Statement of Teaching Philosophy
Brian Schrank, Ph.D.

"By learning you will teach, by teaching you will learn." –Latin Proverb

Overview
The teacher's primarily role is guide and mentor, a role that should be motivated with the energy of a passionate learner. It is essential for teachers to plan clear, concise and systematic presentations of course material; but it is also important to lead by example, and love learning as much as teaching. Teachers must value competency, efficiency, and mastery, but should also value experimentation, exploration, and the self-realization of students. To learn effectively, students must put knowledge to work in order to truly understand it. Students should be given opportunities to see what they can creatively do with course material. Not only does this enable students to synthesize knowledge by making it useful and fungible, it also enables peer-to-peer learning as students see one another's efforts unfold.

Objective
My objective for students is to foster *critical thinking* as well as the ability and agency to produce *critical work*. By fostering a learning environment where critical feedback and honest engagement can flow freely, including toward the professor, students can be encouraged and challenged to exercise their grasp of the subject. I want students to see and prepare themselves as future leaders and innovative producers, rather than machines memorizing skills and discrete sets of information.

Background
My teaching philosophy has been shaped by experiences in a diverse range of academic institutions dedicated to fine art, the production of entertainment technology, experimental lab work, and language instruction. The unifying theme has been the dynamic interplay between thinking and doing, or between *theory* and *practice*. The definition of these terms varies across scholarly communities, but the core idea is that students gain a richer understanding of a subject by learning its theories, and then realizing those theories in individual and collaborative practice.

A Specific Example
Contemporary culture increasingly asks us to think with and to work with new media technologies. As technology adapts to our lives, and our lives to technology, it becomes imperative that academia prepare students to think and perform competently as well as critically within this shifting hybrid structure. New media educators should empower students to analyze, challenge, and play with this interdependency rather than advance it for its own sake. I'll provide an example of how this objective can inform pedagogy. A theory often taught in game design courses is "flow," as defined by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi in the context of psychology. Flow is "optimal experience," or a "sense of that one's skills are adequate to cope with the challenges at hand in a goal directed, rule bound action system that provides clear clues as to how one is performing." The game industry

aspires to realize flowing experiences in commercial games because, along with marketing, it boosts sales. In introductory game design courses it may be appropriate to teach flow as an ideal. However, in advanced courses students might gain a more comprehensive grasp over the flow ideal by interrogating the concept in their games. A student response could be to design a compelling and fun game that rejects flow, or a game that pushes flow beyond the original concept, perhaps by incorporating a complementary concept, such as the "magic circle," from anthropology. Each student would reveal a unique aspect of the popular flow ideal by producing her own practical iteration around it. The class would benefit collectively as students learn how "flow" can afford or constrain practice in myriad, specific ways.

On Diversity

An attitude I ask students to adopt in the classroom is that diversity is a valuable resource. Student differences are useful in animating class discussions, and are especially productive if coupled with intensive, collaborative learning. To accommodate learning differences I use a variety of teaching modules, including: oral-visual lectures, readings that range in authorship and ideology, individual and group work, hands-on workshops, and in-class critiques. Personally, I try to convey that I am genuinely accessible through a focused interest in each student's development. I welcome one-on-one exchanges whenever possible, inside or outside of class. A key to comprehending a subject is the ability to convey knowledge of that subject to other people, toward that end I like to award generous extra credit to students who take the time to assist their peers, which also helps build community.

Assuring Quality

One of the ways I measure and maintain quality as an educator is by encouraging students to take ownership over their learning process. I ask that students feel free to critically engage me and their student peers, but do so in a respectful manner. This can complicate teaching if a student becomes impassioned to the point of disruption, but I have found that this can be solved with a one-on-one meeting. Balancing accessibility and flexibility with order and structure is a skill I am eager to develop in my career as a teacher. My methods and commitment to students have earned consistently high reviews. I have devised and taught five different courses at Georgia Tech (all core curriculum courses of the Computational Media degree program). Students responded to the statement: "The Instructor Was an Effective Teacher" with averages of 4.7/5, 4.5/5, 4.8/5, and 4.9/5. My syllabus for Principles of Visual Design was adopted by Dr. Jay David Bolter (Wesley Chair in New Media) and guided Tanyoung Kim (PhD student) in her approach to the course.

Conclusion

My methods and philosophy of teaching will evolve over the years as I learn more effective ways of structuring courses, guiding students, conducting research, and blending theory with practice. I approach this ongoing journey with enthusiasm and humility. I look to forward honing my skills by listening to, and learning from, colleagues and through continual assessment of my results with students.