

## TEACHING REFLECTION

Teaching is one of the most important activities for any faculty member, and is especially so at a student-centered college and program like Simmons College School of Library and Information Science. Indeed, the student-centeredness is one of the reasons I chose to work at Simmons. I find it incredibly rewarding to engage with students, some of whom have never worked in the field and are only beginning to explore their options, and some of whom have years of experience and want to focus their energies toward the next step in their career. I really value the opportunity to work with and mentor students at all stages of their program and careers, and I share in their excitement and success as they graduate, find jobs, or move into new positions and areas of responsibility.

While my commitment to and passion for teaching have remained constant, my teaching philosophy as outlined in my [Teaching Statement](#), has evolved over the years, particularly since I have been exposed to theories of critical pedagogy. Increasingly, I see my role as a facilitator who challenges my students to question, think critically, and apply new learning, rather than as a transmitter of knowledge. I take a constructivist approach to teaching, working with the belief that knowledge is socially constructed, and that active learning is the best way to engage students with material and to promote deeper learning. To that end, I work to develop assignments and activities that provide students an opportunity to engage with content, apply skills to practice, and interact with each other. I also integrate small and large group discussion into all of my courses. Indeed, I run several courses (such as LIS 493 Intellectual Freedom and Censorship and LIS 410 Information Services for Diverse Users) as seminar-style, where the majority of each class session is discussion and activities, with only minimal lecture.

As my understanding of critical pedagogy has developed, I have also become very mindful of the power dynamic in the classroom. As a result, I make a continuous effort to be transparent with my students and to establish an atmosphere of trust and inclusiveness where all students feel welcome to participate and where we are all respectful of each other's ideas and opinions. I use a variety of methods, including conversations to establish classroom norms, formative assessments, and transparent course, syllabus, and assignment design to promote this classroom climate. The rest of this reflection discusses my achievements in teaching with supporting evidence on the required areas of: pedagogy and active learning; assessment and continuous improvement; integration of research and service into teaching; influence of teaching; course development; and course evaluations summary.

### **Pedagogy & Active Learning**

Early in my teaching career, I tended to rely heavily on lectures as the teaching method with which I was most familiar and most comfortable. Over the years, however, I have had the opportunity to pursue a number of professional development experiences that have greatly expanded my understanding of pedagogy and the science of teaching and learning. I have pursued as many professional development opportunities as I was able in order to continually learn more about teaching and learning, and to keep refining my practice. These experiences have included conference programs, and institutes and workshop on topics such as active learning, classroom assessment techniques, course design, and online learning. As a graduate student, I was exposed to the writings of Stephen Brookfield and L. Dee Fink, who elaborate on the importance of active learning and significant learning experiences. More recently, I have been reading Paolo Freire and Henry Giroux, who examine the social and political dimensions of

teaching. My basic teaching philosophy is constructivist, which includes an emphasis on active engagement with course materials, problem-based learning, and collaborative learning through small and large group activities and discussions. However, as my understanding of pedagogy develops, I have been adopting a critical pedagogical stance, which involves having students interrogate power structures and integrating praxis, or putting theory into action. I have made a conscious effort to integrate more of these practices into my day-to-day teaching, both in-person and online.

As a simple example of active learning, I used to introduce a set of criteria for evaluating reference materials in my reference course. I would define and explain criteria such as authority and currency, and then give students sample materials to evaluate. Not surprisingly, the students moved through the criteria like a checklist. They would examine each source for each criterion, and would generally weigh all the criteria equally. There was little engagement with the activity, and while students seemed to understand the process, they did not seem to be thinking critically about how they were applying it. Since then, I have flipped the activity so that students are given the materials without any prior discussion or direction about what to look for when evaluating them. Instead, through a series of individual, small, and large group activities, they engage with the resources and discover for themselves what is important when deciding the quality of a resource. The students find this approach to the activity to be much more interesting. Not only do they have to apply critical thinking skills in order to develop the list of criteria, but in the process they also discover that each criterion has to be considered holistically, and might be more or less important depending on other factors. For instance, the currency of the item may be crucial for a science or technology resource, but might not matter as much for a piece of literary criticism.

Promoting critical thinking and examination and questioning of power structures has become increasingly important to my teaching. In addition to teaching the basic standards, codes, and values of our profession, I also encourage students to analyze and critique these standards. For example, we might question the impact of hierarchical classification systems that assume the subject term “woman” implies white women and all other women must be separately defined, with subject headings like “African American women.” In classes like Information Services to Diverse Users and Radical Librarianship, we discuss what the implications of these systems are, how they might impact how patrons discover and understand information, and what other approaches could be implemented. When discussing access to information, I ask students to consider not just physical access, but also social and cognitive or intellectual access and to examine how societal structures, publication norms, and library policies and services can both enhance and hinder different types of access. In this way, I hope to encourage our students to critically reflect on professional paradigms and their own practice and to empower them to improve services, resources, and programs.

Much of my emphasis on critical thinking also overlaps with my interest in critical pedagogy and my efforts at addressing diversity and inclusivity in my courses and classroom. A number of the courses I teach, including LIS 410 Information Services for Diverse Users, LIS 505J Radical Librarianship, and LIS 493 Intellectual Freedom and Censorship, explicitly focus on examining systemic and inherent power structures and critiquing the way in which libraries traditionally develop and promote resources, services, and collections. While offering these courses is important as they allow for in-depth investigation of topics, I am also aware of the importance of integrating issues of diversity and inclusion in all courses. To that end, I proposed including Todd Honma’s article “Trippin’ Over the Color Line,” into LIS 401 Foundations of

Library and Information Science in order to offer a lens for examining traditional library paradigms. In fall of 2015, the college held its first community meeting on diversity and inclusion, and it happened to be scheduled during my LIS 407 Reference and Information Services course. Rather than miss it, I brought my class to the meeting, and connected the meeting and the discussions to course content on working with patrons from all communities, understanding intersectionality, and being culturally sensitive. As the “Course Evaluation Summary” section below explains in more depth, student feedback suggests that my students are aware of and appreciate my efforts to integrate diversity and inclusion topics and create a classroom climate of respect.

While I believe that theory and philosophy are important for providing a foundation of understanding for students, and for explaining the “why” behind what we do as professionals, I am also cognizant of the fact that I teach in a professional program and that practical skills leading to employment are equally important for students. Thus, I try to explicitly and transparently connect theory and practice in each of my courses by integrating activities and assignments that allow students to apply theories to practice in as realistic an environment as possible. In the [Teaching](#) section of my dossier, I provide links to sample in-class activities and syllabi that illustrate these practical activities. For example, in LIS 408 User Instruction, I integrate “short talks” throughout the semester, in which students give brief 2-3 minute presentations in order to polish their presentation skills and build up to their final 15 minute instruction module. In one of these “short talks,” students provide me with 2 or 3 topics with which they feel very comfortable. I then call on students randomly and ask a question based on one of the topics they provided. This session gives them the experience of having to answer questions on the spot as they might have to do during a real instruction session. Students seem to enjoy and appreciate these activities. One semester, I was able to coordinate my LIS 407 Information Sources and Services class with two courses being taught in the School of Social Work (SSW). My students were paired with a student in the SSW course working on an assigned research project to act as their reference librarian. These students were able to engage in a real reference interview including negotiating and clarifying the question, searching, communicating an answer and providing instruction. Feedback from students indicated that they valued the real-world aspect of the assignment and believed they learned a lot from engaging in it.

### **Assessment and Continuous Improvement**

I was introduced to the ideas of backwards design and classroom assessment techniques as a graduate student, and I consciously try to integrate these practices into my course design and delivery. For instance, I try to be consistent about defining learning outcomes for all aspects of the course. In addition to course learning outcomes, I identify learning outcomes for each class, activity, and assignment. The goal of such exercises is to be transparent for both the students and myself about the purpose of each aspect of the course, and to facilitate assessment of learning. I have also incorporated rubrics into all of my courses. For every assignment in every class, I develop a rubric that details expectations for that assignment, and that defines performance objectives for achievement at various levels (emerging, intermediate, and advanced). These rubrics give students additional detail about assignments and help to ensure consistency and transparency in grading.

While SLIS has a required course evaluation form that is administered at the end of each semester, I try to include at least one mid-point feedback mechanism in each course, in order to check in with students about their learning and their satisfaction with the class overall. Often

this feedback takes the form of a minute paper or Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ), in which I ask students to reflect very briefly on what they have learned, what remains unclear, and what they would like to see done differently. For my Radical Librarianship course in spring 2016, I also set up a Google form so that students could anonymously submit comments and concerns throughout the semester. This kind of feedback done during the semester allows me to make changes to better meet students' needs before the course is over, which would not be possible if I rely solely on course evaluations done at the end of the semester. I have also taken advantage of the services offered by the Center for Excellence in Teaching (CET) by having someone from the CET visit several of my classes for a Classroom Observation and Small Group Individual Diagnosis (SGID, letters of participation are included in the [Supplemental Evidence](#) section of the dossier). In this process, someone from the CET visits the classroom and observes my teaching. I then leave the classroom and, without me present, the CET staff member engages with the students through small and large group discussions to identify the strengths of the course, and areas for improvement. Students seem to appreciate these efforts to gather and be responsive to their feedback. For example, one student noted on a course evaluation "I felt respected when she informed the class of her reasoning behind the curriculum and some of her teaching practices (e.g. informing us that this is a pilot class and letting us know she values our feedback; informing us why we were doing certain assignments or class activities; etc.)," while another wrote that "Opening up a feedback board on the Moodle page, accepting mid-semester feedback forms, and having open office hours before class were all good channels of communication that were kept open between student and professor."

Overall, I think that my efforts at obtaining feedback underscore my commitment to teaching excellence and continuous improvement. The success of these efforts is borne out by course evaluations and other feedback mechanisms, as elaborated on in the "Course Evaluation Summary" section below. The most important thing about the feedback, however, is that I use it to incorporate suggestions and enhance the classroom experience. For instance, feedback from an SGID session and on course evaluation forms suggested that some students did not feel that assignment descriptions were adequate. Since then, I have developed rubrics for each assignment to provide further detail. In addition, within the last year, I have been including specific learning outcomes and a description of purpose into assignments. These steps help students to understand why each assignment has been included in the course, what the expectations of each assignment are, and how they will be assessed and graded.

As another example, the CET staff member conducting one of my SGID sessions observed that I tend to ask thought-provoking discussion questions, but noted that students may not have enough time to process the question and formulate their thoughts. As a result, the discussion might not be as in-depth as it could be. In response, I have been trying to do more pair and small group activities, in which I give students a couple of minutes to discuss their responses with one other student or with a small group, before initiating a full class discussion. This approach gives students more time to reflect and organize their thoughts. In addition, sharing their thoughts in pairs or with smaller groups can be less intimidating than speaking in front of the whole class. Thus, shy students may feel more comfortable participating this way. Once we regroup as a class, we usually have a fuller discussion after engaging in this process.

In addition to getting feedback from students, it is an important part of my teaching practice to provide students with timely and constructive feedback on their assignments and activities throughout the course. I make a point to try to return all assignments within a week of receiving them. That way, students have time to reflect on the feedback and incorporate any

suggestions into the next assignment. Further, I try to provide substantive feedback that gives the students insight into what they did well, and guidance on how to do better. In addition to comments directly to their assignments, I also return a rubric with each assignment that indicates at what level the students performed for each criteria, and provides additional comments. Students consistently indicate how much they appreciate and value both the quick turnaround and the depth of feedback on assignments.

### **Integration of Research and Service into Teaching**

Many of the research and service activities I engage in lend themselves to the classroom. For instance, several of my research projects, including a survey of reference competencies and a series of employer focus groups, offered insight into the skills and qualifications employers are expecting in the field right now. I have used results and findings from these studies to inform content, activities, and assignments in my courses. For instance, as I noted in the personal narrative, I have developed a semester-long assignment in LIS 451 Academic Libraries in which students have to prepare a budget. Half-way through the semester, I cut their budget, mimicking the kind of experience that many public and academic libraries are facing right now. This exercise not only gives students practice with budget planning, it reflects the kind of adaptability and flexibility employers say they want from our graduates. I have also been able to incorporate information about employer expectations into my advising as I help students plan their programs and construct resumes. My review of academic libraries' strategic plans also helped me to gain a better sense of academic libraries' priorities and challenges, as well as the ways in which they align their goals with the strategic plans and missions of their larger institutions. All of this has informed my development of the academic libraries course.

My service activities have also been useful for informing my teaching. Through my work on the assessment committee, I have developed a deeper understanding of classroom assessment and the use of rubrics. Helping to develop the LIS program learning outcomes and engaging in curriculum mapping has given me a broader and more holistic view of our curriculum. Seeing how different courses address our various PLOs, and at what level they address them, has helped me to think of the position of the courses I teach within the curriculum. In turn, this knowledge gives me an opportunity to try to scaffold content from one course to another so that students can build skills and competencies sequentially. As my own awareness of the curriculum as a whole grows, I have tried to be more transparent with my students about the outcomes of the courses I teach, and how they align with the program goals, and the overall curriculum. I believe this approach helps students to understand the purpose and reason behind core courses and the relevance of electives, and to think about their plan of study as an integrated program rather than a random set of courses.

Most of my professional experience was in academic libraries. Thus, my service on the Board of Trustees of the Somerville Public Library has given me more insight into the day-to-day operations of a public library, as well as the relationship between the public library and an urban city government. As part of my work as a Trustee, I have been involved in policy review and development, review of challenges to materials, planning for a major renovation project, and general community advocacy. Often, I am able to bring these experiences back to the classroom and use them as examples and case studies. Students really seem to appreciate these current and practical examples. In other ways, my teaching has made me a better Trustee. As a faculty member, it is part of my job to keep abreast of trends and changes in the field, and several times I have been able to bring my knowledge of the field to serve some function of the library board.

For instance, I have gathered statistics for the Library Director and the Board as they have prepared reports or requests for the Mayor's office, and I drew on statistics and a deep understanding of the field to craft letters to city administrators advocating for library resources.

### **Influence of Teaching**

The "Course Evaluation Summary" section below offers quantitative and qualitative data to support the impact of my teaching on students. Here, I highlight some of the ways in which my teaching impacts my students. While they are only one measure, I think that my course evaluations demonstrate that my teaching has been effective and enjoyable for the vast majority of my students. My students generally agree that I encourage them to ask questions and think critically, that I am enthusiastic about the courses I teach, and that I treat them respectfully. In both formal and informal feedback, students note my overall enthusiasm for the material I teach, my approachability and supportiveness, and the speed and substance of my feedback on assignments as among the qualities they most appreciate.

Another indicator of the influence of my teaching is the relevance of my assignments. As I noted above in discussing active learning, I try to design assignments and activities that give students a chance to apply skills in as practical and "real-world" environment as possible. Such an approach helps students to see the connections between theory and practice, and to explore how theories are applied within the profession. Further, practical assignments allow students to develop skills that are marketable to employers, and in many cases to create products that they can share with potential employers as work samples. The usefulness and relevance of my assignments is supported by the fact that over time a number of my students have been able to use work from my classes in their professional lives.

For example, two students from my Academic Libraries class were able to use the grant applications that they did in class as proposals to initiate new programs or services in their libraries. A group of students in Radical Librarianship created a political advocacy campaign to support school libraries in Boston (available at <https://schoolsdeservelibraries.wordpress.com/>). The students shared their project with a committee commissioned by the Massachusetts School Library Association to study the efficacy of school libraries, and that committee indicated it will use the advocacy materials (with the students' permission) as part of their outreach campaign. A number of students have used the LibGuides created in LIS 407 at their libraries, and three students have had papers they wrote for my classes published in professional journals and newsletters (These publications are listed in the [Supplemental Evidence](#) section of my dossier). Comments from course evaluations further evidence the relevance of my assignments. For example, students have noted "I found this [assignment] to be very applicable to my workplace. Projects I use for class will become proposed programs and materials in my professional library setting," "The assignments were often time-consuming, but all were precisely targeted for helping assimilate knowledge and practical skills necessary to a reference librarian -- so I can perfectly see the justification for each one," and "Laura is an amazing instructor and I've already used what I've learned in her class in a professional setting."

Just as I try to make my courses practical for my students, I find that I apply my knowledge of teaching and learning in practice as well. My enthusiasm and commitment to teaching is reflected in the range of professional activities that I engage in related to teaching and learning, the full list of which is outlined in the [Scholarship](#) and [Service](#) sections of this dossier. I highlight some examples here. For instance, I have presented on library instruction and library science education at several conferences, including ACRL, NELA, MLA, and ALISE. I provided

a training workshop on how to engage in library instruction for professionals at the Boston Public Library. In January of 2016, I organized and participated in a panel session for ALISE entitled “Instruction for Inclusion,” which focused on how to integrate and address topics of diversity, inclusion, anti-racism, and anti-oppression into LIS curricula. In July of 2016, I presented a full-day workshop with Lisa Hinchliffe for a consortium of Catholic colleges in California on social justice pedagogy. The workshop examines the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy* from a social justice lens, and explores how librarians can address social justice issues in their instruction and reference practice.

### **Course Development**

During my time at SLIS, I have taught a total of nine different courses. Of those, I developed two as completely new courses, and substantially revised and updated a number of others. For example, I have taken up the role of lead instructor for LIS 407 Information Sources and Sources. That course was somewhat dated by the time I took it over as a regular faculty member. Much of the content still focused on learning lists of resources, with a lot of emphasis on print resources, and with little attention to other aspects of reference services such as instruction. Further, most of the assignments centered on answering ready-reference questions, even though the advent of the Web and Google had greatly altered people’s need for assistance with such questions. Since then, I revised the course to bring it more up-to-date and align better with the current practice of reference in the field. For instance, more class time is spent on information services such as instruction and creation of learning objects, and new and emerging models of reference are addressed. In addition, sets of sample reference questions include more research-based questions, which require students to compile and synthesize information, rather than just find an answer. Further, the course now requires students to create and conduct a short instruction module to reflect the large role that instruction plays in reference services. I have also met with the Archives faculty to integrate more examples and content relevant to archives reference. I have made similar revisions to update the content of LIS 408 User Instruction and LIS 451 Academic Libraries.

I took over LIS 410 Information Services for Diverse Users after the course had been on hiatus for a few semesters. By the time I agreed to teach the course, the faculty member who had taught it previously had left SLIS, and the only materials I was given was a syllabus with minimal information. Thus, although that course technically existed before I taught it, I really had to create the course afresh. Over time, the course has evolved into a very strong elective that brings together some important and relevant themes in LIS, including understanding diversity, programming for inclusion, needs assessment, and understanding intersectionality. The [Teaching](#) section of my dossier includes “Selected Qualitative Comments” which includes comments from LIS 410 indicating that students find the course stimulating and engaging, and they appreciate my sensitive and inclusive approach to the material.

I have also had the opportunity to propose and develop two new courses: LIS 505D Multiple Literacies and LIS 505J Radical Librarianship: Critical Theory and Praxis. The Multiple Literacies class grew out of a perceived need to explore and analyze how literacy is defined and enacted in society, the various definitions and conceptualizations of types of literacies (information, digital, health, etc.), and the role of libraries in supporting the development of literacies. This course was very successful, with 100% of students strongly agreeing that they were challenged to think critically, and to ask questions. In open-ended comments, students wrote “I feel strongly that this course should be offered regularly and I

would greatly encourage anyone and everyone in this program (though this topic is quite interdisciplinary; everyone could benefit) to take this class,” “This course was fantastic. It would be great as a full 14 week course and I would recommend it to any student interested in working with the public - literacy impact all of us,” and “Please offer this course again in the full semester format.”

Radical Librarianship proved to be more challenging. Like Multiple Literacies, Radical Librarianship grew out of a perceived need, this time for more attention to diversity, inclusion, anti-racism and anti-oppression within the SLIS LIS curriculum. Throughout the development of the course, I tried to model practices of inclusion and transparency, even sharing a draft of the syllabus through Google Docs so that students and others could see the development and offer suggestions. Looking back, however, I realize that I overplanned the course, and included far too much content and for a single semester. As a result, and as was noted by some students in the course evaluations, some areas were only covered superficially, and it was difficult to address the course outcomes fully. Further, I found it challenging to facilitate the class discussions in a productive way. The reasons for this challenge were varied. To begin with, the class covered issues of racism, oppression, and white privilege—all very sensitive topics. I was constantly aware of the power dynamics in the classroom, and worried about exacerbating those dynamics and of tokenizing or embarrassing students or making anyone feel unsafe. While I have touched on difficult topics in other courses, I have never had explicit training on how to facilitate these types of discussions in the classroom.

In the end, I did my best to navigate the discussions in thoughtful, sensitive, and productive ways, but I believe that I could have done better. The course evaluations for Radical Librarianship echo these sentiments. While students indicated that they felt respected and that they believe that I created a respectful and inclusive classroom environment, several noted that they would have liked deeper and more focused discussions. On the other hand, students also praised my efforts to encourage such discussions, and appreciated the opportunity for such discussions that this class afforded. While in some ways I feel like I did not achieve all I hoped with this class, I am grateful that I had the opportunity to try. I definitely learned a lot from the experience, and I firmly believe that I could take the feedback and my own observations to improve the class in the future. Also, it is worth noting that, while the course may have fallen short in some ways, it was still a useful and relevant course. As one student wrote “I am very happy that I was able to take this course, and thank goodness Laura Saunders had the guts to create it.”

### **Course Evaluation Summary**

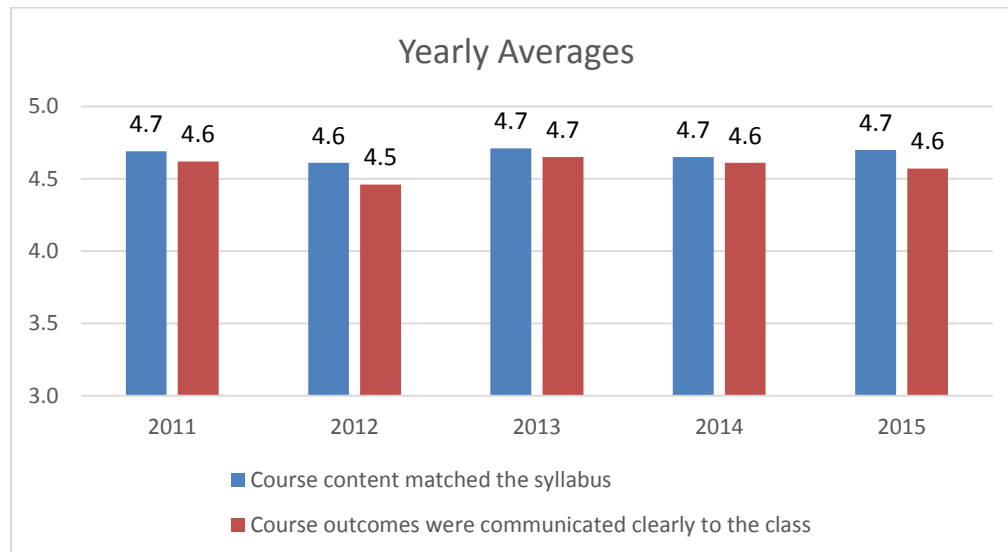
This section offers a summary overview of my course evaluations from 2011 to the present. To date, I have taught 26 course sections for SLIS over five years. Due to major revisions to the course evaluation form implemented in spring 2016, the quantitative overviews presented below reflect all courses taught in SLIS from fall of 2011 to fall of 2015. I taught only one course in spring 2016 and I have uploaded the full course evaluation forms from that semester to the [Teaching](#) page of my dossier for separate review. In addition, I posted the charts and tables below and a pdf of selected comments from course evaluations to the [Teaching](#) page of the dossier. Those qualitative comments are separated into two documents—one includes comments from 2011 to 2013, when I had my midpoint review. The second includes comments since my midpoint review in 2013. As the charts and tables illustrate, my course evaluations have been consistently strong over the years and for each course that I have taught. My average

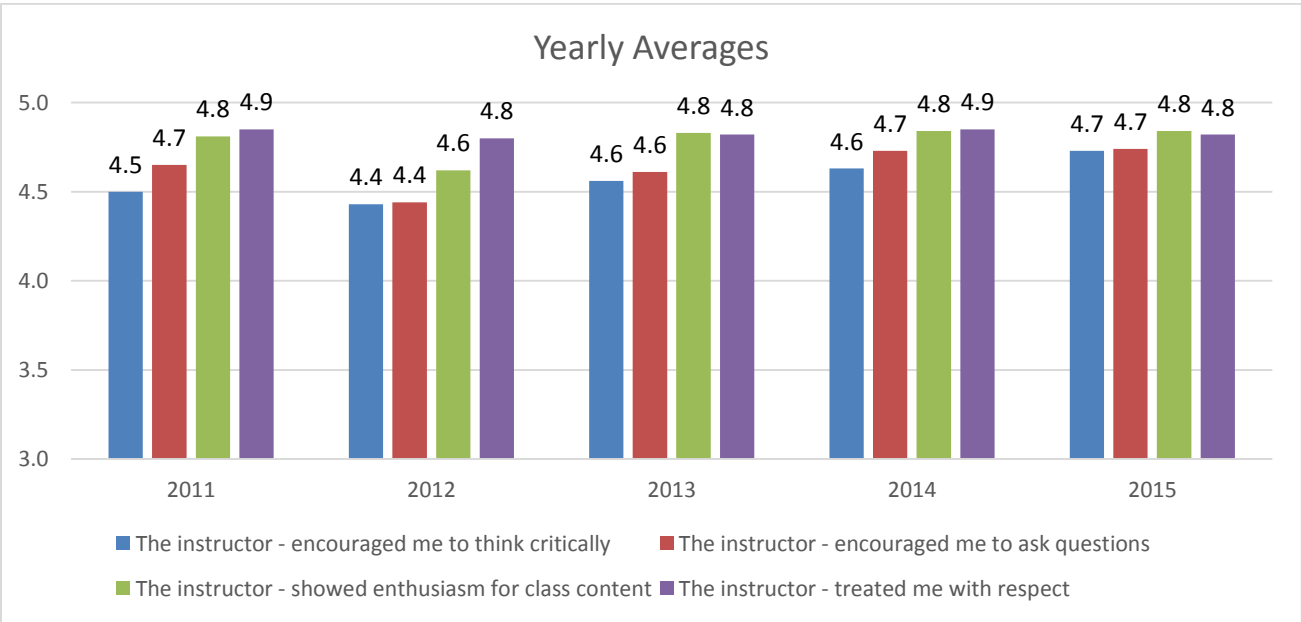
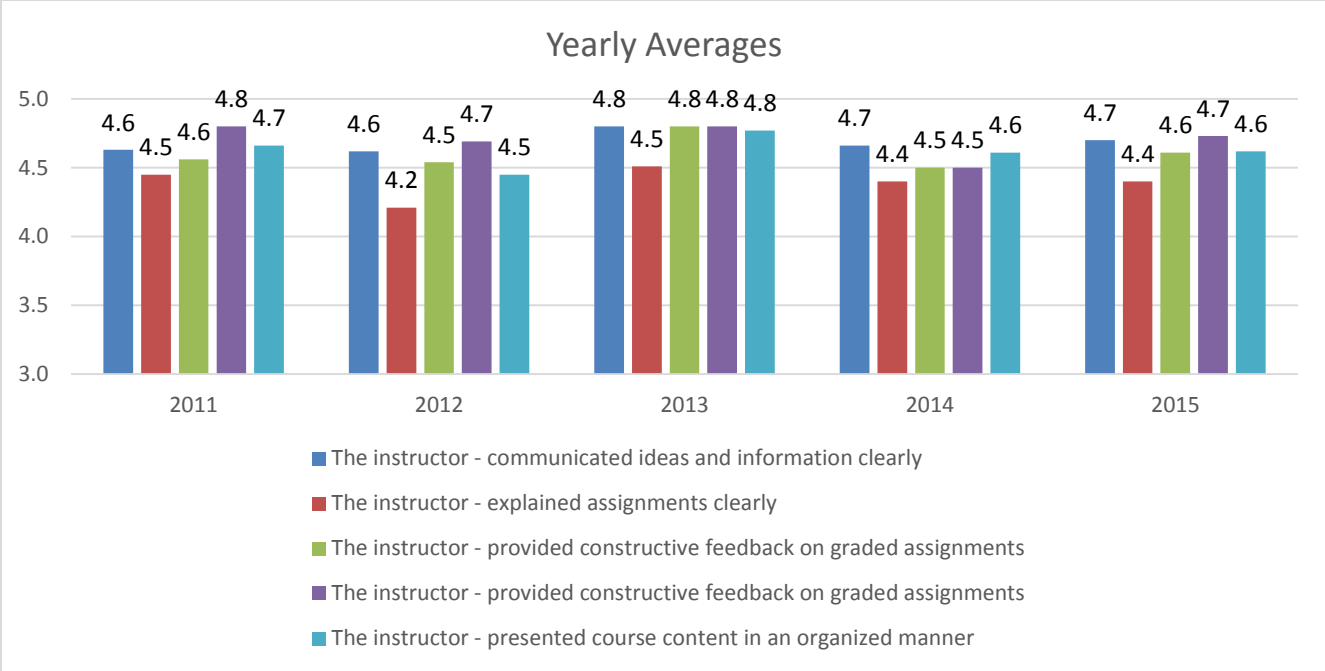


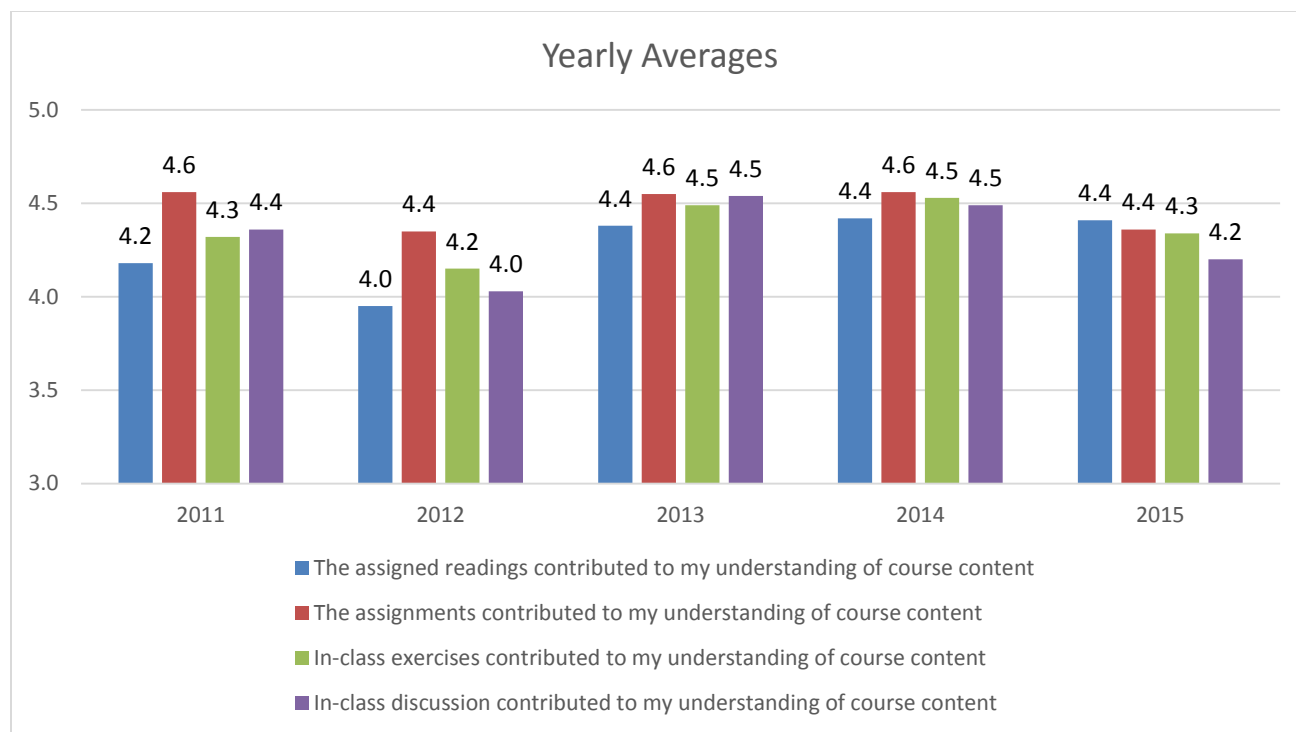
scores for all course evaluation questions are over 4 (with 5 being strongly agree) and for many areas are over 4.5.

### **Year-by-Year and Course-by-Course Comparison**

I will begin this summary by providing broad overviews of course evaluations across courses and years, before delving into some of the questions more deeply. As I was working on the course evaluations summaries, I found it very helpful to look at the numbers from both the course and the year-by-year perspectives. The year-by-year perspective helps to demonstrate consistency in student responses to my teaching over time. However, while total averages across years are helpful, it is always possible that strong evaluations in one course might balance poor evaluations in another course. I tend to teach a mix of core and elective courses, and as noted above I have created some new courses. One question I had was whether my evaluations might vary depending on the type of course. For instance, it is possible that evaluations might be lower in a core course if students are only taking it because it is required and they do not feel a personal interest and/or they do not see the relevance of the course to their program. As the figures below illustrate, my course evaluations are consistently high both by year and by course. I will begin with the yearly averages:

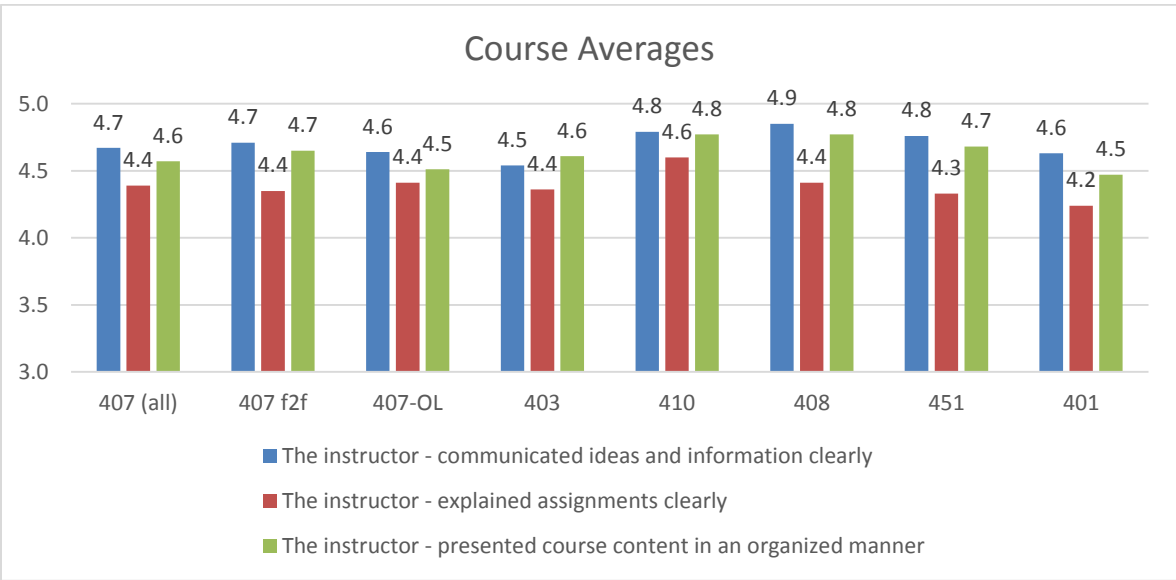
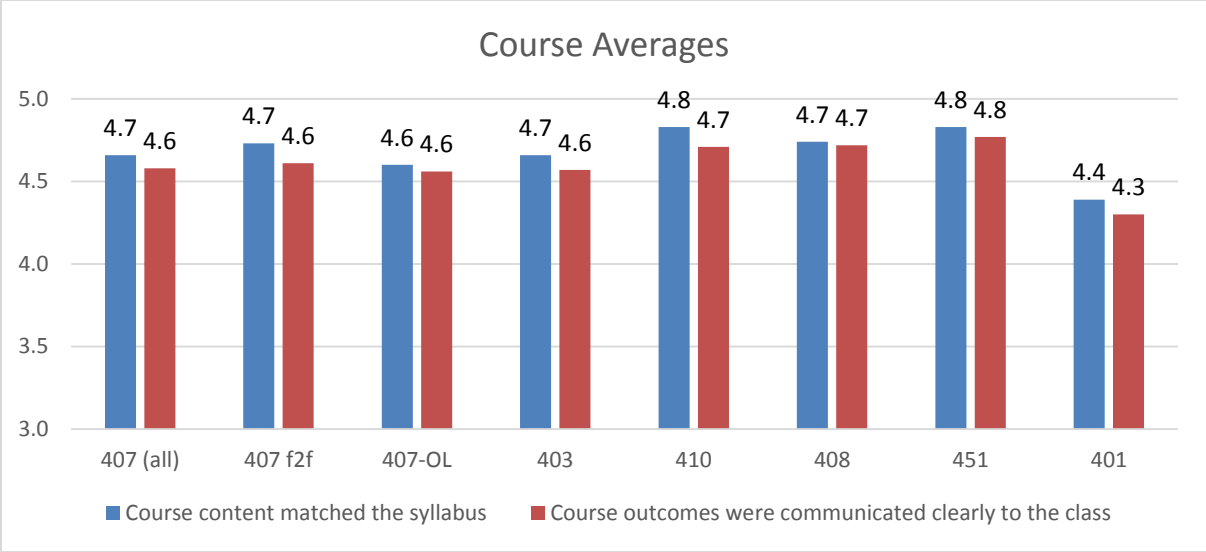


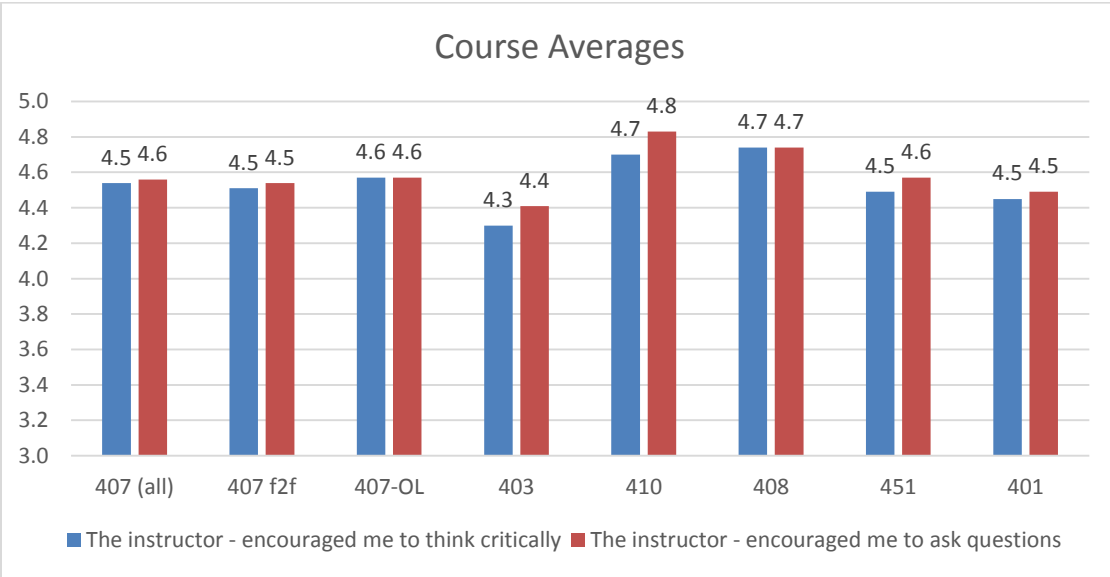
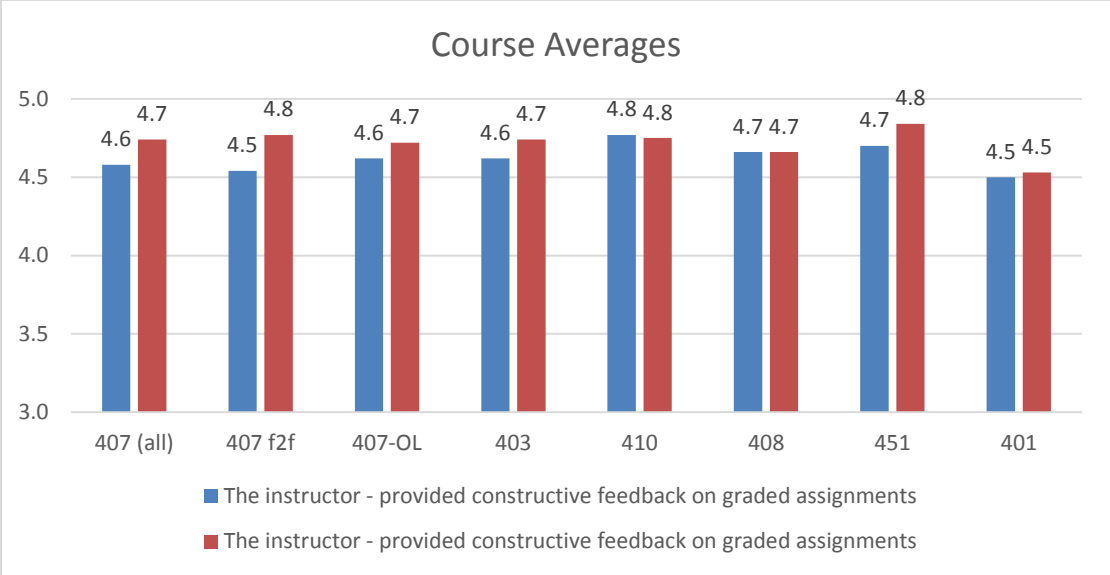


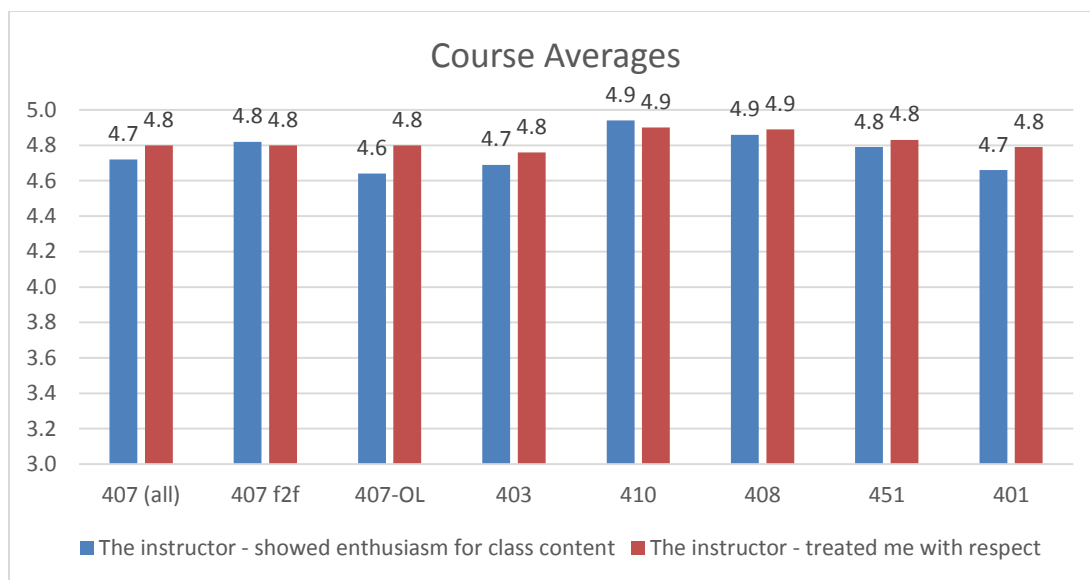


At this point, I would like to address the fact that the averages for several questions fall to their lowest point in 2012. That was the year that I converted and first taught LIS 407 online. Transitioning a course to online is very time-consuming. This was my first experience teaching online, and it took some time to get used to the format and find the rhythm of the course. In addition, I also taught LIS 503J (later LIS 410 Information Services for Diverse Users) for the first time that year. As I noted above, the faculty member who had previously taught that course had left Simmons when I took it over, and I did not have access to most of his materials. Thus, I basically had to develop that course from scratch. Finally, I had a fairly heavy service load that year, chairing both the assessment and curriculum committees, as well as serving as a member on several other committees. While none of these reasons is an excuse for less than stellar teaching evaluations, they do help to explain why the evaluations might have been a bit lower that year. And, even though there was a dip in average answers, it is worth emphasizing that my average scores were still 4 or above for all questions that year.

I will now present the comparative data for the same questions by course:







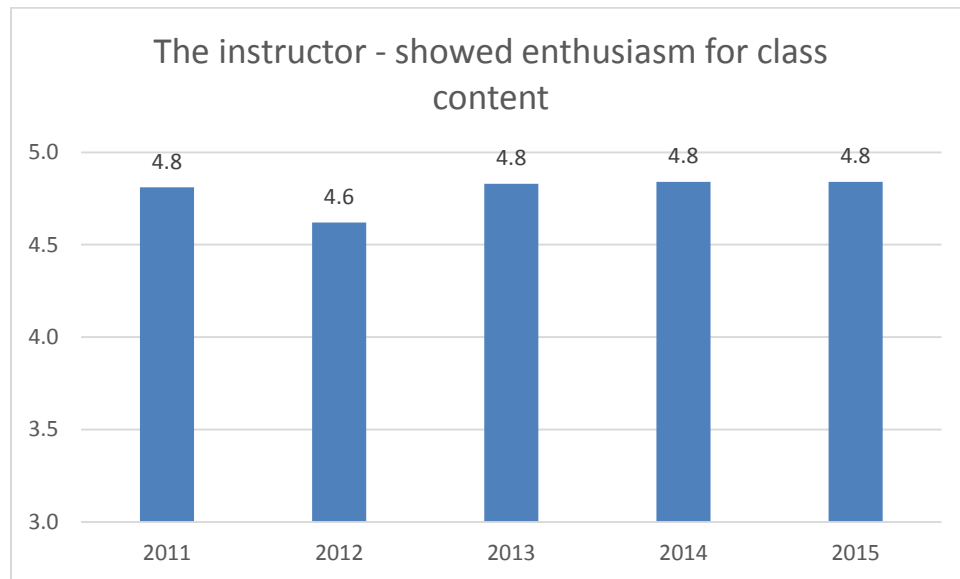
As the charts above illustrate, the average responses to course evaluation questions is quite consistent for each of the courses that I teach. LIS 401 and LIS 403 do show some lower scores, but both of these courses posed some special challenges. To begin with, both were required courses when I was teaching them, and in at least some cases students were unhappy that they were required to take those courses. Students were particularly dissatisfied with LIS 401. Many students indicated that the course was too broad and superficial in its coverage, and that it was not challenging or sufficiently rigorous. I found it particularly challenging to teach LIS 401 because I was not involved in developing the course, and yet in order to maintain consistency across sections, I did not feel that I could alter the content significantly. LIS 403 had the opposite issue, in that there were large inconsistencies across different sections of the course and students were not always getting an equivalent experience. Despite the issues inherent in these classes, my averages are still 4 or above for all course evaluation questions for these courses.

### **Recommending the Instructor & Enthusiasm**

While the charts above give a broad overview of course evaluation data, I would like to unpack further those questions that speak directly to my influence and impact as an instructor, as well as those that are of particular importance to Simmons and SLIS in terms of program and institutional areas of focus. Perhaps most indicative of my teaching abilities and impact is student responses to the question of whether they would recommend peers to take a class with me. On average, 96% of students said in course evaluations that they would recommend me as an instructor, after eliminating a handful of respondents who answered “not applicable.” Over five years and 25 courses, there is only one instance in which fewer than 90% of the students indicated that they would recommend peers to take my classes, while in 18 courses 100% of students indicated they would make such a recommendation.

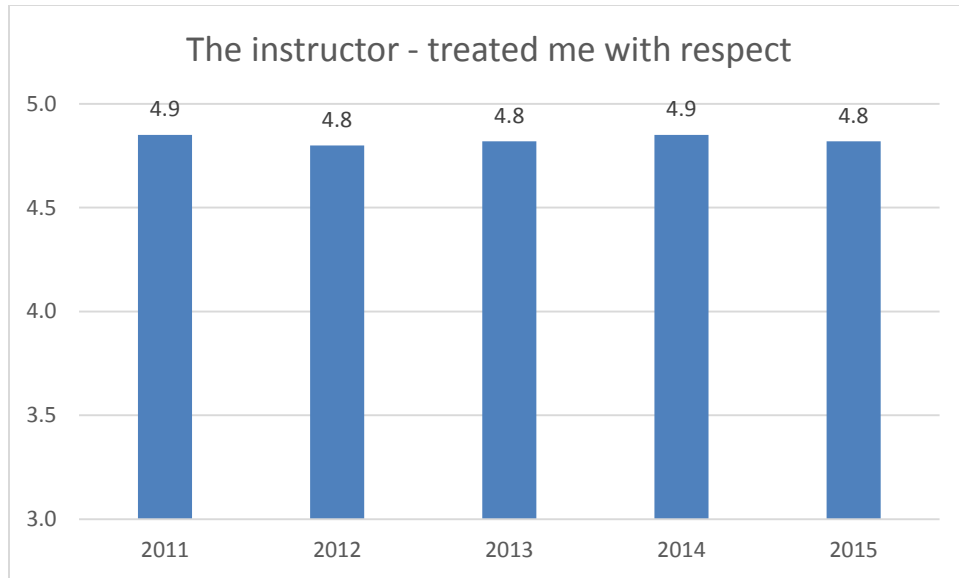
There are different reasons that students would recommend me as an instructor, but the course evaluations suggest that my enthusiasm, classroom climate, and feedback are all important factors. As the figure below shows, average level of agreement with the statement “the instructor showed enthusiasm for course content,” has never fallen below 4.5 out of 5 (with a

rating of 5 meaning strongly agree). Since 2011, 98.4% of students agree or strongly agree with that statement. Of course, enthusiasm does not necessarily equate with good teaching. An enthusiastic instructor might be entertaining and enjoyable, but still leave students feeling that they did not learn much. Responses to other course evaluation questions demonstrate that the impact of my teaching goes beyond my classroom presence.



### **Classroom Climate & Respect**

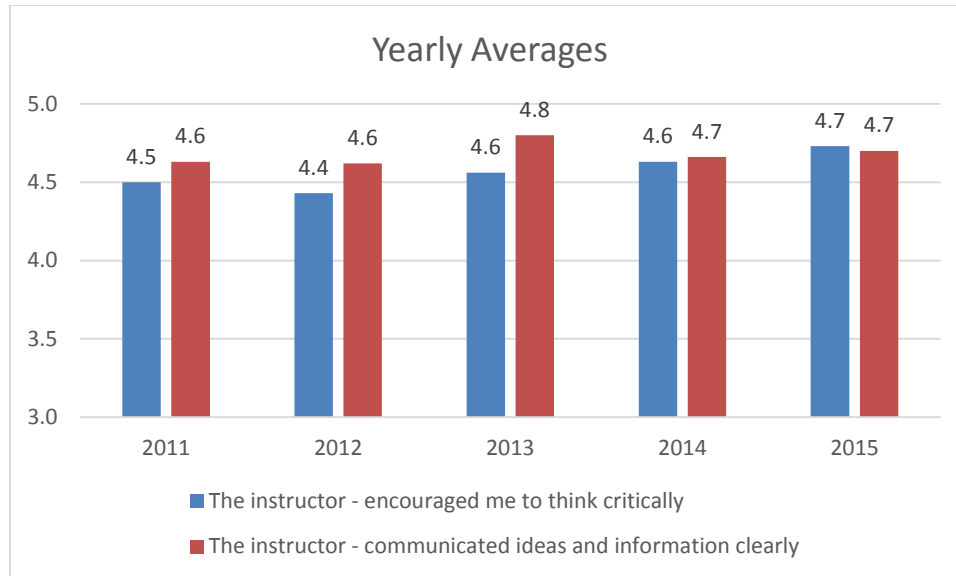
Classroom climate is currently being highlighted both in SLIS and at Simmons College generally, and since 2011 98.9% of students indicate that I treat them with respect. As the figure below illustrates, the average answer to whether I treated students with respect has never fallen below 4.5. The spring 2016 course evaluation included new questions related to classroom climate. In that semester's evaluations, 100% of students strongly agreed that course content addressed issues of diversity, and 100% strongly agreed or agreed that the course approached subject matter from multiple/diverse perspectives. Further, 100% of students strongly agreed or agreed that I employed strategies to create an inclusive environment and that I fostered a climate of respect. These numbers are supported by qualitative comments. For instance, one student wrote that "[Saunders] shows much respect for her students, which in turn garner her respect," while another indicated that "She approaches topics with sensitivity and awareness/transparency." Students from LIS 410, Information Services for Diverse Users, wrote "This course dealt with some sensitive material and I felt as though Laura created a wonderful space where I felt comfortable expressing my opinions and asking questions," and "This can be such a sensitive topic, but Laura was wonderful at creating a comfortable environment where everyone seemed comfortable sharing their thoughts, opinions, and experiences." More specifically, one student noted that "She supported class members who didn't speak up as much in getting space to speak/ I found this course to be an incredibly valuable addition to my experience at Simmons," while another wrote "I felt as though everyone in the class was heard and had their opinion valued."



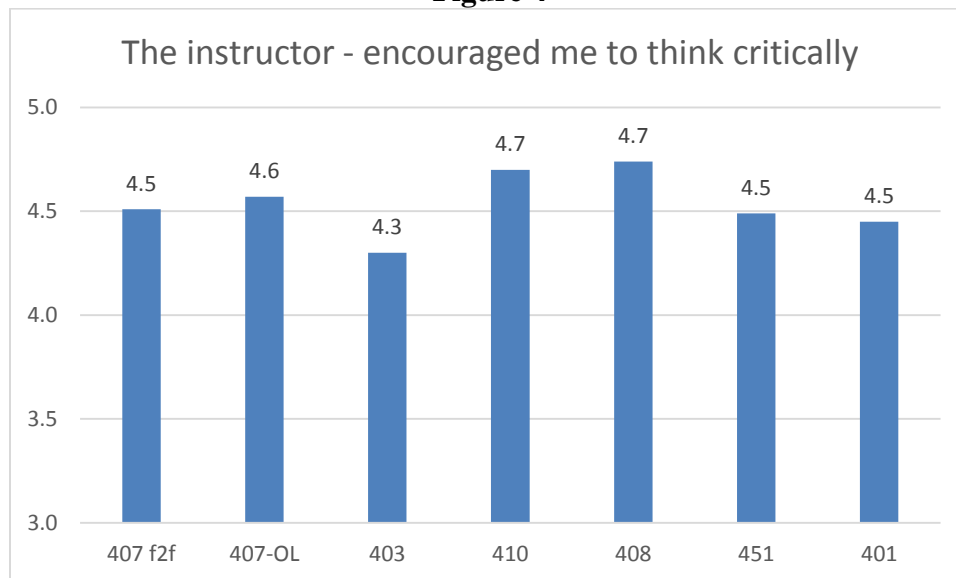
### **Rigor & Critical Thinking**

Rigor and critical thinking are also areas of emphasis in the curriculum. Since 2011, 94% of students agreed or strongly agreed that I challenged them to think critically about content, including 100% of students in spring 2016. Indeed, as illustrated by the first figure below, my average score for the question “the instructor encouraged me to think critically” has never been below 4.4 (when 5= strongly agree). Further, my average score has increased over the last few years, from a low of 4.4 in 2012 to a high of 4.7 in 2015. Not only did my overall score on this question increase, but the increases occurred in both 2014 and 2015, during which time I was regularly teaching LIS 401 Foundations of Library and Information Science. The LIS 401 course was widely acknowledged to be problematic and students generally complained that the course lacked rigor and depth. Despite issues with the course content and design, student feedback suggests that I was able to generally maintain a high standard of rigor and critical thinking in my sections of the course. The second figure below shows the average responses for the statement “the instructor encouraged me to think critically” by course. As this figure illustrates, average responses are fairly consistent across all the courses I taught, including 401.





**Figure 4**



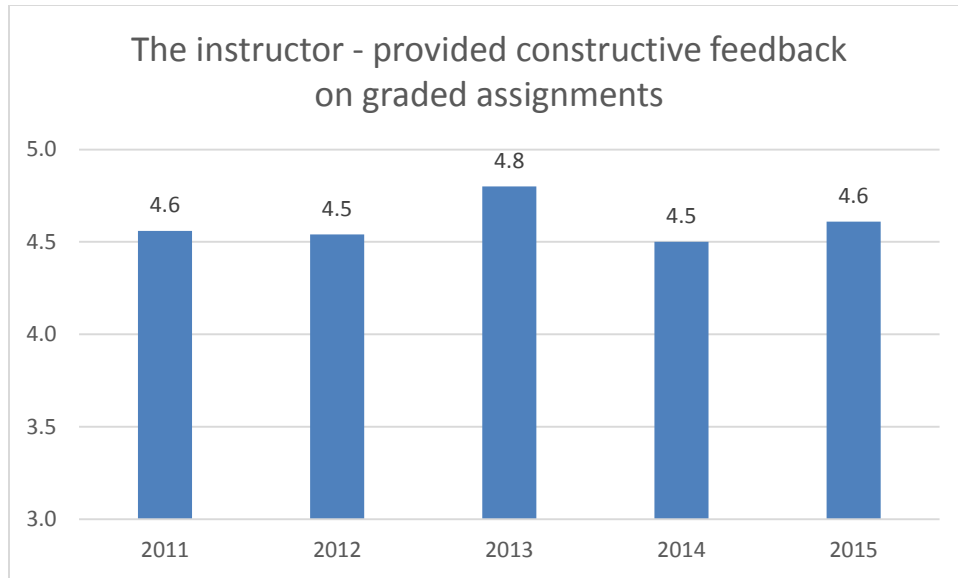
Support for the level of rigor and critical thinking in my courses is further evidenced in student comments on course evaluations. For instance, a student in Radical Librarianship wrote that “the professor encouraged me to work a lot harder on my critical thinking and its expression than I had done before, and I am grateful for that.” Other comments include that “[Saunders] challenged me to think more critically,” that I was adept at “encouraging independent thinking,” that “[Saunders] conveys the information in a challenging but thoughtful way. She challenges her students without overwhelming them,” and that course “content and assignments that were challenging and engaging.”

Spring 2016 was the first time the course evaluation specifically asked about rigor, and 100% of students that semester agreed or strongly agreed that my course was sufficiently rigorous. At the same time, students throughout my courses indicate that I convey information well, with 98% agreeing or strongly agreeing that I communicate ideas and information well.

These numbers suggest that students are not conflating rigor and critical thinking with the difficulties experienced in a course that is poorly designed or material that is poorly communicated. Rather, they believe that the course content was communicated well, and at the same time felt challenged to think critically and deeply about that content. Again, qualitative comments provide further evidence for these numbers. Student comments include: “She always brought a sense of enthusiasm along with the content and challenged me to think more critically,” “Professor Saunders had a knack for conveying her ideas clearly while also encouraging independent thinking,” “She encourages us to ask questions and reflect upon what we have learned,” and “Laura is a fair grader, though certainly not easy. She will encourage free thought and the exploration of new ideas.”

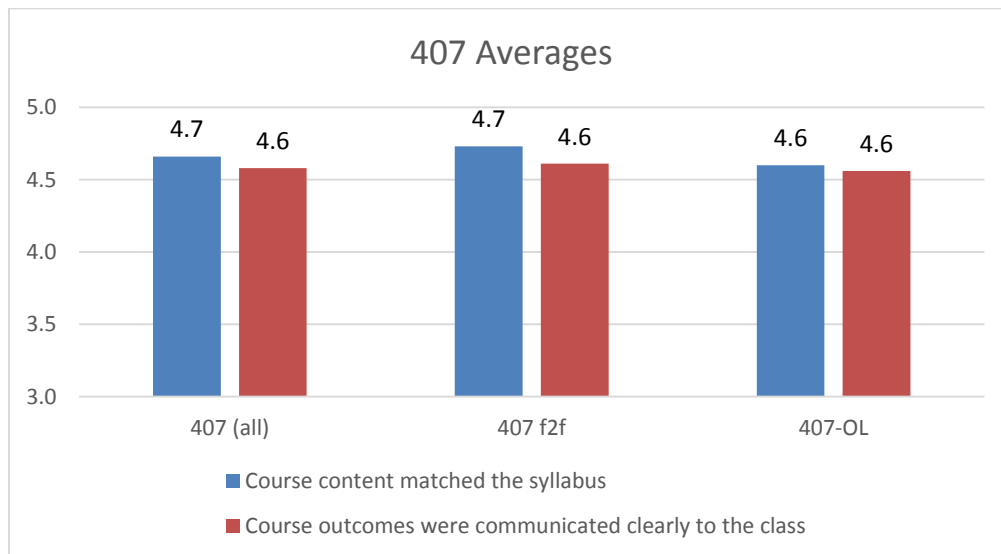
### **Constructive & Timely Feedback**

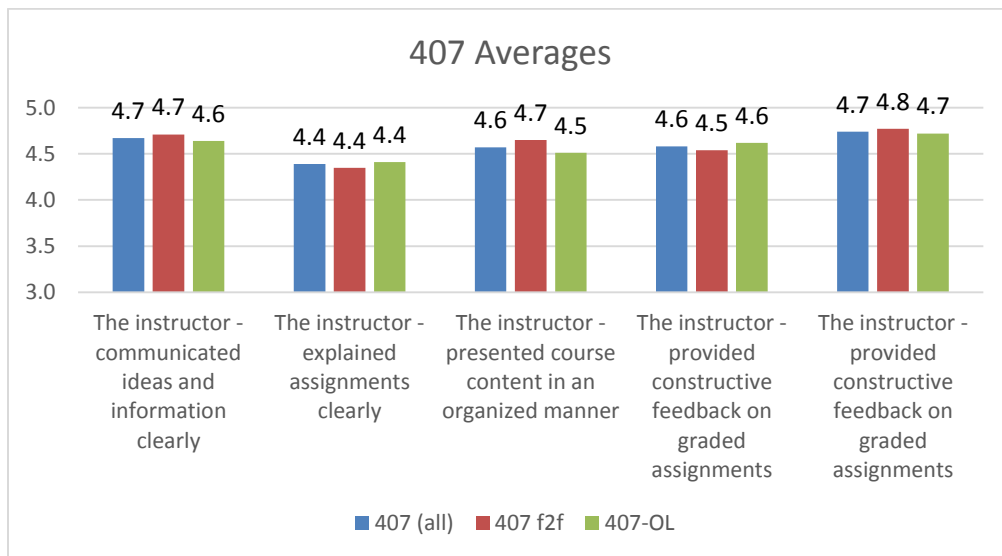
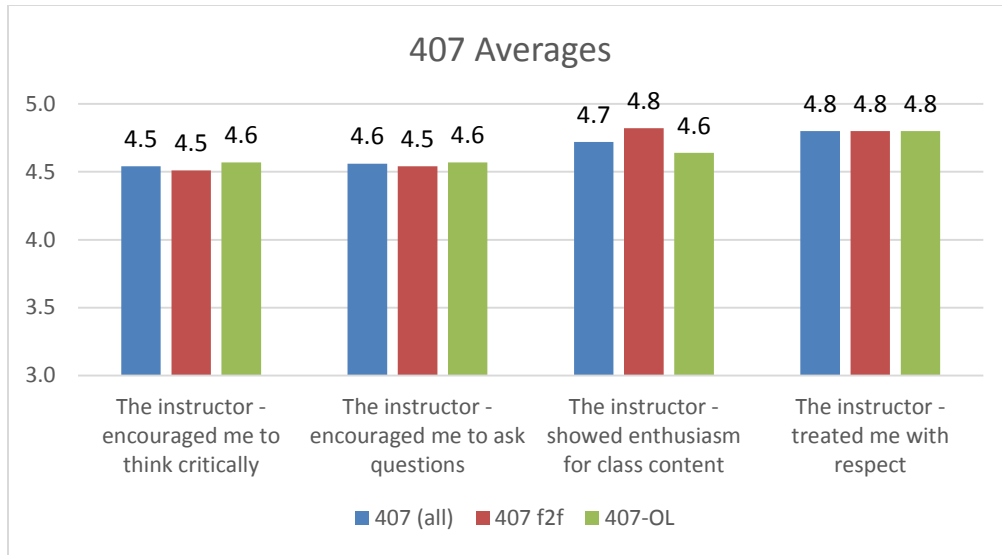
Students also are extremely appreciative of the speed with which I grade assignments, and the substantive feedback I provide. Ninety-seven percent of students agree or strongly agree that I provide constructive feedback. The spring 2016 evaluation also asked about the timeliness of feedback, with 100% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing that I provided feedback in a timely manner. Grading papers is time-consuming and it can be a challenge to return papers with constructive feedback in what students perceive as a timely manner. However, I also recognize how important such feedback is to students, as they depend on it to gauge their performance in the class and to improve on future assignments. In general, I make every effort to return all assignments within one week, and to inform students if I will take longer. Students are very enthusiastic about this practice in their feedback. In open-ended comments, students have written: “Gave good feedback on assignments quickly,” “I was impressed with Laura's timeliness and fairness with her weekly responses,” and “I received more feedback ("meaty" feedback) than I have in any other course.” I have found that feedback is especially important to online students, since they lack the connection of in-person students. As one online student wrote, “Laura is awesome! She is very quick to respond to emails and questions and gave extremely detailed feedback on assignments and you could tell, unlike other professors, that she actually read your discussion posts, etc.” Another stated “I really appreciated how the professor gave me personalized weekly feedback. As an online student, I find it very helpful to get regular updates on how I am doing. Professor Saunders was the first professor I’ve had who gave me substantive comments every week about my performance. This class was really valuable to me.” Finally, another commented “I truly appreciated her taking the time to respond to each student every week via email to offer feedback and clarify points. She made me feel like more than just a number which is difficult in an online environment.”



### Online & Face-to-Face Comparison

Indeed, connecting and engaging with students in an online course entails a different set of skills and techniques than an in-person course. I converted LIS 407 to online in the spring 2012 semester, and since then I have taught the online version five times. I was apprehensive about moving to the online environment. I was unsure whether I would be able to connect with and engage students as I did in my on the ground courses. As such, I thought it might be useful to compare responses to online and in-person courses to see if the responses were consistent. The three figures below show average responses for selected questions for both LIS 407 and LIS 407-OL (the online version) as well as an overall average for all sections of 407 combined. As the figures show, the responses are virtually the same for both versions of the course, and the responses are always above 4, and generally above 4.5.





## Conclusion

Ultimately, looked at from different perspectives, I believe my course evaluations convey a strong teaching record. I take each course seriously and make every effort to ensure that my materials are organized and up-to-date, and that my activities and assignments are engaging, demanding, and focused on useful skills. Even more importantly, I take each student seriously. I appreciate the time, money, and effort that my students are investing in their education, and I recognize my responsibility to ensure the return on that investment. I also appreciate my students as individuals, am mindful of the fact that they come from diverse backgrounds and bring unique skills and experiences to the classroom and that they are all deserving of my respect and support as they work toward their program and career goals. In return, I believe these evaluations demonstrate the appreciation and respect my students feel for my work and dedication.