JEREMY SWANSTON

—

TEACHING STATEMENT

Assistant Professor of Graphic Design, Program Head
Jeremy-Swanston@uiowa.edu
+1 {319} 385-1638
JeremySwanston.com

As an educator of graphic design, it my passion and goal to provide an environment for students that allows for creative that informs artistic and personal growth, while fostering the development of effective problem solving and critical thinking skills. To me, the combination of creative and technical skill, along with the conceptual exploration capacity and insight to generate design solutions is the necessary foundation for great design.

My method to achieve this is to establish a safe and transparent creative environment and focus on developing strong research skills that will become the catalyst for original solutions from the very beginning. This process entails having students generate numerous sketches that will help them go beyond their initial ideas and take creative risks while developing a research-backed rationale for their designs. Along with this experiential component, students develop a deeper understanding of design theory and history through a combination of class lectures, readings and discussions, as well as student-initiated research. This parallel process is crucial for expanding their visual vocabulary and working knowledge of past and present methods and allows for concurrent experimentation with their own design process. Students in my classes also have the opportunity to obtain frequent and constructive class critiques which are peer-based. This constant feedback loop encourages students to further push their design iterations and make needed adjustments to their design process, while remaining open to feedback and contributing their own insights to help peers. Students appear to appreciate the clear guidelines, the focus on the conceptual and design process, as well as the multiple learning components built in my classes. Below are some excerpts from students enrolled in my courses:

> "Jeremy is a phenomenal teacher. He's so organized and really lays all of his expectations out on the table from day 1. There's no surprises. He also has a great way of planning his semester with reading material and exercises that work together. We are constantly talking about our work and the industry. I've learned so much from him and would recommend everyone to take his classes!"

> "Jeremy is an incredible professor and person. I was really afraid to start web design because I'd never tried anything like it. Coding was really daunting, but Jeremy made everything really straightforward and made sure we were all up to speed before assigning our major projects. He was always encouraging and would be sure to tell everyone when they were doing especially good work. I feel like I really improved my skills as a designer and am going to take Advanced Interaction Design with him next semester."

> "Talented. Brilliant. Incredible. Amazing. Show stopping. Spectacular. Never the same. Totally unique. A professor who is actually a really good mentor and teacher as well as a designer."

Beyond the creative process, it is important for students to gain awareness of the business and human aspect of graphic design and the importance of creating authentic, meaningful, and long-lasting connections with clients and relevant stakeholders. In order to expose students to current practices and other professional perspectives, guest speakers are frequently invited to share their experiences and interact with students. Guest speakers are directed to present samples of their work, discuss their philosophy and approach to design, and share their perspectives and best practices for working within a collaborative environment. Students are also given the opportunity to personally engage through a Q&A discussion that follows guest presentations. While all students are exposed to these guest presentations, intermediate and advanced students are also given projects that mimic a professional working environment, with an emphasis on meeting deadlines and production schedules, as well as comprehensive client conceptualization. Projects at this level are comprehensive and focused on building a multi-level brand strategy (logo, color, typography, and design elements) in addition to a multimedia digital presence (websites, apps, and animations). My professional design experience of nearly two decades is a frequent source of anecdotes, challenges, and successes I share with students to help them better envision a fast-moving design environment and their future roles.

It is my strong belief that connecting design to the human aspect elevates design beyond a strictly business-oriented model. For this reason, students are encouraged to become involved in social campaigns that create personal fulfillment and connect them to the human impact of design, essentially becoming citizen designers. As an example, a regular student project built into my GD6 course is a social-based interactive infographic, where students select important social issues that would benefit from increased public awareness. Using their design research skills, emotional connection to the topic, and an iterative process of presentations and critiques, students design an interactive website that communicates critical information and includes specifies actions that make a difference. Recent projects have focused on the topics of sexual harassment, abuse, income inequality, and food insecurity, and steered the viewer towards signing petitions, providing donations, or joining specific action-oriented groups to increase awareness.

I also believe that moving the educational experience outside the classroom can directly involve students in real-world experiences that place them at the center of a dynamic interplay between human, emotional, and social factors. These immersive experiences challenge students to develop the ability to communicate and collaborate with a diverse array of individuals holding multiple perspectives, many of which may be divergent from those of the designer, while holding a firm grasp of the various design methodologies and frameworks that can be called upon to co-design an appropriate solution. A recent example of incorporating an immersive design experience in the graphic design curriculum was a collaborative Spring Break workshop, titled *Project Perry/Proyecto Perry*. This project was a collaborative, multi-disciplinary, and team-based graphic design partnership I initiated between the two largest state institutions, and the community of Perry, IA. During this time, students and faculty fully immersed themselves in the community for five days and engaged residents and community leaders on a variety of challenges that were essential to Perry's vitality, including, but not limited to, economic development, education, community engagement, and cultural inclusiveness. During this immersive experience, students created a total of twelve community projects presented in a final exhibition and thank you party to celebrate the community of Perry. The overwhelming positive feedback from the community as well as the students helped illustrate the benefits of participating in immersive learning experiences that can have real implications and potential to affect change. Below is a student excerpt from the experience:

"At the end of the trip I felt very proud of what we had accomplished. We experienced some short falls during the week but we were able to create an event in 36 hours that positively affected the youth of the community. I would recommend this trip to anyone. I learned valuable skills like time management, triaging tasks, problem solving, and communication skills. Most importantly, I learned about what social design was and how to implement my design skills into a community. This was a truly rewarding experience that I will remember for years to come. I hope other students are lucky enough to share the same experience through the continuation of this project."

Watching students in my classes create quality projects based on expanded design and conceptual skills, and seeing them continue their journey towards personal growth and social awareness is an inspiring process that allows me to sustain my passion in teaching design, and informs my own work as a citizen designer.