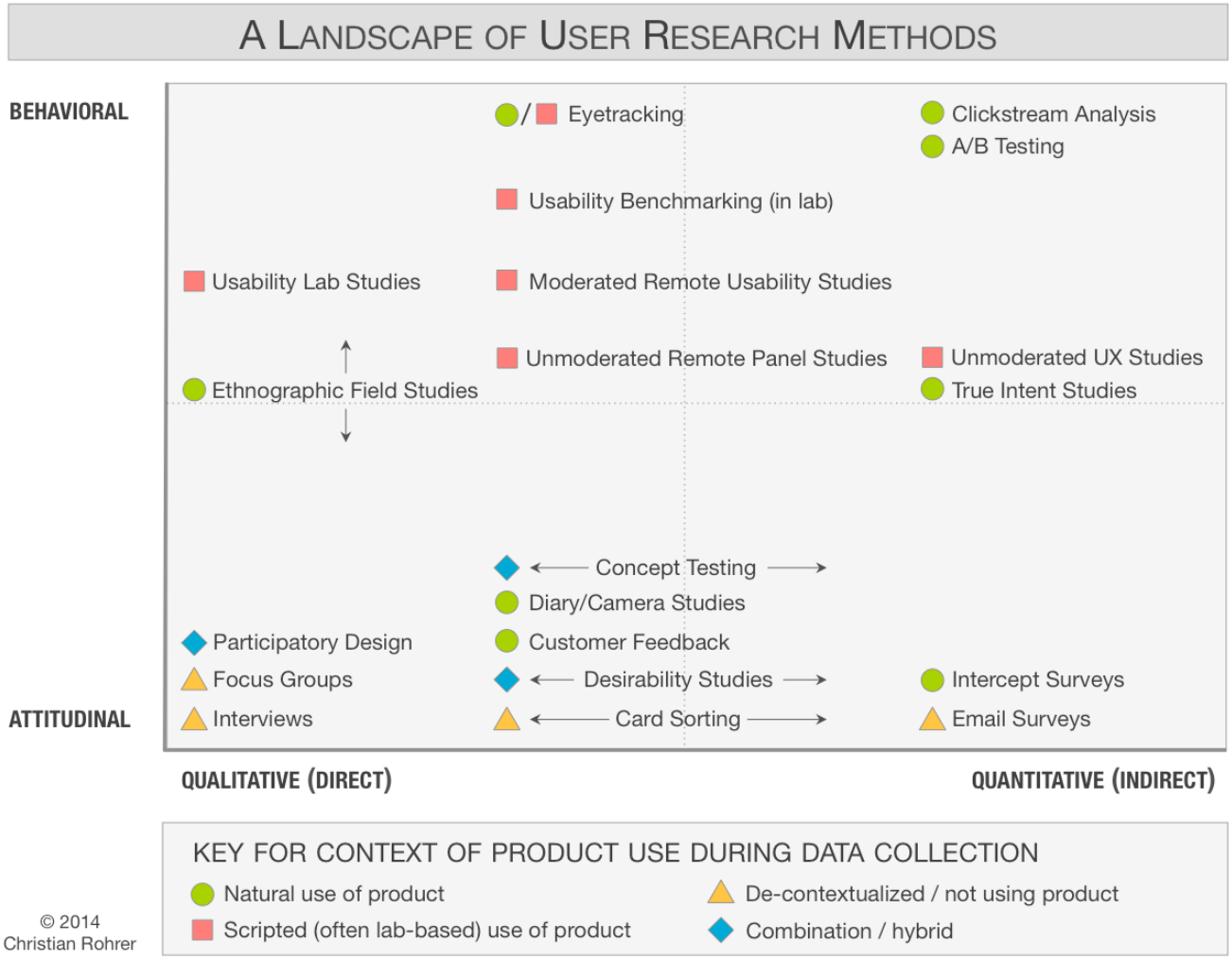
- Identify at least two disciplines for focus, such as music theory, ethnomusicology, or film studies.

- Conversations with these researchers will enable us to select a set of researchers for focus who represent a wide range of media research use cases and are willing to work with us during the grant.

Why ethnographic research?

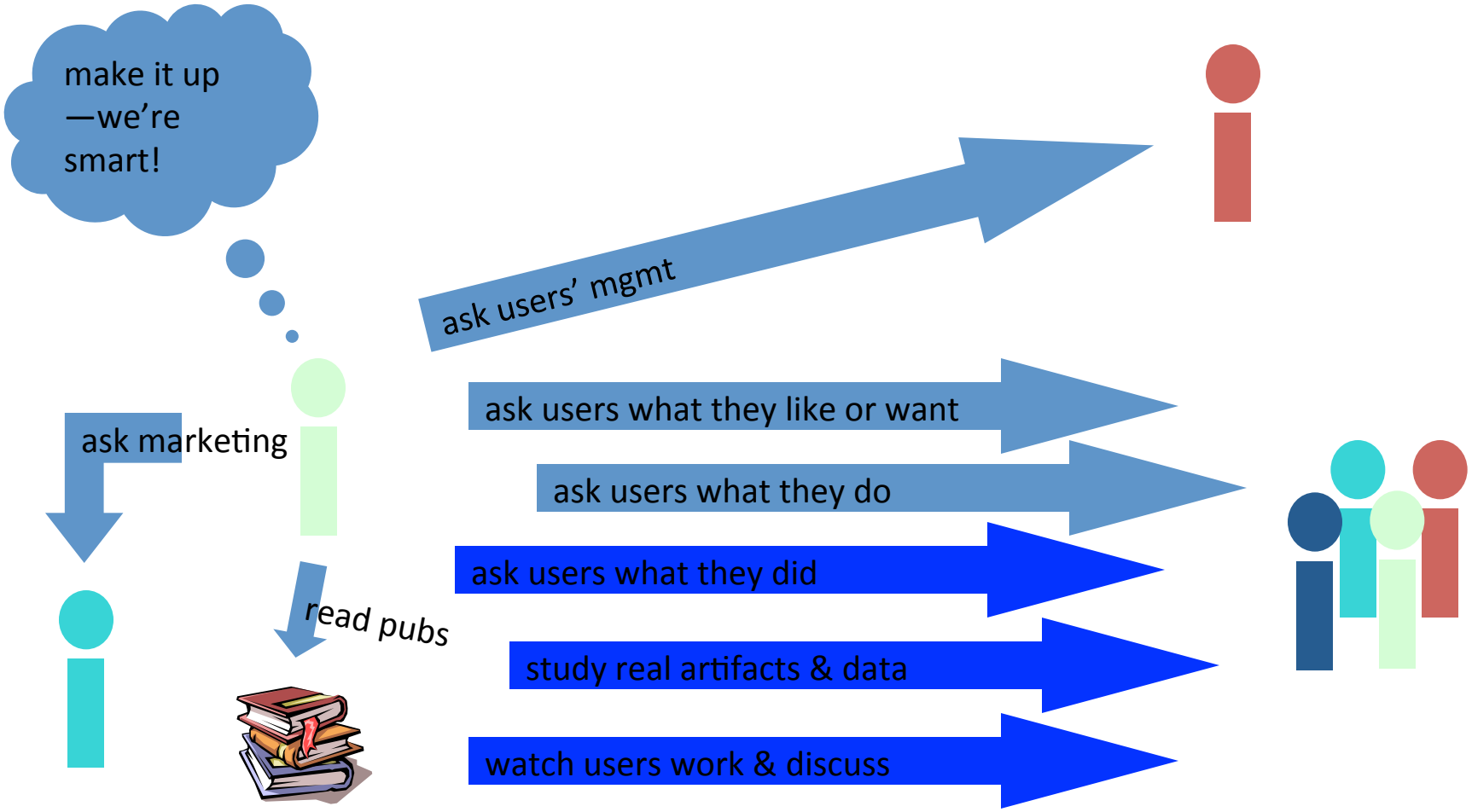
https://www.nngroup.com/articles/which-ux-research-methods/

Which ethnographic research?



https://www.nngroup.com/articles/which-ux-research-methods/

discovering user needs



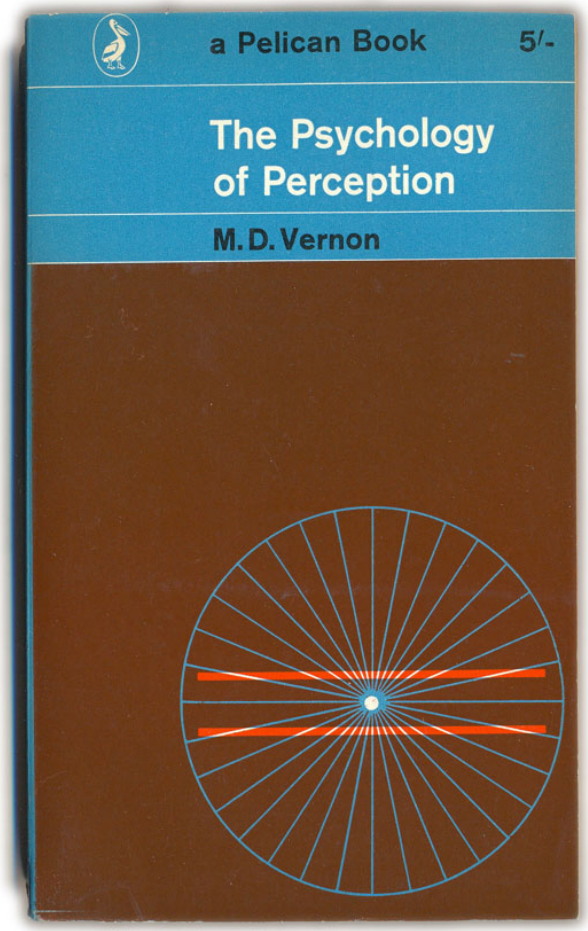
Avalon's User Research FOCUS:

Uncover issues users have trying to use streaming media within their research projects.

Look at the technology they employ, and how they use technology in ways that help and hinder their research processes.

User Research Methodology

WHAT IS CONTEXUAL INQUIRY



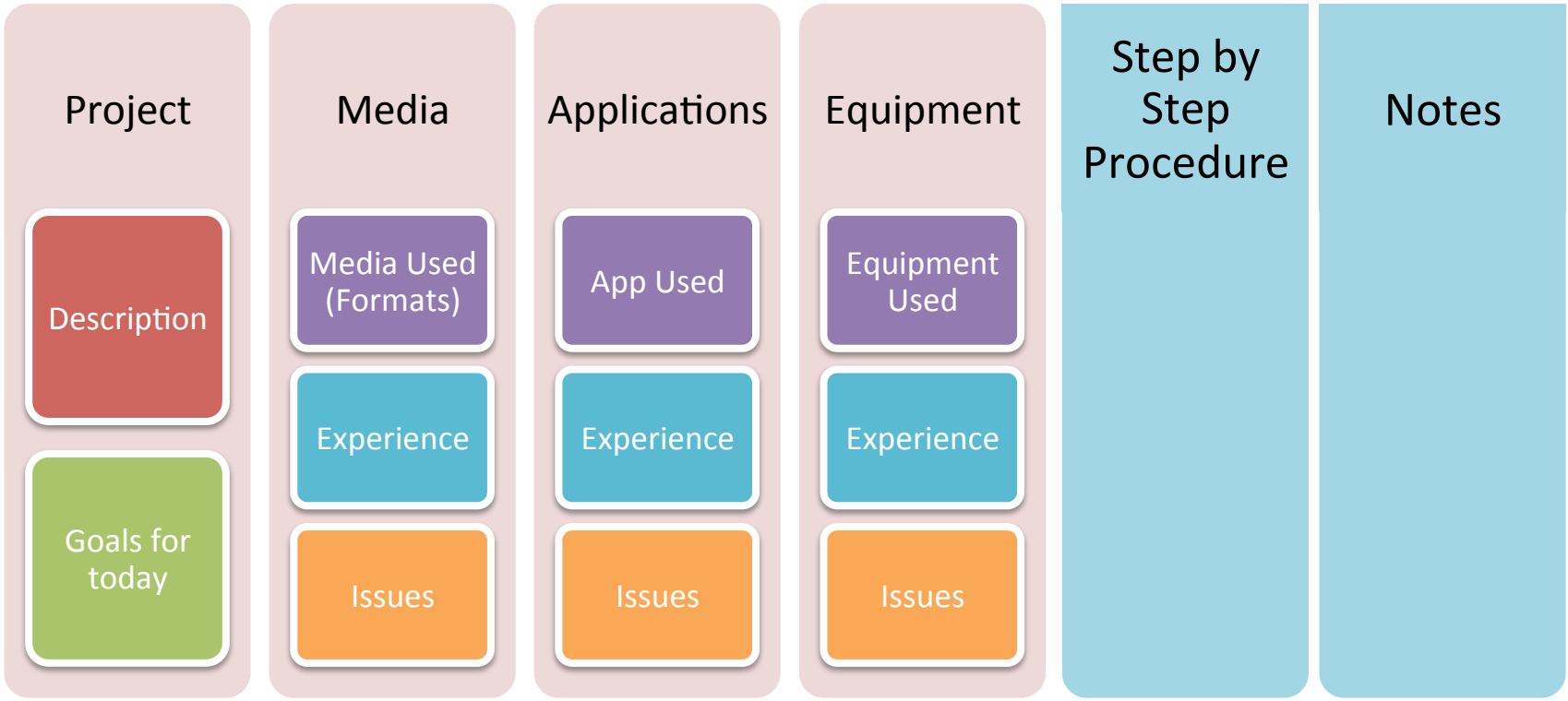
The key differentiator between contextual inquiry and other user research methods is that **contextual inquiry occurs in context**.

It's not simply an interview, and it's not simply an observation.

It involves observing people performing their tasks and having them talk about what they are doing while they are doing it.

User Research Methodology

CONTEXUAL INQUIRY-OBSERVATION



User Research Methodology

Avalon User Research Study
Observation Sheet

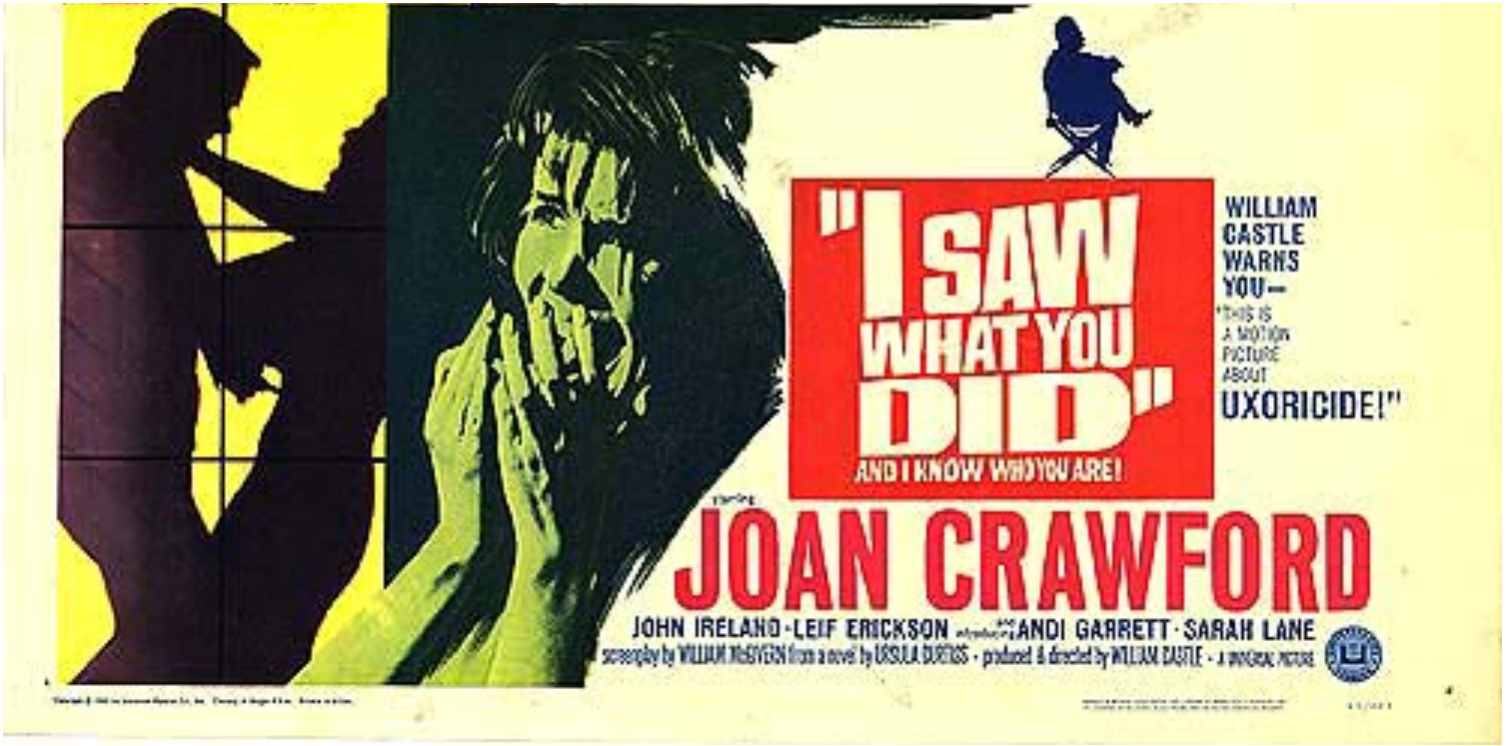
1. Name, Date, Location:		
2. Project Description:		
2a. Research planned for today/goals of work session:		
3. Media Used: (include format)	4. Media Tools/Applications Used:	5. Computer Equipment Used:
3a. Experience with media:	4a. Experience with apps:	5a. Experience with equipment:
3b. Issues with media:	4b. Issues with apps:	5b. Issues with equipment:

Avalon User Research Study
Observation Sheet

6. Step-by-step processes:	7. Observation notes

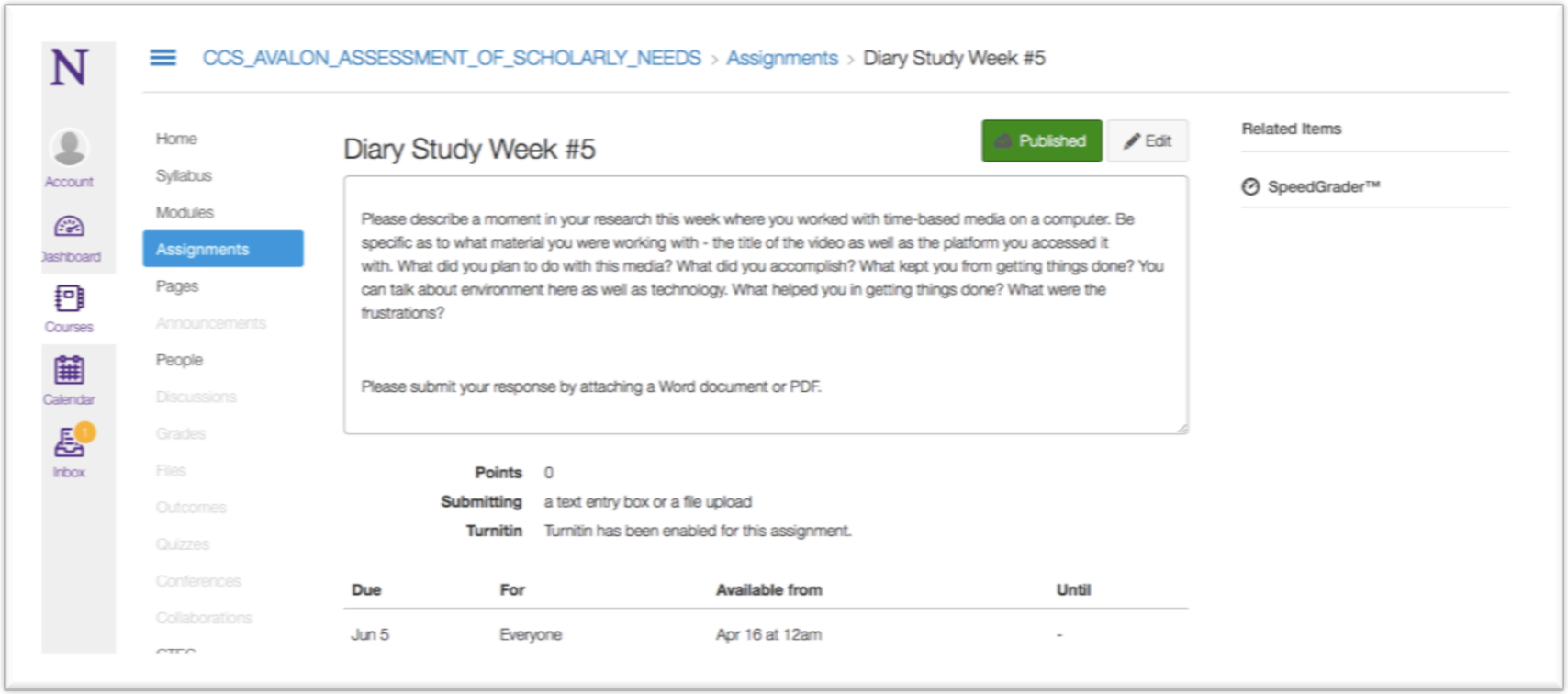
User Research Methodology

CONTEXUAL INQUIRY: Follow up interview



User Research Methodology

DIARY STUDY



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Study Results

For scholars of all levels: More importance is put on content and accessing it, less on interface.

They will use whatever player/tool is available to access the film/music/ footage they need for their project.

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Study Results

No one uses just one tool while accessing and researching media.

Ripping
HandBrake
MakeMKV

Viewers
Adobe Suite
iMovie
Preview
QuickTime Player
YouTube

Note Taking
Handwritten notes
(legal pad/scraps of paper)
TextEdit

Writing
Google Docs
KeyNote
Microsoft Word
Pages
Scrivener

Collecting/Citing
External Hard Drive
DropBox
EndNote
Zotero

"My computer is particularly slow, I should restart it, but I have too many documents open."

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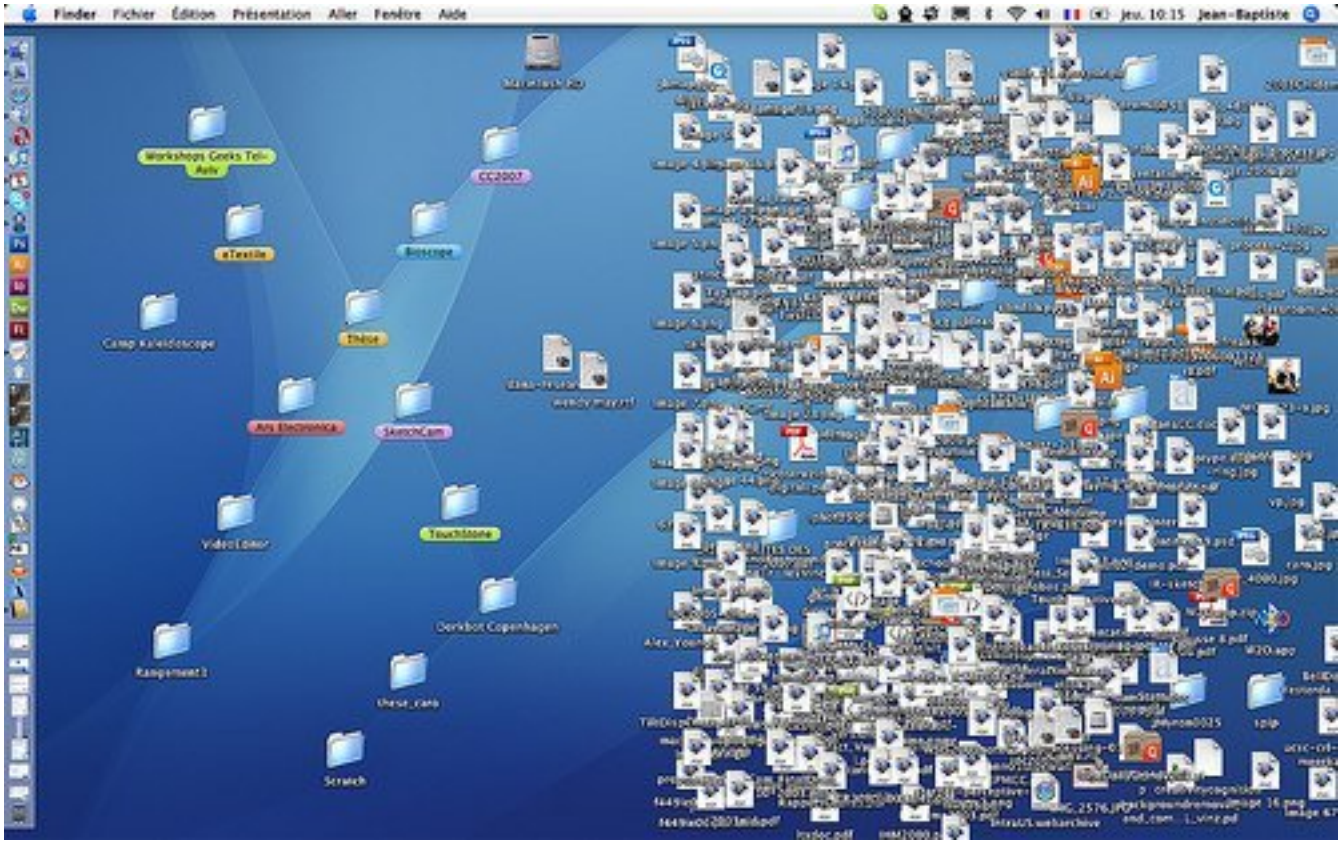
Study Results

COMMON FRUSTRATIONS USING MEDIA for SCHOLARSHIP:
Difficulty locating files on own machine.



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Study Results

COMMON FRUSTRATIONS USING MEDIA for SCHOLARSHIP:
Lack of training in technology for research needs.

"I should really learn how to use iMovie properly but I don't have the time and my research budget doesn't allow for taking a class." (Tenure Track Study Participant, Northwestern)

"I was looking for something else for my research and I found this program to use." (Graduate Student Participant, Northwestern)

"I rely on my techie-friends and students to help me when I get stuck." (Visiting Professor Participant, Northwestern)

Study Results

COMMON FRUSTRATIONS USING MEDIA for SCHOLARSHIP:
Difficulty getting hi-res screen shots for presentations/publications/use as evidence.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37XhIuqsWVk

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Study Results

COMMON FRUSTRATIONS USING MEDIA for SCHOLARSHIP:
Lack of authoritative sources

http://7thhouseontheleft.com/2011/10/love-lucy/

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Study Results

Sand dunes in the Rub' al Khali ("Empty quarter") of Saudi Arabia, COURTESY WIKIPEDIA

Lessons Learned Thus Far

- Recruitment

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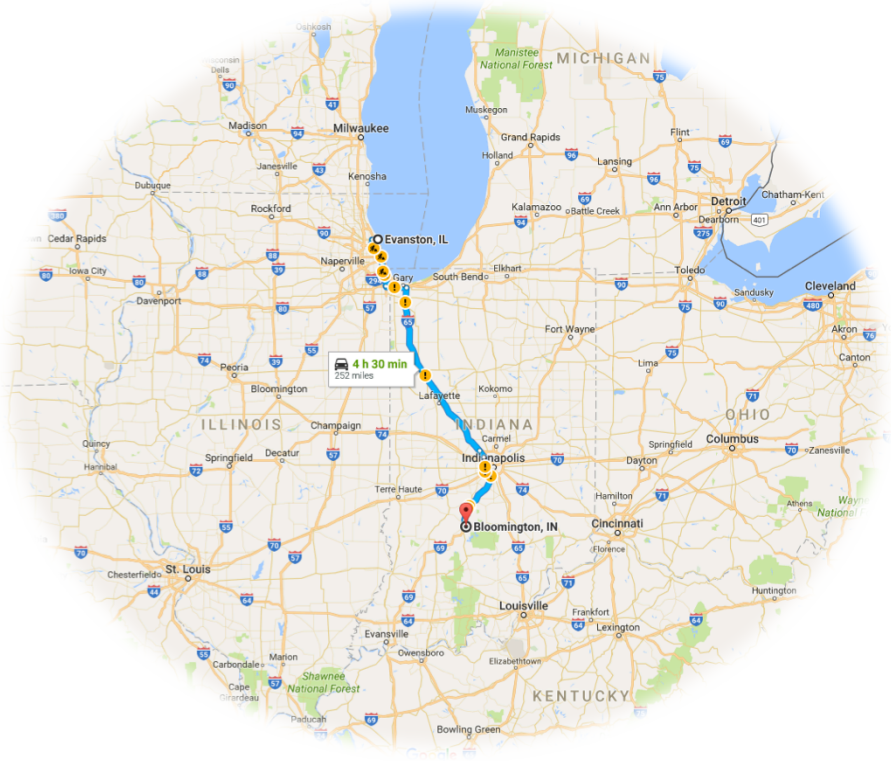
Lessons Learned Thus Far

- Working from 2 separate institutions



Consistent training and use of materials

Crucial projects based on immediate institutional needs

Changes in staffing across both project teams (including loss of initial leadership on study)

Policy differences across institutions

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We're listening…

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