



Gerald Benoît

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

B.A., University of California, Davis

M.S., Columbia University

Ph.D., University of California, Los Angeles

Teaching/Research Areas

Ethics of information; HCI and information retrieval for domain-specific needs (humanities and biomedical); improving effectiveness of digital assets management, use, and integration; information visualization

SIMMONS

Graduate School of Library
and Information Science

Gerald Benoît: Oriented on the Individual

The statue of the Independent Man stands atop the state house in Providence, RI, not so far from where Gerry Benoît grew up. Perhaps then it's not coincidental that "independent" is a key word in his personal lexicon.

"My world view," Benoît says, "is oriented on the individual, on individual freedom." He is particularly interested in the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas and his ideas on the emancipator use of technology in communication. "Access to technology is not enough. If you don't know how to analyze and think, you're not independent. Just putting resources out there, making them available, doesn't democratize anything. The Internet is a real challenge (to the existing power structure) — you can put anything you want on the Internet and you can have a voice. That's why it is so useful . . . like graffiti, in a way . . . it gives everyone a voice." One of Benoît's many research interests is to develop digital tools for Native Americans and other "first peoples" who are interested in cultural memory projects.

"I believe students should learn to abstract knowledge in order to respond to new, unanticipated situations. As students and later as information professionals, they should consider the consequences of their decisions by explaining and defending their analysis in a logical and reasonable manner. They should be able to see the philosophical issues associated with the social use of information. For me, teaching is a kind of intimacy . . . it goes to the heart of who I am. I put my whole self into it."