**IST614: Spring 2015**

**James Stewart**

**Questions on readings**

In order to evaluate whether you can use the ideas and information you are learning, you are required to prepare at least one question (more are welcome, if you feel so inclined) on the readings for each class. Questions should be posted to the discussion board forum for that unit. Deadline for posting is Tuesday noon before each Wednesday class. That will give us all a chance to look them over before we meet to discuss on Wednesday morning.

Asking good, thought provoking questions is an intellectual skill in its own right.

Strong thought questions and active participation in the discussions are critical. Your response to the questions we discuss in class should be as thoughtful and well reasoned as your own questions. Just giving an opinion with little justification or evidence will not advance the discussion. Linking course material to your comments is important.

Feel free to submit questions early in the week, and to respond to other student’s posted questions, as well as to comments you receive on your posts.

**When composing questions, think about**:

***a)*** ***Does the thought question provide evidence of mastery of the course material?*** This is your opportunity to show that you have mastered concepts and information to which you are being introduced in the course to think on your own. Make sure to use concepts and information from the course materials in each thought question that you ask. Many times this may mean learning how to think about something with which you are familiar in a new way.

***b) Is the meaning of the question conveyed clearly?*** If readers don't know what you are trying to say, the writing is not clear enough to effectively communicate your thoughts. The "general idea" is not only often so general as to be useless it is often incorrect or confused. Be specific, be clear, say what you mean, and mean what you say.

***c) Is the question specific enough to be answerable?*** (Extremely broad or general questions such as "Is this a good thing?" or "What will the future bring?" are not answerable.) One way to evaluate whether or not a question is answerable is to think about whether you yourself would be able to answer it within the space of a semester if this were a research project for you. You may well ask a question to which neither the professor nor anyone else in the class knows the answer, which is not only acceptable but to be encouraged, because it pushes everyone's understanding further. The criterion of answerability doesn't rest upon what we already know; instead, it is a matter of what we **could** know. Don’t ask questions that could be easily answered with a simple definition or quote from the text.