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STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

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Motivation to teach

My first management role out of graduate school inspired me to teach. As a fresh-faced, 23-year-old digital content manager inheriting three employees who were all well older than I was, the responsibility of assuming leadership felt at first intimidating. But, it didn't take long before I realized I had my own digital knowledge and skills I could teach the team, and that by employing those skills myself I could set an example for them to follow. I challenged my employees to experiment with new forms of storytelling, and to break from traditional tasks to employ a new, more user-centric method to content creation, often of their own choosing.

Most effectively, I acted with such nerdy and genuine excitement at our work — without shame or fear of appearing to my team as 'uncool' — and that excitement became contagious. When one employee who was particularly talented and motivated expressed fear of wrangling with a particularly difficult snippet of code, I reaffirmed my belief in her problem-solving skills, while also putting the programming task at hand in simpler terms she would understand (i.e. "HTML is the structure; CSS is the style"). I'll never forget the look of wonder and intrigue that came across her face when she finally finished building her first web app. It wasn't long after that when I decided my best way to serve the profession was to teach.

Why Hofstra?

On a sentimental level, Hofstra reminds me a great deal of my own undergraduate institution in Georgia, Mercer University, except that the Lawrence School's student participation and multimedia facilities far surpass the media curriculum I had when I attended undergraduate. While Hofstra's School of Communications has already received top honors for successful post-graduation outcomes, I believe – in fact, assisting in the task myself would be inherent in my mission as an assistant professor – that an even deeper potential lies just beneath the surface of the Lawrence School, and that — by converging the school's communications mediums and disciplines more tightly - and focusing more intensely on entrepreneurial and computational journalism for M.A. students, that Hofstra, with its range of communications programs and massive facility, can outshine even the traditionally strongest journalism education programs in the country.

Approach to teaching

My approach to teaching involves three general steps: (a) getting the student not just interested in, but *excited about* the subject matter, (b) instilling confidence in the student while patiently offering assistance as needed and (c) allowing the student to shape the end product of work in an experiential *and* experimental learning environment.

Piquing student interest and participation – the first and most difficult of those three hurdles – can initially prove difficult, especially if the student isn't already familiar with the topic at hand. Like any good journalist, this is when I try to simplify the subject matter into terms and metaphors that a general audience would understand (i.e. "an iFrame is sort of like a window into another webpage"). I bring high energy and excitement to the classroom, with the goal of spreading my enthusiasm for learning to the rest of the class.

Positive feedback and confidence-boosting skill-based compliments help foster this enthusiasm and ease the student into the task of learning for herself. Negative opinions regarding good-faith student work should *never* be verbalized publicly in front of the student's peers. I find it instead much more valuable for the entire group for the class to critique each other's work, as it puts the entire class to task at critically examining what makes good work and what doesn't.

Throughout the entire teaching process, I try to *think like a student*. Most of all, I remain a good student myself: constantly learning new technologies and honing my craft, refining my research and connecting it to my teaching to make the classroom an exciting place to be.

Open-Source Learning and Hacking the News

When possible, I believe all student work that emanates from journalism classes should be shared and open-sourced among the broader community and media industry, usually via Github. I also believe students should become familiar with open-source best-practices such as documentation writing, project management and version control by the time they finish a journalism undergraduate program, and that students *should* receive bylines/credit for real-world applicable work, with URLs and Github repositories to show prospective employers. Furthermore, I believe that my duty as an educator requires me to open-source all teaching materials, syllabi, etc. that I compile for my classes — not only for posterity, but more importantly for the benefit of other educators. Student projects suitable for open-sourcing can range from a simple longform piece that other journalists can fork and customize, to complex tools that allow journalists to tell stories in new ways. Mitch Resnick of MIT's Media Lab has proposed a similar journalism learning model that he calls "creative learning". Such a learning style requires four main components, as I see it:

- Learn by *making* new things
- Make *real* things that matter
- Do it with other people (or at least with others nearby)
- Share the new things you make with the rest of the web.

Sometimes, for more traditional audience-facing projects, the process of open-sourcing can just mean uploading a multimedia project to YouTube or curating a Pinterest group board like this one I curate – so long as the methodology behind the work is clear or explained in detail alongside the project. While the end goal of any journalism course should ideally be for students to produce publishable work, I do *not* believe a journalism educator should interact with a student as a professional editor would with a reporter. The purpose of the student's time in school is above all else to **learn** the importance, the ethics, the art *and* the science of the craft of media and communications, not simply to produce work (though production is critical to learning). My major goal in the classroom, therefore, is to act not just as a lecturer speaking from a pedestal of one-to-many; rather, it is to serve as a collaborator, helping individual students on problems they may encounter and going through technical processes myself with students as they follow along with my work.

Particularly when more complex technologies become involved (*think: upper-level computational journalism seminar*), the time it can take for a student to grasp even the basic daily lesson can vary greatly from student to student. Getting a working local development environment set up alone can be unnecessarily tedious at times, requiring a high level of programmatic knowledge and computer jargon. This creates an artificially high barrier to entry for many students. Doubly troubling is that getting a working development environment has little to do with actually learning the technology (*Those in the industry who claim to want to bring greater diversity to the programming community should consider addressing this.*) Having said that, I want to clarify that technologies alone do *not* constitute journalism. Coding, design, mathematical and computational skills are simply a few of many means of getting to the story.

On Publication-Ready Coursework

Deadline-driven production of accurate, insightful and timely journalistic product is no doubt an important skill to master in preparation for the professional job market. Nonetheless, for educational purposes (and, arguably, for professional recogntion, too), quality (often learned first by failures) trumps quantity. I find that by enforcing a rigid teaching-hospital adherence to obscure, often print-centric deadlines for content creation more often than not stifles the very sort of creative and entrepreneurial approaches to interactive storytelling that students need to learn now more than ever – not just for their own careers but for the future of mediated journalism itself.

On Journalism Educational Pedagogy

Having first started working as a beat reporter at my hometown daily newspaper in the mid-2000s, I'll readily admit my naïveté and myopia regarding the changes that would soon rattle what was then still the "news industry." In my 17-year-old self-conception, I would one day be a noble and prolific *newspaper* reporter, racing against the daily print deadline and possibly shoveling text online as an afterthought. Paradoxically, however, at the very same time as I aspired to be a print reporter, I consumed almost all my news online, and little of my media diet constituted the sort of "serious" journalism I envisioned for myself. I trolled blogs about American Idol contestants and indie rock bands, followed NBC sitcoms and observed emerging technology trends on sites like Digg and Redditt. *My RSS feed contained very few legacy media organizations.* So why did I aspire so much to be a newspaper reporter?

I'm of the firm belief that I am among the older bracket of a two-generation crop of young journalists who came of age during the transition period between two radically different eras of media consumption. One conception of journalism and news production came to us from media and cultural depictions of the industrial period of "professional journalism"; the other, fragmented, era of communications was rapidly gaining steam through our PCs, flip-phones and MySpace accounts, setting the stage for the new media ecosystem before we even knew the shift was underway.

My experience growing up using the internet while also developing an interest in reporting during my early teens enabled me to find a middle-ground between the GIF-filled listicles of the viral web and "the serious stuff," gaining perspective from both a business *and* editorial perspective. While fellow graduate students in 2011 denounced *The Huffington Post* and *Buzzfeed* as cheap gossip and curation sites that lacked prestige and ranked well beneath their skill levels, I took a more quantitative approach to the issue. *Buzzfeed*, for example, was developing experimental, entrepreneurial revenue streams and content strategies to support its journalistic work, hiring new staffers in droves even as legacy, venerable news institutions suffered continued furloughs, buyouts and layoffs in an effort to adjust to the new normal. (today, those same peers clamor for jobs at Mashable, Buzzfeed, Vice, et. al. sometimes more aggressively than they might for *The New York Times.*)

Hence — as I intend to outline in more detail in future research — I am somewhat leery of the *"teaching hospital" * model of journalism education championed by philanthropic journalism funders and higher education institutions. The teaching hospital model of educating journalists very well could work if news were merely an art. But it is both an art and a science, and science is subject to constant change. From my experience, the teaching hospital model has more frequently restricted academia to the imperatives of legacy journalistic production workflows, often siloed by medium. The role of the journalism school is, no doubt, to teach by doing; however, currently-vogue "teaching hospital" models run the risk of leaving less bandwidth for the level of innovation, entrepreneurship, agility and research that is crucial for journalism's future.

Service-Learning/Experiential Learning Modules

In a transitional flux in which even the most committed, devoted journalists often today find themselves doubting the very real importance of their work to the public or publics they purport to serve, I believe it's pivotal that all pedagogical classroom lessons and readings coincide with real-world experiences that give deeper meaning to the subject matter at hand. Whether it means covering a local topic of little previous public scrutiny for an entire semester or creating multimedia projects/mobile web apps that document a situation or cause in the surrounding campus community, I believe that serving others *directly* through the work produced in the classroom is a crucial component to a holistic media education (*see: JMS 262, a course in which I led students to build an interactive guide to local hidden gems). Helping those around you instills pride in one's self. Pride in one's self instills a sense of purpose. A sense of purpose empowers a stronger desire for learning to become a media professional — a hunger that translates ultimately into academic and career excellence.

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