Statement of Teaching Philosophy

My teaching throughout my career has been focused on experiential learning across disciplines. My students engage with society in a hands-on fashion, applying their critical insights and skills to the real world in dedicated experiential-learning classes, and through modules or projects in studio-based courses. My interest in experiential learning in the courses I teach also informs my role as Director of Zone Learning for Ryerson, finding opportunities to grow the curricular connections and educational impact of our entrepreneurial, action-biased, real-world-centered programming.

I see my role as helping students develop grounded, functional creative ideas, with the ability (and inclination, and strategies) to teach themselves enough about any particular technology to make that vision a reality. I also introduce them to the test of a real-world environment as the evaluation of if/how their vision has impact. Hagel, Brown, and Davison (2010) discusses “the power of pull”, in which individuals and institutions need to respond to the fast-changing nature of tools, businesses and industries by engendering responsiveness in how they approach the world. In the world of technology, graduates will need to adapt on an ongoing basis. I teach a design-thinking methodology where students learn to listen, observe, and co-design with those affected by their work in order to create more successful, ethical, and engaged interventions. I believe in providing students with a supported, well-resourced environment in which they can learn how to learn, gaining experience through the application of their own creative outputs.

While I’ve made a study of best-practices (Bain 2004; Silberman 1996), my inspiration in this remains one of my own favourite professors, Henry Jenkins (formerly of MIT, now at USC). Jenkins has a profound ability to connect the dots from anything a student offered to the theorist, principle or point being featured. Seeing a connection between your own thoughts and that of a reading drives home
the ideas more powerfully than any lecture could, and I have always tried to re-create that experience for my students. I combine this with MIT’s hallmark learning-through-making approach, where students are active in real-world situations, learning what they can when they put theory into practice.

In terms of curricular experiential opportunities, I have focused on bringing industry challenges to teams, with students getting out of the classroom and engaging with real people affected by the technologies, programs, content, and ideas the students generate. I find that when work is launched to the public, student motivation is far greater than anything submitted simply for instructor-feedback. By directly engaging in the real-world situations that will structure their working lives, students see the application of the skills and insights they’ve been developing throughout their academic career.

Students create projects in all of my classes, with an emphasis on design thinking and iterative design. Projects are presented to peers, users/audiences, and outside mentors at the idea/inception stage for feedback, advice, and workshop-style critiques. Students are guided to rethink their concepts or explore alternate techniques from the start. We then re-visit progress with students while they are working on their projects, helping them iterate on their ideas, revise/improve their concepts, and move towards engagements that may have a life after the class; my students have found jobs, founded startups, designed thesis, and re-directed their entire career-paths after my courses.

Finally, students reflect, in writing, on the process, challenges, and skill-development they’ve gone through during the work. This final element can’t be stressed enough: often our students don’t know what they know, and aren’t able to articulate their distinctive skills to prospective employers. After my classes, students are able to talk about concrete interventions they built, with solid examples of how they identified, addressed, and overcame difficulties.
I also focus on collaboration as a 21st century skill that all students, in all fields, will need to build. This is something that's hard to do in our traditional university educational environment. Students take classes with others in their own major, with the grading structured to prove individual knowledge-retention rather than promote group dynamics or demonstrate skills around collaboration. I teach my students how to work in a team, how to value one another's skills-sets, and how this is a necessary part of real-world engagement. Experiential learning is not just about the opportunity – it’s about structuring, scaffolding, and providing exemplar-situations where students are supported in engaging best-practices.

I believe effective learning is derived from creating a space for students to able to reference the important ideas of each class through compelling experiences. I expect a high degree of engagement from my students, with a significant portion of their grades drawing from active participation in experiential exercises, their performance within their group, their professionalism, and their reflection on their own learning experience. I am privileged to have the courses I teach also integrate with my role promoting experiential learning as Director of Zone Learning, building curricular connections for entrepreneurial ventures for students across the entire university.

**References**

