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April 30, 2023

Teaching Statement

Students producing work that they are proud of is at the core of everything I do.

I try to create an environment in which the expectation for exploration is strong, where the quality of product is high, where hard work is rewarded, and where critical analysis is key. Above all, I teach with passion and excitement. I believe that this excitement is infectious and is one of my strongest traits as a mentor, producing an atmosphere in which students are passionate about their work, where they do their best and are proud of what they accomplish.

In the Fall of 2018, I added a Sound and Media Design Concentration to our MFA in Theatre degree. The concentration is dual focus, which mirrors my expertise, but the concentration does allow students to emphasize in either sound or projection design. The program parallels our other design MFA concentrations, which recruits every other year and accepts two students per year. As the sole faculty, the development of this program has been incredibly rewarding and challenging and has taught me a great deal about adaptability and rigor. It is a small enough program to significantly change with the needs of each student, with enough opportunities for meaningful growth and high caliber output. Now in its 3rd class of students, I believe there is consistency in programming and approach, and we are seeing great success in our graduates.

Specific to the concentration, I have created a repeatable projects course, which focuses on skill building and artistry, with topics based on the needs of the student. This class is taken every semester, along with a production course, in which I mentor students though one or two realized theatre or tangential entertainment projects per semester. During the pandemic, the realized productions became paper or virtual projects, but maintained the rigor and significance of a realized show. Throughout the development and execution of this graduate program, I have maintained the same teaching style that I have applied for years to undergraduates in the BA Design and Technology Concentration and graduates seeking a secondary focus.

All the subjects I teach are a combination of art and technology; most often, the creation of art through technology. To that end, I create a series of projects that have a technological component within an artistic framework, giving students specific skillsets and creative expression. This is a challenge for the novice student but is also what makes the courses exciting and rewarding.

Rather than giving several small assignments dealing with narrow topics or single outcomes, I prefer to create fewer projects that require many interrelated steps. This gives more time to explore the overall topic, and based on the student's capabilities and inclinations, allows the final product to be weighted in an area that they have a proclivity towards. Ultimately, the individual technologies are examined as tools, making it clear that any number of different tools can be used to create the desired artistic outcome.

I am equally passionate about mentorship and self-exploration, which I communicate to the students as guided self-instruction. Individual consideration was important to me as a student and is important to me as a teacher. I give everyone individual attention, giving advice and guidance at every stage in the development of a project. At the same time, a student must be able to self-learn in a field where the technologies and processes change significantly almost daily. If a student can't learn something new by individually diving into a new software, watching a YouTube tutorial, or researching new hardware, they will not have success beyond school. I give them the opportunity to do this self-learning in an environment where someone can say "don't forget about this" or "have you thought about that?"

Critical analysis of the work is crucial to the learning process. Every project is presented to the entire class, analyzed by the student, critiqued, and discussed by the classmates, and openly evaluated by me. Through this, the students learn from all the successes and failures in the room, not just their own.

As an example of the methodology of my coursework, the following is one of the primary projects in the beginning undergraduate projection design course:

Title: Unified Imagery on Non-Traditional Surfaces

Learning Outcomes:

> The student will be able to unify content through manipulation and creation of imagery and video, set up simple video projection systems, apply basic mapping and masking of video content in three-dimensional space, and explore industry standard playback and manipulation software.

Requirements:

> Using a minimum of 5 original or modified images and/or video, the students must create a 1.5-to-3-minute montage of unified thematic digital imagery projected and mapped onto specifically chosen three-dimensional surfaces. Students must have a sound component (music, sound effects, or voice – live or recorded). The student is to pay particular attention to theme, transitions, and mapping/masking. The project is presented in class, with critique to follow. Afterwards, the student submits a one-page paper, which outlines their design choices and process, and things learned.

This is how the above project is implemented over 4 weeks. First, I present the requirements of the project, which gives the students context for all the steps as we move forward. This includes a live demo that I created for the class and watching videotaped past student examples. Then we have a lecture and demonstration on projection surfaces, showing how different materials,

finishes, and colors react to projected imagery. Students then use information from their previous glossary assignment to set up and troubleshoot our Media Lab projection system. This is followed by a series of in-class content and manipulation exercises; 1) Adobe Photoshop for image manipulation, 2) Adobe Premiere for video editing, 3) Adobe After Effects for particle systems and effects. This is followed by a multi-day mapping and masking exercises with tabletop objects using Qlab for playback and mapping (with Isadora and Watchout to follow). This exercise specifically shows two methods of masking, one using photoshop in full screen mode, and the other using an iPhone snapshot which is then manipulated in Photoshop to cutout objects to be masked.

All these explorations take place while the students continue to work on their projects, both inside and outside of class, including self-scheduled time in the Media lab. This allows plenty of time to answer questions, give individual support and guidance, and to help students who are struggling with any aspect of the project.

In the end, students will have explored many specific aspects of projection design techniques, as well as artistic exploration and storytelling through imagery and surfaces. Through student and faculty critique, students become more adept at recognizing aesthetic choices and the quality of product execution. Moving forward in the same course, students are introduced to other forms of playback and manipulation software, as well as artistry, through projects based in interactive design and text-based work.

Throughout all the courses I teach, I use multi-step projects, mentorship, self-exploration, critical analysis, and passion. All of this leads to developing young artists who can execute imaginative ideas though any technology at their disposal. It also makes them proud of the work they create which I hope will lead to a life of continued creation.

- Joe Payne