

Cynthia M. Frisby, Ph.D.

Graduate Education Vision

I believe that a professor must prepare graduate students to become competent professionals or academicians who practice and/or deliver accurate and significant studies that make a major contribution in today's ever-changing society. Journalism and Strategic Communication is based on the tenets of professional integrity, effective communication, active inquiry, and service to a particular target market or broad, diverse community. The goals of a strategic communicator are to assist advertisers and marketers in identifying advertising problems, creating strategically sound messages, developing well-executed messages that resonate with populations, and evaluate the effectiveness of advertising campaigns.

My objective as a professor is to motivate undergraduate and graduate students toward a level of independence where they develop a desire to learn and think for themselves. To reach this end, I rely upon many activities that involve total engagement and involvement by my students. Instead of just reading about advertising, public relations, and cross cultural issues in journalism, my students look at advertisements, write creative briefs, analyze news and media content and, producing quality projects and reports as they learn both strategic communication and journalism skills and the role journalists and communicators play in today's culture.

There are a number of graduate student issues and services that are highlighted, outlined, and discussed in my vision of graduate education. I would like to focus on, if accepted for the position of Associate Dean, activities and programs that help students become active participants in the graduate education process. The following statement not only outlines my vision in terms of my perspective and philosophy toward graduate education, but includes my vision for how I would provide leadership and programs that encourage graduate students of all backgrounds and cultures to learn how to become fully functioning faculty members at higher education institutions around the world.

VISION OF GRADUATE EDUCATION

Graduate Education is a Shared Process

I believe that graduate education is and should be a process that is shared by the faculty and the student. Learning at the graduate student level involves problem solving, enhanced writing and oral communication skills, exploration, utilization, contribution, and generation of knowledge. I believe learning is and should be the responsibility of each student and is accomplished through self-motivation, active participation and involvement, and engagement in the learning process. At the graduate level, I firmly believe that professors [should] act as a guide, a guide that motivates the graduate student toward acquiring professional skills in communication, practice, leadership, management, and critical thinking.

The most important step a professor can take to help graduate students develop appropriate skills is to create a positive learning environment by first and foremost respecting and promoting intellectual diversity. This not only sets an example for students to follow, but it also allows students to share their ideas openly with other students and with their professor. Respecting and promoting intellectual diversity requires a deeper understanding of how diversity manifests inside and outside of the classroom. On the one hand, intellectual diversity manifests itself in the various worldviews that students possess. On the other hand, intellectual diversity manifests itself in the various ways students learn. To effectively promote and develop graduate students' critical thinking skills, both forms of intellectual diversity must be taken into consideration.

The final area of my vision of graduate education that I would like to discuss is my views toward self-improvement. Teaching is a privileged position that demands humility as much as respect. It is crucial that teachers recognize the power inherent in their role and are self-reflective about their actions. In my teaching I work to be mindful of my position as a role model of the kind of learning I strive to promote among students. As I a professor, I constantly evaluate my performances in the classroom every time I teach. This includes; assessing how well I presented the material, what students' reactions to the material were, and coming up with ideas on how to improve upon my presentations to maintain student interest. I believe that taking the time to rewrite lectures, add new

material, and revise lesson plans is something that I must do on a regular basis. However, self-reflection has its limits. Other important ways I continue to improve my skills as a professor include; talking with experienced professors and other instructors for advice, keeping up on current social issues, refreshing my knowledge of the subject being taught, and perhaps the most important tool is using student evaluations to inform me of my weaknesses.

BELIEFS ABOUT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Stimulate Student Engagement

I embrace graduate education and teaching as an opportunity to inspire and empower. Ideally, I want graduate students to feel personally changed by their participation in any course I am teaching. This type of learning is most likely to occur when graduate students become personally engaged with the material and perceive the subject matter to be directly relevant to their own lives and to their professional goals. Understanding the diversity of learning styles and student experiences is key to enhancing this engagement. The process by which I work to stimulate student engagement is unique to each individual and classroom. While students must ultimately take responsibility for their own learning, a teacher can often inspire their desire to learn. Learning about the graduate students I teach and listening to their experiences has helped me to consider ways of making course material relevant and fostering critical thinking skills. I am passionate about finding the most effective ways of stimulating and sustaining intellectual growth among those who enter my classroom.

I believe professors should provide leadership and opportunities to prepare graduate students to become fully functioning faculty or practitioners. In order to engage the student, I believe I must develop professional activities and tips for them to learn how to become an engaged faculty member. Following is a list of the ideas and suggestions I have considered when it comes to ways that I might lead, motivate, and help graduate students transition to becoming fully functioning faculty members.

Attend conferences to network

It is important to me that students submit papers and join large professional conferences. Conferences are great starting places for building connections outside one's department and discovering issues and topics in a field of interest. I would also encourage students to attend smaller conferences with a more narrow focus because these venues provide students with an opportunity to meet researchers in a very specific subfield and, perhaps, get an opportunity to meet the author(s) of seminal papers in their research area of interest.

While at these conferences, I always recommend that students attend any and all student events so that they can meet peers and future colleagues. While the cost of traveling across the country to attend one of these conferences may be prohibitive to many graduate students, I encourage my students to look for travel support and scholarships offered for students at the department, university, and/or organizational level.

Volunteer

Another area that I feel would help graduate students develop and prepare to become future faculty is to find opportunities to do pro bono research work or to volunteer within the local community helping local businesses and marketers solve advertising problems. Volunteering opportunities within the strategic communication community range from small commitments such as taking a leadership role within a student organization or group or chairing a session at our national Association for Education in Mass Communication and Journalism organization.

Improving Oral Communication

If given an opportunity to help prepare graduate students for faculty positions, I would encourage them to present papers and learn how to present their research to an audience. Conferences provide a great opportunity to present research and creative projects to an audience with similar interests. Besides conferences, there exist many less formal, but equally valuable, platforms to present research. The University of Missouri, for example, hosts several research poster sessions and graduate student research symposiums that allow ample opportunity to improve oral communication skills.

I believe that internships and other collaborative experiences are great for fostering discussion and cultivating ideas for future research projects. Many departments have an informal gathering following (i.e., brown bag lunches) to discuss the research topics with others in attendance.

Acquire teaching experience

Teaching provides a great way of learning how to explain concepts and ideas to an audience. Often, I encourage graduate students to seek out tutoring opportunities. Our athletic department, through its student success center, often seeks tutors who might be able to help struggling athletes with course work. For future faculty, this is a great opportunity to develop skills. Tutoring achieves the same effect of teaching, yet on a smaller, more intimate scale. Leading a discussion in a seminar is another way to gain teaching experience without a lengthy commitment.

Gain experience writing and publishing

The editorial process of journals forces graduate students to improve their work. I always recommend that graduate students create manuscripts (in or out of the classroom) for a variety of journals, including journals in other disciplines. Reviewing is also a great way to gain insight into the editorial process and improve their own writing. I often suggest that my graduate students serve as reviewers of our AEJMC conference so that they can learn how to improve their writing skills and enhance publication probabilities of their own manuscripts.

Apply for grants and fellowships

I think it is important, especially in terms of providing leadership for graduate students, that they learn useful and marketable skills that will come in handy in almost any future faculty position. Obtaining external funding is difficult, so if a graduate education program can help students prepare for writing grants, this will service can definitely benefit many, if not all, graduate students.

Taking Advantage of Opportunities Within the Broader University Community

If ever given an opportunity to lead graduate students or a graduate education program, I would want to offer seminars for graduate students that address the professional development skills discussed here and help to develop programs that foster better teaching.

As a professor, one of the greatest gifts I can give students is tips and information on career planning. As an Associate Dean, I would love to provide leadership that gives graduate students the tools needed to begin to plan their future. Workshops that provide advice on choosing an advisor, developing a teaching portfolio, applying for positions, getting funding, negotiating a salary, and much more.

CONCLUSION

Over the years, I have worked to fine-tune my teaching philosophy. While my teaching objectives vary depending upon the course level and content, I have always made it a point to strive to optimize student engagement and academic success. I work to promote student responsibility for learning by asking each individual what they will contribute to the class and how each person can participate in creating a classroom environment that is stimulating and respectful of diverse views and experiences. I also require and/or encourage graduate students to develop an original research project that culminates with submission of the paper to an academic conference and/or academic journal. This research projects provides an opportunity for graduate students to select their own area of research and determine their own research agenda.

I do not see a rigid dividing line between research and teaching. Great professors need to be at the cutting edge of recent scholarship. Social science is not a collection of facts, but rather, an area of research that is wrought with unfinished puzzles, contradictions, and new areas of inquiry and theoretical development and enhancements. I try to encourage graduate students to discover the excitement that can be found in researching the world of media effects and how exposure to certain types of media affects attitudes and behaviors. I welcome the opportunity to supervise independent projects, and I have encouraged students whose theses and projects I oversee to submit their work to appropriate conferences and journals for review.

My relationships with my graduate students, the teaching experiences I have gained, and the support I have found in my colleagues have all contributed to my graduate education stance, vision, and goals. In sum, my vision is one that strives to give all graduate students an equal opportunity to learn. It is through my respect for intellectual diversity that I conduct myself in a professional manner to create a positive learning environment where graduate students can develop their critical thinking skills. But the key to my vision rests on the idea that I must set and continue to set high standards for students and for myself. I must lead by example for my students as my mentors did for me.

Teaching is my passion. There is nothing else in my professional life that brings the same joy and exhilaration to me as giving a lecture or working with graduate students, particularly when students are learning and engaged. While I am fortunate to have found something I am so passionate about, I feel that I have a responsibility to work hard for my students. It is a great gift and a great responsibility to share the subject matter I love with others. I am truly grateful for the opportunity to teach!