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STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

As someone who is passionate about design, teaching is the activity where that passion is most apparent. When I teach, I finish my classes exhausted and energized at the same time, tirelessly campaigning that a career in design is one of the most exciting career paths of our present time. I want students to feel not only professionally informed, but also personally changed by their participation. In my view, teaching is not entirely composed of instructing or imparting information, but also about igniting transformative learning, empowering students to take responsibility for their learning, inspiring courage to grow intellectually, cultivating curiosity, providing opportunities, uplifting the spirit, and igniting action.

As a design educator, I've learned that teaching and design are quite similar in relationship to planning and orchestrating to serve the end user. Design is the synthesis of the "content" and the "form" it is given. Teaching is much the same: how do I present content in a structured comprehensible manner with variety, intensity, and interaction? In regards to this relationship, I see my role as primarily threefold: 1) preparing students with the skills necessary for success in design; 2) showing students how to go beyond the basics, enabling them to think creatively and originally in the application of said knowledge and skills; and 3) stressing to students the importance of becoming life-long learners, to continue to seek knowledge long after they leave the classroom. Within this context, I have six main goals for my students. I explore these below, along with proposed methods and examples for attaining said goals.

1. EXPLORATION OF PROCESS: First and foremost, I teach my students that design is not about making things "pretty. " Design is really a problem-solving activity with "appropriateness" as the ultimate gauge of success, as every solution must be unique to its problem. I emphasize the design process as: 1) problem definition; 2) research; 3) conceptualization; 4) visualization/form-giving; 5) testing; and 6) implementation. This process is a rational way to demystify what designers do while still recognizing creative expression. It creates focus for the student, manageable chunks to build a unique and enlightening solution. Through this process, students are required to go beyond their initial idea, which is usually based on an initial reaction or a preconception. The solution may be valid, but is it the best solution? By adapting this methodology, students increase their aptitude for critical thinking and problem solving.

2. GROWTH THROUGH ASSESSMENT: Having effective assessment methodologies are critical to

student growth and self-awareness. To the design student, it is important for them to recognize what makes a design work beyond the visual appeal so that they can assess and critique their work. To this end, it is essential to first equip students with a design vocabulary that provides measurable attributes of good design. This includes principles such as contrast, balance, alignment, and movement to name a few. Once students are aware of these principles, they can then identify with assessments designed to measure outcomes of their work. Furthermore, offering multiple assessment options ensures authenticity of learning and competency. Thus, my courses are prepared with a few different assessment approaches. This includes using feedback as a primary tool to connect assessment to learning. Some feedback is through documentation (that students can read and reflect upon). Some of it will be verbal working individually with the student. Some will be through class critique sessions where students are tasked with providing the input. This feedback tells the learners what outcomes are valued in the design community and how they are doing, and it acknowledges the goals that designers set for themselves. Rubrics are also an important assessment tool that can be used to provide consistency in evaluating student work. They spell out scoring criteria and let students know what is expected of them, and demystify grades by clearly stating the expectations for a project. The guidelines established in rubrics help eliminate the perception of instructor bias. They also help students see that learning is about gaining specific skills (both in academic subjects and in problem-solving and life skills), and they give students the opportunity to do self-assessment to reflect on the learning process.

3. A STRONG FOUNDATION: I believe it is important to help my students develop a solid foundation in design. This framework includes aspects such as design elements, typography, history of design, and an expanded visual vocabulary. Unfortunately, too few designers have a strong foundation to call upon. This information helps students in a variety of ways by understanding styles and movements of the past and to think critically about their own designs. When a solid foundation merges with educated problem-solving and decision-making, students will experience a versatile classroom dedicated to fostering each student's full learning potential. In instilling this foundation, I believe critiques are an integral part of this process with students giving and receiving feedback from their instructors and peers. These sessions are not inquisitions, but rather tools for the designer to ask questions and gain critical insight into how others perceive their work. A good designer must have the ability to analyze not only his or her own designs, but those of others, too.

4. FIELD AWARENESS: As an educator, it is my responsibility to instill in my students a respect for and understanding of the design field as well as their influence on that field. My students gain an awareness of the business of design, including deadlines, production, and client relations. Rather than

simply watching students experiment with design techniques, I strive to align students with the working world and encourage them to begin to think and act like professional designers. I believe that a design education, at a minimum, requires student understanding of the field in practice. This understanding is usually gained through the development of projects within the curriculum that work with real-world clients and take them through the design process from conception to production and finally to presentation to the client. Additionally, practicing design professionals are regularly invited to speak to my class to share their experience and advice.

5. COMPUTER & TECHNOLOGY EFFICIENCY: Students need to master the specific technology and software skills to operate effectively. Design should always begin with concept, but concepts must be efficiently executed to be effective. This mandates a proficiency in the tools used to create final products, such as the Adobe Creative Suite. However, students must realize that the computer is not capable of creating good design and is merely a tool. The lesson then is how to make the computer work for the designer, not the other way around. Without the intervention of human intelligence and talent, the computer is just an expensive toy. Thus at the outset, it is always my goal to position the tool as merely a step toward proficiency.

6. THE DESIGNER'S ROLE: Students should at minimum be exposed to the concept of the designer's role in society as an agent for change. From a holistic standpoint, I feel it is vital that students understand their responsibility to use that power well. Historical examples are continually cited in my class, and students are given the opportunity to choose a cause or organization for which to create a piece of visual communication. Combining the social world with personal experiences allows each learner to produce work that is exciting for the student, personally and professionally. In this environment, students develop an analytical understanding of the design world in which they live, aiding their professional growth as experts in the field of design.

From a purely instructional standpoint, I believe a teacher must possess the ability to communicate using a combination of approaches because individuals learn and respond differently. Therefore, a teacher needs to be far more than a content provider, but an expert at delivery, utilizing all available resources to teach something that is distinctive, useful, and somehow memorable. In this model, the instructor must possess the ability to perform, produce, and inspire the audience, supplementing traditional lectures with samples, games, videos, Web reference, group discussions, etc. From this standpoint, I'm not a big supporter of the three-hour lecture, unless boring my students is a goal. I believe the role of the instructor is to provide a pathway to achievement that is logical and meaningful.

When discussing personal qualities key to teacher effectiveness, I believe patience, open-mindedness, organization, strong character, and the ability to manage is inherently important to instruction at the college level. Additionally, teaching is not limited to the classroom. Professors should make themselves accessible to students outside of class, as mentoring is a crucial part of the teacher/student relationship that takes place in one-on-one advising sessions. My students understand that I genuinely care about them as individuals and have a vested interest in their education. Thus, it is an important part of my role is to “set the scene” for learning by providing the right environment inside and outside the classroom. Is the classroom atmosphere relaxed? Is participation encouraged? I, the instructor, must set the classroom tone in everything from my syllabus to the way I present myself. Ultimately, I must convey that I am not only knowledgeable, but also approachable.

As with anyone involved in education, student or teacher, a personal growth plan should always be included. One never develops socially, intellectually, or academically without consistently learning new things and striving to further oneself. Because teaching must remain flexible and open to reflection and revision, I have continuously updated course material over the years, providing professional preparation that will serve design students well. Furthermore, years of firsthand professional design experience informs my teaching, and I grow through my design practice. Working as an active professional helps me keep my finger on the pulse of the design world. The field of design constantly changes, and, in order to teach others, I must continue to learn and grow, staying aware of these changes and communicating them with the students. My experience as a designer has thus always been aligned with my classroom.

Educators must constantly reevaluate their teaching methods and accommodate diverse learners. Diversity is essential to a healthy classroom, and I celebrate the differences among my students while honoring their individual strengths and needs. I strive to recognize each student's abilities, build their confidence, and create a classroom where everyone can share ideas and learn from one another.

In closing, I am a living example that becoming an effective teacher takes time, commitment, and exploration. I still vividly remember how unprepared I felt during my very first class, standing in front of students with my course book in hand and spending the hour reading directly from the text. Since then, teaching has been a treasured learning experience, allowing me to continually improve my approach and methods. Looking back, the personal connections I have made with students stand out as the greatest reward, especially when I see them succeed in their chosen fields. Knowing I have positively influenced their journeys is what inspires me to continue teaching.