

I did not set out to be a teacher, and in fact, many years ago when the notion was first put forth to me as an undergraduate at Earlham College I scoffed at the idea. Before I knew it I was teaching private students through my pottery business and eventually as an instructor for Continuing Studies at IU East. Soon I was asked to be a Limited Term Faculty member for the Purdue CGT program at IU East and when I enrolled in graduate work at the School of Informatics Media Arts and Science program I jumped at the opportunity to be a Graduate Teaching Assistant. Immediately upon graduating from the Masters program I was hired as a Visiting Research Associate where I taught two courses per semester. Once my visiting status was over I was offered a position as Lecturer and I have been teaching four courses plus independent study and capstone students ever since. I have continued my independent artistic pursuits and have discovered that my palette of media has expanded to include students. Just as I sculpt clay I now sculpt students' education experiences. Teaching is not a job, or even a career; it is a lifestyle and one that I gladly welcome. I cannot imagine my life without helping others realize and attain their goals. Guiding students to find their own paths of knowledge and learn to accept their own limitations and achieve their goals despite these limitations is what makes teaching so fulfilling to me.

### **Teaching**

College is the place where students form their views of the world around them and new media students are in a particularly powerful position as potential creators of media that will sway the consumer or advance research potentials by exploring new ways of presenting ideas and information. Ethics and social awareness are an integral part of what I teach in my classes, even in the software courses, and equally important is the idea of fostering thoughtfulness and inquisitiveness among all of my students.

It is for these very reasons that I developed a new course that has been adopted into the undergraduate curriculum. This course, N385 Seeing Sideways: Experimental Approaches to New Media, formerly known as N485 Seeing Sideways: The New Media Eye, is a place where students are encouraged to really examine their way of seeing the world and looking for new ways to jumpstart their personal creativity. It is a course that promotes experimental approaches to projects and actually embraces failure. By this I mean that if a student really tries something that stretches their usual boundaries of skill or thought, and if the idea does not work then that student has learned much more than if he or she played it safe and churned out something vanilla generic. This course shows students that sometimes rules are made to be broken but also that sometimes rules are essential. Without figuring out which rules are flexible and which have succinct reasons for being in place no progress is ever made. The central thought in Seeing Sideways is "What if...?" and then having the courage to try, and possibly try again. Blogs for this course can be viewed at <http://seeing-sideways.blogspot.com/>

In addition to developing my own course from scratch I have worked with my colleagues to develop a new course for our revised curriculum, scheduled to start in

2010. The course is N102: Fundamentals of Digital Media Practices and is designed to be part of the core freshman year for all MAS undergraduates.

In the area of collaborative curriculum development I have been in the process of developing a course with Sara Hook called Litigation Support Systems and Courtroom Presentation due to launch in summer 2009. It will be cross-listed as both an Informatics (I) and New Media (N) course and will be part of the Legal Informatics Certificate program Dean Hook is developing.

The evolution of my approach to teaching is particularly evident in the capstone students I have mentored this semester. Most students come to me with either a website/interactive idea or no idea at all as to what they want to do for a capstone. But the students who have taken my Seeing Sideways course are proving that they are able to grasp concepts for much larger capstone projects. For example, one of my students this semester came to me with no idea what he wanted to do, plus he was extremely burned out on school. He wanted to do a website about something just to be finished with school. After some discussion I convinced him to think larger. What was he interested in? Where was his passion? It just so happens that he was also taking Seeing Sideways at the same time. I encouraged him to try some of the techniques he was learning in that course to brainstorming ideas for the capstone. Soon he was dreaming up all kinds of ideas. He came up with the idea of "Digital Graffiti" and he ran with that idea. He created a three-walled structure, engineered a rear projection screen and custom digital spray cans, and using the Wiimote Whiteboard v0.3 open source software created by Johnny Chung Lee and a Flash application the he created himself, he was able to bring to life a stunning capstone project that was extremely popular among the attendees. The student later told me that he didn't know he had it in himself to create something that ambitious and he was actually planning for future projects even though he will graduate this semester. He is even considering graduate school. Not bad for someone who was ready to just jump through a hoop to get it all over so he could move on to his real world job duties!

Even when faced with large numbers of students each semester I have devised ways to still maintain a one-on-one relationship with each student. For my N190 Topics in Interactive Media course I have implemented a weekly check-up system where each student uploads the file(s) they have been working on during class so that I can check it and make sure each student is reaching the benchmarks they need for progressing with the course. If there are problems I can catch them early and address them individually with the student. The caveat is that I get buried in grading. I am exploring ways to streamline this system so that the demands on my time are easier to deal with, but to me, the benefits of this system outweigh the drawbacks, so long as I can keep up.

I also believe in teaching by example and a great illustration of this is when I invited a student to work with me on a poster session submission for the New Media Consortium. I had been accepted to the poster session for my idea of seeing

sideways and they encouraged me to be as original as I wanted with the poster. So the student and I worked on the New Media Refrigerator for the poster session, based in part on a project he had created the previous semester in an independent study with me. Our innovative approach to the idea of a “poster session” garnered us the People’s Choice Award at the session. I gave the ribbon to the student to remember the event and his exposure to this professional experience has led him to consider teaching as an option for himself.

Whenever I see opportunities for students to extend themselves I encourage them to take the chance. Two of my exceptional Photoshop students were awarded full scholarships to the National Association of Photoshop Professionals’ semi-annual national conference, Photoshop World, in Boston based upon my recommendation.

Leana Kruska, a senior this year, just finished up a summer internship at the Smithsonian Institute and is currently working on a webcasting project for the Yaddo Artist’s Retreat in New York with an exhibition at the New York Public Library. Leana had this opportunity based on my recommendations of her and her work to Richard Edwards, who is heading up the project. He had originally asked me to help him but I saw this as a perfect opportunity for Leana so I passed the torch to her instead. The portfolio she used to land the Smithsonian internship took form in my Seeing Sideways course and later through an independent study with me. You can view her portfolio here: <http://www.leanakruska.com/> The assignment from which this portfolio was born involved giving students an egg on the first day of class and asking them to “Do something interesting with it.” I think she did!

Another example of effective student engagement is by incorporating active learning concepts into the classroom in unexpected ways. As a creative exercise in Seeing Sideways I allowed the students to take a break, but with the stipulation that no one was allowed to leave their seats, but everyone must leave the room. Since we were in rolling chairs this was not a problem. The only time they were permitted to leave the chair was if they were actually going to use the toilet. All other times they were to remain seated, including going to other floors of the building or going outside for a smoke. Even though this happened several weeks ago the students still talk about this exercise with enthusiasm and excitement, as do some of the faculty who happened upon students in their chairs in the halls!

Not only do I advocate experimentation in my students, I believe in trying different approaches to teaching. This semester I offered one section of N190 Topics in Interactive Media as a distributed education (DE) class and have learned that it is more than just taping a lecture and distributing it with some handouts. This course is particularly difficult to transfer to a DE format because of the heavy lab component and the variety of software used. I am looking forward to dissecting this experience and researching ways to more effectively reach distance students. I am also going to research new teaching methods that would be more appropriate for DE courses.

I see teaching and learning as a partnership and this belief has served me well. This approach fosters a sense of responsibility in the student instead of a pejorative hierarchical paradigm. I have found that students really respond well to this attitude and will work much harder if they realize the teacher is actively interested in their educational and emotional well being. I have referred many students to the CAPS program (Counseling and Psychological Services) on campus and they return to class with a newfound interest in their studies when they see that people around them care about their welfare.

Not only is teaching a partnership with the students it affords opportunities to partner with other faculty and even the outside community. I am always interested in making connections with other disciplines and serving the larger campus and community through my teaching. I have been a guest lecturer sharing my insights about design in Owen Dwyer's G309 geography class. I have also been a guest lecturer for N100 and I101 to share the possibilities of digital imaging with a variety of students. I am in the beginning stages of exploring collaboration options with other disciplines such as nursing through fostering a partnership with Seeing Sideways. Creative thinking is not limited to just the arts fields and many of my campus colleagues are eager to explore the possibilities.

I also believe in giving back to programs that have been beneficial to me in the past. I have been a frequent participant in the Preparing Future Faculty program since I graduated from it in 2004 by sharing my experiences with current PFF scholars. I was asked to do just that for Nancy Chism last year when she was working as a Fulbright Scholar in Thailand and invited me to be part of a panel discussion on my experiences in PFF. A condensed version of the panel discussion can be viewed here: <http://crl.iupui.edu/pff/stream.aspx>

Another form of collaboration I am exploring is through publication. I am currently in the development stages of writing a paper with Joe Defazio on how new media students learn design. We intend to submit it to the International Journal of Design.

### **Service**

Partnership not only has value on the campus but in the larger community as a whole. I believe in giving back to the community through education and service and I instill this philosophy in my students by incorporating service-learning components in my courses. In the past my N190 Topics in Interactive Media class has designed websites for such community organizations as: Kaleidoscope Youth Center, Heritage Place, St. Francis Pet Hospital, and Hardin Geotechnologies. Several of the capstone students I have mentored have chosen service projects such as: redesigning the Broadway United Methodist Church website, creating an interactive CD for the Boy Scouts of America, redesigning a website for the Minority Health Coalition of Marion County, and redesigning a website for the Indy Senate of the National Bowlers Association.

My commitment to teaching has also led me to teach summer classes for the Indianapolis Urban League as well as publicly sharing 35 of the tutorials I have made for my students on Youtube so that others might benefit from them. I have also dedicated my personal website to teaching. Many examples of work by my students, tutorials, syllabi, and examples of my own work can be found on the site. I also use the structure of my site as a teaching tool as an example of what to do and what to avoid in interactive design. My website can be viewed at [www.spyroterra.com](http://www.spyroterra.com).

I have also volunteered my services to several outside organizations and individuals. I have worked as a web/Flash consultant or developer for Turtle Haven Dairy Goats (<http://www.turtlehavendairygoats.com/>), The John Hardin Project, and the Midwest Cooperative Education and Internship Association (<http://mceia.org/>), among others.

I have also used my university service to further enhance the lives of students in the MAS program. As chair of the Student Affairs committee I am looking at ways we can better serve students with disabilities in the School of Informatics.

### **Conclusion – future goals**

After attending a meeting where Uday Sukhatme had encouraged us to consider 12-week courses and Friday courses I converted my N180 Digital Media II: Raster Imaging class to this format. The idea is to allow students who wash from other courses to keep a full course load for the semester and therefore this course is also open to non-majors. The course is going well, but as with any pioneering activity there are caveats. The numbers have dropped dramatically since we switched it to a Friday morning. Apparently students are not early birds! Another drawback is that because of the Friday course I am not able to attend faculty meetings or a large number of professional development seminars and workshops. The campus mindset is still that Fridays are the day to have meetings because no one teaches. I am in the classroom during these important events and it has become difficult to stay informed. I am exploring options of converting this course to a DE class to allow me to attend meetings as well as open the course to more students. It would still allow for students to pick up the course mid-semester and alleviate some of the parking issues on campus. Springing from the experience I have from this semester's DE course as well as the feedback I hope to receive from the students in that section I plan to redesign the course for DE and launch the first DE section during the second summer session, 2009.

Attending workshops through the Center for Teaching and Learning such as the recent workshop for Junior Faculty will be instrumental in finding ways to improve the quality of my teaching. I plan to incorporate ideas such as exit slips and other assessment techniques and arrange for focus groups like I did with Dakin Burdick on my first Seeing Sideways class as ways to measure the success of my teaching while incorporating time saving techniques without compromising my commitment to my students.