

## Libby Hemphill's Philosophy of Teaching Statement

A professional program such as the School of Information Master's degree curriculum requires balancing two goals: helping student develop practice skills specifically for their future work and teaching them how to think about problems so that they are prepared to adapt to changes during their careers. The course I have the most experience teaching introduces students to social theories of information, and so my emphasis is on challenging students to engage material critically. This skill, critical thinking, is invaluable for a broad range of occupations; the ability to examine concepts provides students a foundation for meeting new challenges. By understanding the essential aspects of information, students are better prepared to adapt to changes in their careers – changes one could not anticipate and for which one cannot specifically train.

Critical thinking transcends disciplines, and using it as a cornerstone for my approach to teaching enables me to adapt to a variety of teaching and learning environments from classrooms to one-on-one sessions with students and GSIs. Respect for intellectual diversity and collaboration are complements to a focus on critical thinking and cornerstones of a successful SI education. The kind of learning environment that best facilitates critical thinking relies on the diverse intellectual contributions and approaches of others. I use a variety of large-group discussions and small-group activities in my teaching; this allows me to use case-based exercises to help students develop abilities to analyze information in work contexts and in collaboration with others. For example, students analyzed the Open CourseWare initiative while learning about intellectual property and social learning theory. Case exercises help bridge the potential gap between the course's focus on analyses of theories and the students' needs to prepare for professional practice.

It is my responsibility as an instructor to foster learning environments in which students call upon a variety of ways to view a particular situation and in which students come to value multiple perspectives. One important way I foster such intellectual diversity is by taking neutral stances on controversial or disruptive material. Our students call upon a variety of backgrounds, including systems design and library services, and I encourage students to discuss cases such as Google Book Search from those various perspectives. These exercises emphasizing intellectual diversity prepare students to explore future problems from a variety of perspectives and encourage them to develop innovative solutions to problems such as online book searching and digital preservation.

Respecting intellectual diversity also requires that I take into account the varieties of ways in which students learn. Providing material in a variety of formats and using a range of teaching styles – including class discussion, role playing, and individual engagement – produces a positive learning environment in which all students can feel safe and supported. I use a variety of aptitude measures so that students have opportunities to demonstrate their skills and to develop new ones. For example, when teaching Social Systems and Collections, I used classroom participation, short essay tests, and long paper writing to check for students' understanding. When training GSIs authoring assignments for their courses, I've helped create short answer, concept mapping, and essay assignments. Using a variety of methods to check for understanding caters to different sets of intellectual strengths and challenges students to develop skills where they have weaknesses.

In addition to helping students develop critical thinking skills in an atmosphere of intellectual diversity and collaboration, I believe remaining a student myself is paramount to being an effective teacher. I don't mean that I should always take courses, but I believe to be a good teacher I must continually evaluate my own teaching. Serving as a GSM helped me develop skills to evaluate my own teaching. Observing and helping other GSIs, reading student feedback on my teaching, and developing GSI training sessions all helped me examine my own teaching. Taking time to consider students' feedback and learning to articulate teaching methods to other GSIs were invaluable in helping me improve as an instructor. Talking with other experienced teachers, engaging with students, and utilizing resources such as CRLT all help me continue to improve as a teacher.

In conclusion, I believe that encouraging critical thinking, respecting intellectual diversity, and facilitating collaborative learning are keys to successful teaching. Doing so creates a learning environment in which students can learn the skills to process and generate information and to develop habits of using those critical thinking skills. Such an environment helps students to learn to be precise and logical, to communicate effectively and respectfully, and to analyze information. These skills are requisite of our students whether they enter careers in information policy, library services, or another information field. My focus on learning, both my students' and my own, prepares me to teach a range of courses effectively to a diverse student body.