dsoergel@buffalo.edu 2015-09-10

**Syllabus Extension**

**Instructor capsule bio. Teaching statement. The course as a learning community**

optional **Information about the instructor**

Dagobert Soergel is Professor, Department of Library and Information Studies, Graduate School of Education, University at Buffalo since 2009, Professor, College of Information Studies, University of Maryland, 1970 – 2010, and Professore Onorario, Dipartimento di Ingegneria e Scienza dell'Informazione, University of Trento since 2007. He has been working in the area of classification (taxonomy, ontologies) and thesauri both practically and theoretically for over 50 years. He is the author of the still-standard text- and handbook *Indexing Languages and Thesauri. Construction and Maintenance* (Wiley 1974) and of *Organizing Information* (Academic Press 1985), which received the American Society of Information Science Best Book Award, and more than 100 papers and presentations in the area of classification / ontologies and more broadly in information science. He has taught courses at several universities in the US and Germany, and has been offering a long-running tutorial on *Knowledge Organization Systems (KOS) in Digital Libraries* at the European Conference on Digital Libraries (ECDL) and at the Joint Conference on Digital Libraries (JCDL) in the US. He was the chief architect for several thesauri, including the Alcohol and Other Drug Thesaurus and the Harvard Business Thesaurus. He has written about the future of digital libraries and led the editing team for the EU-funded DELOS Network of Excellence in Digital Libraries response to the European Union call for online consultation. He was a member of the Working Group on the DELOS Digital Library Reference Model. 1997. Recent publications include four papers in the Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology on *the nature of relevance, o*n *sensemaking*, on *the topicality of art images,* and on *evaluating software for automated indexing*, Keynote addresses at the global ISKO conference 2014 in Warsaw, Poland on *Knowledge Organization for Learning* (printed in the proceedings, much expanded version in the Brazilian Journal of Information Science) and at the ISKO UK conference 2015 on *Unleashing the Power of Data through Organization* (much expanded version in the journal Knowledge Organization)b. In 1997 Dr. Soergel received the highest award of the American Society for Information Science, the Award of Merit, and in 2009 the Contributions to Information Science (CISTA) Award of the Los Angeles Chapter of ASIST. He received the Governor's Award for Volunteering Excellence (Virginia). Gold Medal, 1993.

Items cited https://web.archive.org/web/20111015041143/http://etoh.niaaa.nih.gov/AODVol1/aodthome.htm [www.dlib.org/dlib/december02/soergel/12soergel.htm](http://www.dlib.org/dlib/december02/soergel/12soergel.htm)

www.delos.info/files/pdf/events/brainstorming\_dec05/DELOSBrainstormingReport\_Final.pdf

More information about the instructor

GSE Faculty Spotlight www.dsoergel.com/ublis571-0.0-1Reading1GSEFacultySpotlightSoergel.pdf

Short CV www.dsoergel.com/ublis571-0.0-1Reading2SoergelCVShort.pdf

Full CV www.dsoergel.com/ublis571-0.0-1Reading3SoergelCVLong.pdf

optional **Teaching Statement**

"There are those who look at things the way they are, and ask why?   
I dream of things that never were, and ask why not?"

George Bernhard Shaw as paraphrased by Robert F. Kennedy.

**Guiding principles**. I endeavor to inspire students to look beyond present practice – which, of course, they need to understand – to what could be, so they can become true leaders in the field. Second, I guide students to an understanding of basic, often timeless, concepts and theories – always illustrated by examples and assignments that connect to practice – so that they have a firm foundation both for lifelong learning and for critically examining present practices and reinventing them as needed to better serve users. Thirdly, I imbue students with a spirit of user orientation, so that they bring an understanding of user tasks, sense-making processes, and resulting requirements to everything they do, from structuring classifications and designing Web sites to indexing to formulating queries to presenting results. In all of this I make students think.

**Implementing these principles** requires careful structuring of course materials – often creating a new conceptual framework – and good document design. It also requires guiding students to their own discovery of ideas. For this purpose I often conduct interactive sessions in front of a blackboard on which a framework evolves step by step from student contributions. Face-to-face class sessions with lecture, discussion, and in-lecture exercises supported by extensive lecture notes on paper have served me well in pursuing my teaching goals, but I have also developed online materials that recreate the interactivity to the extent possible.

**I pay great attention to choosing good examples** students can relate to, especially examples that illustrate several concepts and principles, so that students do not need to get familiar with a new example every time a new concept is introduced and, perhaps more importantly, so students can see how several concepts work together in practice.

**Short version:** If you are comfortable with it, please call me Dagobert.

**Long version, optional:**

**On learning communities, power structures, and name customs**

I propose, but do not impose, use of first names all around. So I am happy and prefer to be addressed as Dagobert, but if a student is more comfortable with Dr. Soergel, I will answer to that also.

Here are some relevant thoughts. At its best, a course is a learning community. We are all here to learn, but learning does not mean to listen to and accept the word coming down from on high, it means to analyze critically, to critique, to challenge, to dispute, to discuss, to share viewpoints and ideas. There are differences in what each member brings to the table; each member of the community has a stock of knowledge and a unique set of experiences; of course some are more knowledgeable or experienced than others, but everybody contributes and everybody takes away.

Such a learning community thrives best in a social structure that values and embodies equality and mutual respect. (This is also why I feel very strongly about student participation in academic governance, recently abolished in the UB LIS Department.). Make no mistake, language has a powerful influence on social structure. In many cultures, structures of kinship, power, and authority are ingrained into people's minds through the use of language. The custom of students addressing the instructor as Dr. X but the instructor addressing students by their first name is a case in point. When I grew up in Germany, the general mode of address outside the circle of family, relatives, and close friends was "Sie", equivalent to using last names. Starting in 10th grade, teachers addressed students by their last name or Sie. Formal, but equal. In the US of today, use of first names is commonplace, even among strangers. This makes the custom of inequality in the mode of address, still widely practiced in academia, even more grating. There are variations from unit to unit and from discipline to discipline. In computer science (as in high-tech companies) using first names all around (from chair to students who just started) is the norm.