Teaching Statement

My goals as an instructor in a graduate-level professional program are:
- To provide students with a foundation in both the theory and practice of librarianship
- To develop their critical thinking and intellectual curiosity by encouraging them to engage with the core questions and challenges of the discipline.
- To facilitate the discovery and creation of new knowledge through active engagement with course content

I strive to achieve these goals through a constructivist approach to teaching and learning, which includes an emphasis on active engagement with course materials, problem-based learning, and collaborative learning through small and large group activities and discussions. I have made a conscious effort to integrate more of these practices into my day-to-day teaching, both in-person and online. For instance, in my reference class, I moved from a model of introducing and explaining the criteria for evaluating resources and then asking students to apply those criteria, to a flipped model in which students engage with the resources through a series of small and large group activities and determine for themselves what is important when deciding the quality of a resource. Similarly, I have students engage with ethical questions related to the profession by examining case studies and current news stories in which they have to draw on their understanding of the values and ethics of the profession and their own experiences to decide what would be an ethical approach to the problem. These activities require students to think critically about the material rather than just applying a set of standards or criteria, and student feedback shows they find the activities to be more relevant and interesting than the lecture-based approaches.

The constructivist philosophy emphasizes the social nature of knowledge, but I also believe that individual students have different preferences for learning engagement. Some students are comfortable joining discussions and engaging with peers immediately, while others want time to process and reflect on new information. I try to accommodate these preferences by students with various paths for active participation including small and large group discussions, self-reflective activities, online forums, and feedback sheets so that everyone can participate in a way that is comfortable for them.

Finally, I believe we are all collaborators and partners in the learning process. Just as I bring my own background knowledge, research, and professional experience to the classroom, I encourage students to bring their experiences, to ask questions, and to challenge assumptions so that we can all learn from each other.

Laura Saunders | Fall 2016