66 Fifth Avenue, Rm 501 New York, NY 10011
t 212.229.8908 f 212.229.5619 amt@newschool.edu
www.newschool.edu/parsons

School of Art, Media and Technology

October 29th, 2012

To Whom it May Concern:

I am former Dean of the School of Art, Media, and Technology at Parsons The New School for Design in New York. I have served as a senior professor and administrator at Parsons for more than two decades, and I founded the MFA and BFA programs in Design+Technology at Parsons in 1996 and 2000, respectively. I have been asked by Parsons graduate student Ms. Susse Soenderby Jensen to provide her a letter elucidating three specific aspects of Parsons MFA Design+Technology program, within which she is matriculating. I do so readily and without hesitation. The aspects of the program Ms. Jensen has requested I write about are:

1. My motivations and goals for starting the program
2. A description of the focus on code and programming in relation to design
3. Those aspects of the program that are geared towards preparing graduates to teach at the university (higher education) level

First, let me describe my motivations for starting the program in 1996. There were many, but the two most important were the need for a graduate studio program that placed systems thinking and computer programming at the center of the creative studio process, and the demand for university-level teachers who could propagate this approach (when originally proposed, the MFADT program was described as a program that would "link technology and the creative process, and to produce thoughtful, knowledgeable, highly-skilled creative designers and teachers whose work benefits from the integration of advanced digital technology... providing a fertile ground for experimentation in art, design, technology and the related areas of engineering, science, social science, business, and world affairs"). The MFA Design & Technology program was founded as (and is) a full-time 64 credit, two-year program with an intense focus on the relationship between visual representation, research and writing, computer programming, teaching, thesis work, all which end in a terminal degree. Within the program, high value is placed on a centralized, engaged studio practice, and a unification of theory around that practice, particularly related to active engagement with social concerns and the public sphere. Students are urged to collaborate with others within the broader DT and Parsons communities, and to take leadership roles via work-shopping and teaching within those communities. Since its founding, MFADT has succeeded on both of these fronts. It maintains a large status both within Parsons, as its largest graduate

program, as well as within the field. Graduates hold senior creative positions at major design throughout the world, and more than 50 MFADT graduates currently hold tenured or tenure-track university teaching positions at top universities.

Second, I will provide a description of the focus on code and programming in relation to design within the Parsons DT program. The best way I can provide this is to describe three of our foundational (required) courses—first, the pre-entry "Boot Camp", second, the "Creativity and Computation Laboratory" (enrolled in first semester by all students), and finally the advanced course "Audio Visual Systems". The point of both of these courses is to establish programming fluency while stressing the possibilities of computational code applied to traditional design disciplines. Students are taken through simple excercises using Java (Processing) and Python, physical computation using the arduino boards, and later C++ (students will primarily use the OpenFrameworks libraries in this regard, see http://www.openframeworks.cc/). In "Boot Camp" students directly link projects created in the java-based Processing language with data visualization and information graphics (resulting, usually, in game-based or interactive results). In the "Creativity and Computation Laboratory" students learn the fundamental building blocks of a programming language and move beyond using the Processing environment with the ultimate goal of providing a strong foundation in support of major studio projects. Textbooks include Processing - A Programming Handbook for Visual Designers and Artists and Programming Interactivity - A Designer's Guide to Processing, Arduino, and Open Frameworks. There are several stated learning outcomes in this course: demonstration of knowledge of fundamental programming, development of multiple visual & interactive projects using Processing and Open Frameworks systems, presentation of computational design process and workflow, and integration of a variety of media elements into code-based projects. Finally, in the "Audio Visual Systems" course students are expected to build fully-fledged computationally based studio projects using physical computation and OpenFrameworks (C++). This course, though daunting, has proven highly successful and has produced a variety of award winning projects over the years. All Parsons MFADT students are expected to pass through this triumvirate of courses.

Finally, I include a paragraph on those aspects of the program that are geared towards preparing graduates to teach at the university (higher education) level. The MFADT degree itself does provide the terminal qualification to teach on the university level. Within the program, students pursuing higher-education teaching as a goal are prepared in three ways. First, within the program, they have opportunities for Teaching Assistantships within Parsons undergraduate programs. Second, they are provided the opportunity to teach within the "Boot Camp" pre-entry program after successfully completing their first year within the MFADT program. Finally, from a curricular perspective, students wishing to pursue university

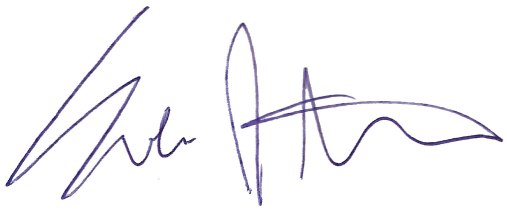
teaching as a career are urged to enroll in the course "Designing Education" which can be taken during their second or third semester within the program. Because the MFADT program was initiated with the intent of producing professors competent in both fundamental art/design studio approaches as well as computational fluency and systems thinking expertise, the emphasis within our teacher training is on innovative approaches. Teaching innovation often occurs outside of the normative curricular offerings, through intensive workshops or projects, which have spawned several unique secondary projects and learning outcomes. Three such examples include:

- '**Scrap Yard Challenge**' - hosted by professors Katherine Moriwaki and Jonah Bruckner-Cohen over a weekend, e-waste, building do-it-yourself hack objects and prototypes out of e-waste.
- '**Ideation Workshops**' - hosted by professors Anezka and Margaret Fiore for 1st year MFA DT students, showing the process of collaboration and iteration, working with a peer-to-peer design engagement rather than individual model.
- '**Games & Learning**' curriculum - developed by professors Katie Salen (Quest to Learn) and Colleen Macklin (PetLab) that engage students in designing curriculum in the form of games for learning within publicly situated projects.

Great emphasis is also placed on establishing effective learning outcomes within the teaching environment. Curricular and teaching evaluation and assessment strategies for students learning to teach are primarily held through oral review and critique both with internal and external reviewers, generally during the mid-semester and final term weeks.

I would be happy to answer any additional questions you might have. Please feel free to contact me at travisS@newschool.edu.

Sincerely ,



Sven Travis
Associate Professor, School of Art, Media, and Technology
Founding Chair, MFA and BFA Design+Technology programs
Parsons The New School for Design