

Teaching Philosophy

As a professor I see my role in the classroom as instigator, provoking students to consider, address, engage in the tangential, the outlier, and the obvious if necessary. Once these provocations are taken up a discussion can begin relating and assessing the value they bring to the problem space. For young designers a structured process is necessary in providing guardrails to their thinking. For more experienced designers forming their own process to accommodate their investigation requires a greater understanding of how their decisions help or hinder the investigation.

My role in teaching has included both technology and design, which is a difficult task because the two have conflicting processes. On the technology side, learning the steps that allow you to perform pre-generated tasks is what I call inside-out understanding. Students often look inside the software and get out something they never imagined. Design on the other side is a process of looking out, to the problem, the people, the environment, the culture, and bringing those things together to inform some kind of intervention that addresses the problem. I prefer to teach technology in the same manner as design. Showing students how the system software works, exposing its bias and preference, allowing students to operate within those parameters or at least, mitigate their effect on the people who use their products. This is a more critical approach to learning because it reveals technology limitations and at the same time, encourages innovative thinking from an outside point of view. Students learn the possibilities of how the technology may perform and then seek out expanded possibilities for solutions.

From provocations to redirecting the student's point of view simulates the popular divergent-convergent sequence propagated by Tim Brown. The complexity of this sequence increases with the inclusion of the technical process that operates in tandem with design. Design is however, often thwarted by the limitations of technology and more so with the introduction of machine learning. It is easier to operate technology and design processes in tandem if we can assume a common approach. New technologies offer new opportunities in visual communication and the sooner the student can master the language of computing the sooner they can integrate it in their own thinking.

Listed below are courses that I have taught and had great success in engaging students in the topics and projects developed for the classes. Visual communication is an active dialogue between the students and an audience they are only beginning to understand. One of the most eye-opening experiences they have is putting an interactive tool in front of someone only to have it fail. For this perspective they learn how others think, what motivates them, and what it takes to keep them engaged. For these reasons I enjoy teaching these classes: User Experience, Interactive Media, Data Visualization, Web Design, Visual Communication and AI, and Human Computer Interaction.