LIS Pedagogy Chat is a discussion series for library and information science instructors. Our goal is to provide an informal space to ask questions and share ideas about online pedagogy, and to build a community of practice. Each session focuses on a different topic and features a short presentation on best practices followed by a facilitated discussion and a collaborative document of ideas to share. Slides and notes from each session are available in a shared folder. For more information, see https://www.lispedagogychat.org/

The Emotional Labor of Teaching

Date: December 2, 2022
Moderator: Melissa Wong

Link to Slides

Presentation/Discussion

Reflective Pause:

- What went well this semester?
    - Students were happier and more engaged than previous semesters
    - Took on leadership roles-- but was also challenging
    - Reinvigorated programs- had great attendance at events and more instruction sessions than previous year
    - More positive vibes on campus
    - More faculty inviting people back for follow-ups
- What was challenging
    - Being the only instruction librarian
    - Challenges with student mental health
    - Getting COVID
    - Busier than ever; less time to devote to students
    - Low engagement with synchronous sessions
    - Extreme weather
    - Small staff= more demands on everyone
    - Tech challenges
    - Gloomy vibes on campus; lack of student motivation/engagement
    - Work/life balance
    - People aren't spending time on campus
- When did your work feel emotionally engaging? Emotionally draining?
    - Student mental health crises-- emotionally engaging though because students were open in talking about it, were optimistic in their outlook
    - Advising theses-- students needed so much support, needed emotional in addition to research support
    - Student brought treats!

- Monitored honors students presentation-- engaging and draining
- Jump in individual consultations-- happy to connect 1-on-1
- Keeping a kudos folder of appreciate emails
- Lots of resignations and turnover
- Getting used to new faculty assignments
- Realizing everyone is doing the best they can
- Would be nice if admin trusted us and our expertise
- Engaging: Getting to do some great work with students and colleagues. Draining: Sometimes lacking support/resources needed to do the job. No time to be sick.

Emotional labor
Has become a catch-phrase, but original conception is from Arlie Hochschild:
Regulating or managing emotional expressions with others as part of one's professional work role. Managing the emotions of others as well as your own.
Suppressing or hiding negative emotions and displaying positive emotions.

Emotional labor creates a dissonance between actual and expressed emotions.

Examples in the classroom:

- Collaborating with challenging colleagues- last minute requests, asking for things we don't offer etc., having cajole others to take on their share, The Interrupting Instructor
- Adopting a welcome and cheerful teaching persona
- Fostering excitement about assignments, research process, etc.
- Addressing microaggressions or inappropriate behaviors
- challenging readings that bring up political or social issues-- facilitating a good discussion
- Dealing with power dynamics with faculty

Emotional labor can result in physical and emotional fatigue, even exhaustion and depression, burnout.
Even little tasks like crafting an email that won't ruffle feathers becomes overwhelming

Gay Hendricks is: "it is easy, if we view teaching as a one-way street, to fall into the trap of doing more than 50% of the work in the classroom. If we see teachers as having the answers and the students as having the questions we invite an imbalance in the relationship which can only cause a drain on teachers' energy"

But there are positive aspects as well:

- Feeling good about helping someone
- Dealing with a tough situation well

- Sometimes “faking it” actually makes it real-- go into class feeling exhausted but the energy you put into it buoys you and you really get into it.

How can we manage or recover from emotional labor?

- Process things with someone else-- colleague, family member friend
- Talking it out and commiserating
- Reminding yourself you can do things differently next time
- Not letting perfect get in the way of the good
- Being intentional about work-life balance
- Letting yourself be done with something
- Taking time to separate, reset

Tips for enforcing personal boundaries:

- Track good and bad habits
- Not checking work emails on weekends
- Getting off phone
- Blocking off time on calendar
- Setting expectations for when you’ll answer emails
- Making a to-do list based on priority
- Block access to certain apps with screen time limits

Based on what went well this fall, what do you want to continue/build on for spring?

- Be gentle with myself
- Giving myself grace
- Letting students take over some of the class time leadership-- lead discussions, select readings, etc.
- Thinking practically about my time and what's feasible. I'm a collaborator and educator, not a faculty member's <insert whatever here>
- Lean into trust and collaboration and kindness
- "trust the people. through your trust, they become trustworthy" - Emergent Strategy! :)
- Trusting students, I mean, be more authentic and honest with them.

What would you like to do differently in the spring? What could make your job easier?

- Saying no more often; No is a complete sentence
- Giving up some responsibilities
- Remind myself that a "slow yes" is okay. I have my whole career ahead of me, I don't need to do all of the things right this minute.
- Letting go of things I had been doing and make space for new hires to do the work too. At the same time, making sure to not leave them stranded.
- Give fewer assignments/papers
- Think about what advice would you give a colleague in a similar situation
- Trying to not let my frustration about other people's/admin's choices affect my mental health