

Cara Marta Messina

Diversity Statement

Diversity is not just the inclusion of diverse bodies. To be diverse means a paradigm shift in knowledge hierarchy, recognizing diverse knowledges as important and making accessible impenetrable, tacit knowledges. My research, teaching, service, and administrative approaches are based on the interconnection of social justice and access.

My teaching prioritizes empowering learners to become critical consumers and composers and empower themselves to transform their communities, professions, and cultures towards justice. Learners incorporate research methods to analyze and critique systems of power, especially hegemonic cultural representations in mainstream media. I use *critical digital* pedagogy; I apply critical perspectives found in the traditions of Paulo Freire and Black feminists such as bell hooks to digital environments and data by having learners engage with the political, social, and cultural implications at every level of the technological stack and digital composing practices. Through my pedagogy, learners develop their research practices, become more aware of genres and rhetorical practices, and learn applicable professional skills including programming and data collection. I provide students with specific tools they need – like understanding genre conventions and ideologies, developing genre and audience awareness, navigating digital constraints and affordances, and learning and practicing research methods – to transform their cultures.

This pedagogy extends past my classroom, as I integrate it in my research. My dissertation centers fan writers who explicitly address and critique systemic issues of representations of race, gender, and sexuality in the media they love. These fans explore identity performance and representation through their writing, as they write about the struggles and joys of under-represented, non-normative, or counter-normative identities. The perspectives of critical fans, or fans who actively critique systems of oppression such as racism or heteronormativity, are central to my work. My research traces how their political and social justice commitments emerge in their composing practices and how these practices can transform their cultures. Besides from fans being simultaneously the subject of study for my dissertation as well as highlighting their political practices, I emphasize the importance of speaking and collaborating *with* fans and community members, providing resources for them to either learn or continue their advocacy journeys. For instance, I provide extensive documentation about the process of creating a digital dissertation and analyzing data using Python. Because this dissertation is public, I aim to make these findings and practices accessible for fans, researchers, and teachers. My digital dissertation, then, not only emphasizes the importance of knowledge access, but reimagining the types of knowledges we value by centering fans' rhetorical and generic practices.

My investment in access and providing methods for others to speak back also carries across other areas of my scholarship. I am currently co-editing a special issue in *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, the leading open-access Digital Humanities journal, on Black Digital Humanities for rising scholars. My co-editors and I aim to carve out disciplinary space for Black scholars and scholars who center Black studies in DH. I have also worked on multiple projects, such as the Women Writer's Vector Toolkit, where I have written extensive documentation and teaching materials to make the project materials and back-end choices accessible. I have also led several GitHub workshops, where I emphasize that the platform calls for accessible documentation and ethical collaboration. These instances in my research demonstrate a commitment to the access of knowledge, but also the importance in carving out spaces for scholars and community members — especially Black, Indigenous, & people of color, women, and LGBTQ+ folks — to center their voices, perspectives, and knowledges.

As the Assistant Director of the Writing Program (WP) at Northeastern University, the WP Director and I chose the 2020-2021 WP theme to be anti-racism. To practice this year's theme, I am collaborating with members of the WP Committee to recruit anti-racist scholars to speak; create a list of anti-racist readings for both faculty development and teaching; develop infographics on anti-racist teaching and administration; assess instructor syllabi for anti-racist language, policies, and readings; and reimagine the WP Learning Goals to continue enforcing anti-racist pedagogies in the program's future. Beyond these activities, administration work, for me, means *investing* in anti-racism and social justice by providing monetary and structural support through hiring practices, learning goals, and faculty development.

My commitments extend beyond program concerns to the lived conditions and experiences of community members; I prioritize community-building, systematic support, and access. I co-organized several conferences, including Design for Diversity's forums and Northeastern's annual English Graduate Student Conference. I gained knowledge on conference and event organizing, especially using resources to make conferences accessible. For instance, using funds to bring in particular scholars, especially scholars of color who may be overlooked or not paid for their labor. I created the [Graduate Student Welfare Advocacy Group](#) (GSWAG) in 2019. GSWAG contains both English department faculty and graduate students who are invested in developing policies and providing support for graduate students.

GSWAG writes newsletters every month celebrating graduate students' work and research, provides a safe space for graduate students to share issues, organizes workshops on pressing issues such as Title IX or teaching triggering or traumatic content, and collaborates with the Graduate Student Committee to propose and create policies to take care of graduate students.

At Susquehanna University, I will continue pursuing my commitment to justice and equities, especially through the Susquehanna University Press, that center anti-racism, feminism, and social justice. I will apply antiracist and feminist practices as the Director of the SUP, inviting diverse students to publish, edit, and develop their writing, reporting, and storytelling skills. Rupturing knowledge hierarchies means both providing spaces for learners to develop skills as well as empowering them to challenge professionalization, data, and hegemony. I integrate this approach in my classrooms, administrative practices, service work, and scholarship. My goal is to empower everyone to become responsible consumers and composers of digital technologies, media, and genres.