Teaching Statement
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1 Teaching Philosophy

As a faculty member at a public state university, my first priority is to educate the students that come through my classroom. I view my role as helping to shape students' understanding of the world around them and providing them with many of the necessary tools to succeed after college, including critical thinking and analysis, problem solving, and collaboration techniques.

I take my job as an educator very seriously, and I am constantly working to improve myself as an educator and to provide my students with a positive learning environment. In the classroom, I view myself as a *facilitator* of knowledge transfer and I have developed teaching strategies to optimize my ability to encourage critical thinking and enhance comprehension. I employ a constructionist approach to teaching; regardless of the subject material, I use strategies to actively involve the students in the learning process through activities that require them to derive meaning rather than simply be told how to think about a subject.

In my classes, I create environment where students reflect on and question commonly held assumptions and make discoveries that help them understand people and information in a new way. I encourage students to think about topics and issues outside their normal paradigms for evaluating the world. This can be uncomfortable at times but usually provides a valuable learning experience. Such conversations are common in my privacy and security (INST611) and Technology, Culture, and Society (INST466) classes, where there are rarely simple answers; for example, one question we wrestle with throughout the semester in INST611 is how we as individuals and a society can balance personal privacy with national security. Breaking students out of these commonly held assumptions may help them differentiate themselves from other applicants for a job, or it may spur a research for a future data scientist or professor.

Below I highlight five main teaching tenets I incorporate into my classes and collaborations with students.

1.1 Consistency

Consistency both within and across semesters allows a more reliable method to evaluate my progress as an instructor as well as the success or failure of specific class components. In every class I teach, my main goal is to connect course materials and students' broader world experience and to provide students with practical skills and techniques for processing information. I regularly use real-world examples and case studies to link lectures to everyday experiences. For example, in INFM 600, students choose from a list of current events I describe and evaluate the information problem using material and knowledge from the class. In INST611, we watch TED Talks each class to connect that week's theme to a more generalized understanding of the concept; I find this gets the class engaged and actively thinking about privacy and security issues from the start of class. In INST627, students analyze real datasets (including my own, which I scrub and make available to the class) and must make decisions about what variables to analyze and describe why such analyses would be useful to an organization or to advancing research.

In addition, I work with other faculty who teach the same classes as me to ensure a high level of consistency across sections and ensure students can reach the same learning milestones. I have shared my slides, homework, and class activities with other faculty to show them how I convey a given topic and to get feedback on their methods. With INST201—which quickly grew from one section to four or five each semester—I organized a weekly Skype call between the instructors and teaching assistants to enable us to discuss the class and compare our experiences teaching various topics and the feedback students gave us.

1.2 Flexibility

As important as consistency is, every teacher knows how unpredictable a given class, topic, or semester can be. Therefore, I also highly value flexibility as a core tenet of my teaching philosophy. For most of my classes, I collect feedback from students at the beginning of the semester to help set expectations, and midway through the semester to identify any areas where there may be issues or misunderstandings. I use this feedback to adjust assignment dates and the content of assignments when students are not getting the intended benefits from the activity, and to make adjustments in the materials in future semesters. For example, in INFM600 when an online discussion board assignment became too cumbersome due to the large number of students, I used feedback from students to create smaller subsets of students to allow meaningful conversations to occur without information overload. Likewise, in the undergraduate introductory class (INST201), student feedback led me to make changes to the Wikipedia assignment I used as part of the information literacy and information organization modules. During the FA18 semester, I have partnered with TLTC for their "Fearless Teaching Framework Mid-Semester Evaluation" project to develop better evaluation criteria for faculty.

I am very flexible with my lesson plans to account for and enable the class to explore (useful) tangents to the main lesson. For example, when I first taught INST627 in Fall 2015, I quickly realized that many students wanted an individual-level of interaction when discussing homework or class activities. Therefore, I changed my lesson plans to allow for 45-60 minutes at the end of each three-hour class to work through individual or group questions. I also had the students work through problems in groups each class and spoke with each group about questions and problems they were having with the activity. In INST466, I leave the topics for one or two class sessions open at the start of the semester, and I encourage students to submit ideas for topics they want to spend more time talking about; midway through the semester, I select the most popular ideas and build out classes on those topics.

I've also recognized that class size and class content can significantly affect how flexible I can be in a class. For example, while I was flexible in terms of lecture structure for INST627, I was not flexible in terms of the statistical analyses we learned during the semester. However, in INST611 I can be— and am—more flexible based on current events. For example, during INST611 in SP16, the ongoing FBI-Apple court case led to significantly more discussions around legal and policy-based aspects of privacy and security than in prior semesters.

1.3 Active Engagement

I build my classes around discussion and activities to reinforce important concepts and encourage students to think *beyond* the readings. For example, I often employ the "Think, Pair, Share" activity to get everyone in class involved, even if only at a dyadic level. I employ a lot of visual techniques (e.g., mapping out concepts on the board, Post-It Notes brainstorming) to reinforce concepts and get everyone involved. I provide students with numerous ways to interact outside of the class, such as resource pages that anyone can edit and non-graded discussion boards to continue conversation after class or share related materials.

I am also a proponent of using technology in the classroom *when appropriate to the goal of the class.* I believe that there is much more to be gained from using technology to facilitate learning in the classroom than banning it to prevent misuse. One of my favorite activities to do in class involves AGoogleADay.com, which is a game Google created involving difficult questions that participants answer using Google search. I have used this activity in INFM600 and INST201 to help teach students about information overload and some of the issues related to searching for and verifying information sources. When teaching online courses, I get students involved and interacting by having them post short introductory videos at the start of the semester and then watching and commenting on their classmates' videos.

Based on course evaluation feedback, students appreciate the interactive components I use to break up lectures and reinforce concepts. For example, one student in INST201 in the FA17 semester said, *"The interactive teaching style was very helpful when it came to reviewing and understanding the content learned in class"* while a grad student in INST808 said, *"Dr. Vitak ensures that the class is well engaged and interactive. She makes it simple to understand course content."*

1.4 Ask Questions Any Time, Anywhere
People who collaborate with me are familiar with my propensity to respond to emails quickly. I set a similar bar for responding to students; while I have a firm email response policy in all my syllabi that I will respond within 48 hours, I recognize and remember the stress of college and make it a priority to respond to their queries as quickly as possible. I also spend significant time in my campus office outside of office hours and leave my door open. I tell all students I work with— including via class, mentoring, or collaborating—that they are always welcome to stop by with a question or email me at any step along the way.

Students who have taken my classes appreciate my availability and quick responses. For example, in an email at the end of the FA2015 semester, a student from INST627 emailed me and wrote*: "I wanted to thank you for always clearing my doubts throughout the semester. Throughout the semester, I have bothered you with my doubts about every assignment and every reply has only made me understand concepts better and has fostered my interests in statistics."* A student in INFM600 wrote in their evaluation, *"The instructor also did a great job in being available as a resource throughout the course for students with questions and was fair across the board."* In addition, several students who have taken INST201 with me said that the class and my willingness to talk with them about the course and the major was the main reason they declared as an InfoSci major. This kind of feedback is so rewarding and drives me to continue to innovate in the classroom.

1.5 Learning From Failure
Finally, I recognize that failure is inevitable, and I believe that activities or projects that don't work still provide me with valuable knowledge for future classes I develop. For example, during my first semester teaching, I spent most of the semester trying to regain control of the classroom after taking a purposefully relaxed approach at the start of the semester. During the winter break, I sat down with my syllabus and thought about what went wrong and how I could have prevented that situation from happening. I realized many of my mistakes—including being too passive and not establishing myself in a position of authority—and realized I needed to change how I presented myself in class. I also made changes to my syllabus to provide me with more written support to backup decisions I might be forced to make in class regarding student behavior.

In subsequent semesters and for other classes, I have maintained a separate version of the syllabus to add notes each week regarding things that worked well, things that didn't, readings to cut or add,

and so on. I also get feedback from the students at the midpoint and end of the semester and specifically ask them about what they would change in classes. This has helped me to be more flexible as a professor but has also helped me recognize aspects of classes that I thought worked but the students did not. The first time I taught INST611, I got feedback from several students about a class activity they thought didn't work. When updating the syllabus for the current semester, I was able to refer to my notes and revised the assignment to provide more clarity of my expectations for students, as well as to describe why I saw that assignment as valuable.

2 Teaching Innovations

Since I joined the UMD iSchool in Fall 2012, I have taught six different courses, including INFM600 (Information Environments) six times, INST201 (Introduction to Information Science) four times, INST611 (Privacy and Security in a Networked World) three times, INST466 (Technology, Culture, and Society) twice, INST627 (Data Analytics) once, and INST808 (Qualitative Research Methods) once. I am the sole developer of four of these courses (INST201, INST466, INST611, and INST808), as well as a fifth course (INST3XX, Privacy, Security, and Ethics for Big Data), which will be a core course for the iSchool's new Cybersecurity and Privacy specialization in the BSIS and offered for the first time in Spring 2019.

I believe that learning requires investment by the teacher as well as the student, and I have engaged in a number of training opportunities at UMD. I participated in the iSchool-run workshop series in spring 2014 on designing online courses and used the skills gained there to develop and implement an online version of INFM600 successfully in Fall 2014 (and a hybrid version of the course in Spring 2015). During the 2015-2016 academic year, I participated in the ADVANCE Keeping Our Faculties (KOF) program, where we met monthly to discuss topics related to being faculty and working toward tenure, including teaching. In May 2016, I attended a workshop for developing general education courses for the Cultural Competence requirement; the resulting course, INST466, has since been approved as a general education course and has been taught twice to date (in SP18 and FA18). I also successfully applied for the BSIS introductory course (INST201) to be offered as a general education course in the History and Social Science category, and for the upper-level elective (INST466) to be offered as a general education course in cultural competence. I continue to work with the current course instructors to improve and innovate on my original course structure for INST201, even though I am not currently teaching it. I also developed an online version of this course, which was taught for the first time in SU18.