Lynette Kvasny
Teaching / Learning Philosophy

I adopt a praxis-oriented approach to research, teaching, and service. By praxis, I mean combining theory and action to build the capacity of historically underserved citizens and institutions to appropriate information and communication technologies (ICT) in ways that will enable them to improve their life chances. The results of this fieldwork are then integrated into the course design and delivery. This agenda embodies our College's mission of inspiring solutions through education, research, partnerships, and community.

My content interest lies in applying socio-technical frameworks in the analysis of the social implications of ICT in non-corporate settings. I choose to focus on non-corporate settings because ICT and information systems are pervasive in all areas of life. I want to raise students' consciousness of the opportunities and problems that arise from our society's growing reliance on technology. As future business leaders, it is imperative that our students not only understand the ethical, moral, social and legal aspects of these emerging technologies. Students must also have the analytical, research, oral and written communication skills, and an understanding of diversity to advise government and industry so that sound and just policies can be developed to leverage and harness ICT equitably.

I embrace a problem-based pedagogy to explore these topics and issues beyond the traditional textbook-approach to learning. This pedagogy has required me to develop new forms of assessment to include self reflection on the learning process, to find diverse community partners so that students can engage with local organizations, to use more class time for advising teams on course projects, to incorporate diversity into problems, and to use ANGEL for more timely communication and dissemination of resources. Students play a central role in deciding on the topics that are included in the course, and I begin each class session with brief student presentations on current news related to ICT. In this way, everyone gets to display their knowledge and expertise on a topic of their choosing. Also, it starts each class session with the voice of students, not the instructor. I then use small group activities and class discussions to tie in with the student presentations. The class concludes with a mini-lecture to summarize the discussion and bring in points from the readings that may not have made their way into the day's discussion. I also use formal debates, essays, microblogs (Twitter) and blogs (Tumblr) as a way to get students to research, develop and defend positions on controversial topics like internet censorship and the ethics of employers viewing students' social networking sites. I've adapted this general approach for the four undergraduate courses (IST110S, IST130, IST297 and IST431) that I regularly teach.

I've also designed and implemented new undergraduate courses on communities and service learning (IST 496B), emerging technologies and popular culture (IST130) and individuals, institutions and new media (IST297K). The emerging technologies and pop culture course is now offered annually to 150 students and is our only General Education – General Arts course. The new media course is in the process of becoming a permanent course. It will be the only required 200 level IST course to focus on ICT in the human societal context.

For me, ICT is an extremely elitist construct. The availability of computing resources, for instance, is diffused along the longstanding fault lines of race, gender, class, nationality, age, education, (dis)ability, and geography. ICT requires skills and competencies that are not randomly distributed. ICT requires substantial amounts of free time for exploring and learning. And, the outcomes and benefits that one derives from ICT use are largely shaped by the demographic characteristics of the user. Because ICT is an elitist construct, I find it crucially important for students to question their complicity in creating and maintaining technologies that unwittingly reproduce these longstanding inequities. Most of my students are young American white males, and I struggle to find ways to enroll them as allies in the struggle for creating more equitable and socially just technological products, services and public policies.