Philosophy of Teaching Statement

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My teaching philosophy is premised on the social constructivist notion that the classroom environment can and should be modeled on real-world environments that allow students to encounter realistic workplace issues and challenges. Therefore, I work to ensure that my curriculum mirrors the professional communities in which our students are being prepared to participate. The classroom then becomes the platform to acquire tools and skills to examine and navigate that world, critically. In my technical communication classes, my students work with clients to solve problems of message adaptation and information design given a specific rhetorical context. Last spring, for example, my technical communication class at Georgia Tech worked with the Office of International Education (OIE) to examine the content and layout of OIE's recently re-designed website against the goals of providing critical information to international students and encouraging study abroad participation by the general student body. The students engaged in a number of activities to achieve these goals including, conducting client interviews and status update meetings; conducting website heuristic evaluations; designing and conducting user testing with constituent users; and developing social media campaigns to encourage traffic to the website. Additionally, students developed rhetorically-appropriate artifacts, such as reports, research protocols, presentations, etc. Students have then gone on to include these artifacts as part of their professional portfolios as they pursue full-time jobs and internships.

My pedagogy is also strongly influenced by my practice as a technical communicator; hence, I am at my core, an advocate for the user. Having worked in information technology, I was dismayed by the pervasive thinking of the user as the problem in technology interactions, having heard colleagues jokingly refer to the "Id10t" error. I maintain that quite often the beliefs about the user in STEM professions arise from STEM degree programs that don't create adequate linkages to the Humanities and the Social Sciences. One consequence is that designers create in a vacuum, removed from the very realities that shape their user's experiences. It is my distinct belief that technical communication as a discipline provides a most crucial interdisciplinary link needed to create artifacts with effective, user-centered design. For example, at Georgia Tech, I currently teach a hybrid Technical Communication course which is linked with a Computer Science junior design project and co-taught with a Computer Science faculty member. In this course, students design and develop an application for a client over the course of two semesters. Although there was considerable

interaction between students and their clients, I have revised the two-semester curriculum to include a user testing module so that our students are exposed to the realities of user feedback and the concept of user-centered design. One of my students in his reflection at the end of the course, had this to say: "…during the course of the semester, I realized that the backend complexity of an application is quite meaningless to the user…they did not really care nor appreciate the complexity behind the display. They just found it unintuitive and complex to use." This reflection provides some indicator of the course's success in re-positioning the user at the center of the design process.

With regards to learning, I understand that adults are motivated to learn for different reasons and through various processes. I believe that college students are intrinsically curious, and if given the right tools, they can facilitate they their own learning process. As a result, I believe that teaching is analogous to building a puzzle. As an instructor, my role is to provide significant pieces to that puzzle: sometimes omitting pieces to create curiosity; sometimes providing pieces to provide completeness; but always providing the pieces that establish the context and scope of study. Consequently, I see myself as a guide, a regulator and a facilitator of student learning. For example, whereas in some of my lower level technical communications courses, I may define a problem for the class, in my upper level classrooms, students go through the process of understanding how to identify and frame a communication problem relevant to their field, ask questions relevant to the issues and choose research methodologies appropriate to the questions being asked. In my current class on "Voice and the Future of Speech Technology," students are asked to design a speech or sound interface that will solve or address a problem that people encounter in everyday interactions. One of the activities I designed for this exercise required students to go to the busiest intersection on the Georgia Tech Campus, where they observed how users interacted with the environment, documented the types of problems they saw and analyzed how peopled negotiated these problems. Once they design an interface, they will choose appropriate methods to investigate the efficacy and feasibility of their solutions.

I want students through the lens of communication studies, to ask relevant and critical questions about the technological world they occupy. Therefore, I am committed through my own research initiatives to find and establish links with industry partners who can provide rich and realistic opportunities for students in my communication classroom.