Nicolas Aguirre - Summary of Teaching, Fall 2016

Summary

As a whole, my first semester teaching was successful. I began the semester saddled with anxiety and doubt, and ended feeling confident and enriched by the experience. The demands of my coursework and needs of my students have pushed me to deliver my best work yet. Getting to know my colleagues and interacting with them has been a joy; I find myself quickly adapting to my new environment. I have positive expectations about this upcoming semester. The future seems to hold promises of rewarding experiences.

Courses

MSCH-J360: Web Design

This is a challenging course to teach. Web design is an expansive topic, and its software ecosystem is constantly evolving. I made an effort to familiarize students with new and emerging technologies, and designed the course to be project-oriented. Students finish the course having completed five projects that test knowledge of HTML, CSS and JavaScript. Students seemed to respond positively to the use of *p5.js*, a visualization library designed for non-coders. This is sensible as many of them are journalism students and probably visual learners.

MSCH-J362: Multimedia Storytelling

This course was somewhat out of my comfort zone, but I made an effort to capitalize on my creative strengths and bring those to the classroom. About half of the coursework was based on work with Adobe Illustrator, with a focus on visual design concepts such as color theory, proportion and page layout.

I intended to teach elementary data visualization using Tableau, but ran into some technical problems. Lab computers had Tableau Public *(free version)* installed, but were not able to establish connectivity with the Tableau server. As a result, students could not save their visualizations. I did my best to improvise, and instead opted for students to complete a written assignment in which they analyzed one of several visualizations I provided.

The last assignment involved students grouping up to create a non-linear story using a program called Twine. This was a great success. Students seemed to communicate and work well in small groups, they were enthusiastic about their stories, and as a whole they seemed much less inhibited towards the end of the class.

Successes

I initially had doubts about students learning object-oriented programming in an introductory web design class, but students picked up JavaScript pretty quickly and made impressive progress by the end of the semester. There are many different ways to teach coding, but I found that [CodePen](#) was very popular. CodePen works fantastic as a "scaffolding" tool; I can provide a small amount of code to get students started, and use "pseudocode" with instructions to give them a gentle nudge in the right direction.

I had students give short presentations towards the end of the semester, and I am pleased with the result. The goal was to have each student explore a different topic of web design or programming, such as a new programming language, and give a short primer to other students. Since the world of computer science has a reach extending far beyond my class, these short presentations were helpful in familiarizing students with other technologies.

I found that some of the more technically-involved assignments merited the creation of tutorials. I made several YouTube tutorials for activities and assignments, and students remarked that they were useful.

Growth and Learning Opportunities

My greatest struggle in starting my first semester at IU was dealing with so-called "impostor syndrome"; a tendency to doubt one's own competencies. For the first few weeks, I was very rigid and anxious in the classroom. My voice was shaky, my speech mechanical, and my body language rigid and guarded. I began to feel respected and encouraged by the students, and slowly developed confidence.

I am also beginning to reconcile with my perfectionist tendencies, and accept that I may not be able to make every student happy. Instead, I recognize that my path is one of continuous growth, and that with each lecture I gain insight and fortitude.

As far as curriculum is concerned, the biggest change to Web Design is my new requirement to have students purchase a domain name and hosting. I am requiring them to keep and maintain portfolio sites. This is done partly out of practicality - it makes grading easier - but also to make students more competitive in the job market.

With the start of this new semester, I intend to work on becoming more connected to my colleagues and involved in our academic community. I am also exploring opportunities to participate in service.

Again, I have positive feelings about the future, and my gratitude for having this job cannot be overstated.