Application for PDAC 2019 Teaching Recognition Award

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OpenLab Teaching Portfolio

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Personal Statement

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> I hear, and I forget. I see, and I remember. I do, and I understand.
>
> Chinese proverb

I believe that applied pedagogies of original research, scaffolded writing, and place-based and project-based learning are excellent ways of cultivating curiosity and confidence in students. Very often the gestation of research projects occurs through the examination of the raw materials of theatre: stage structures, costumes, music and sound, rhetorical strategies in texts, and the performing body. The interdisciplinary approach of my research reveals itself in workshops that rely on the diverse skills and backgrounds of students to activate multidisciplinary histories. This is especially important at an urban college such as City Tech, where the extraordinary social and ethnic diversity of the student body occasions cross-cultural conversations.

I aim to balance my teaching to equitably serve students with rudimentary skill sets as well as high achievers who are better prepared for college-level work. Because of family commitments and overwhelming economic pressures (some of our students are homeless and many are hungry and cannot afford a MetroCard), it is very often the lower-achieving students that do not have the time or energy to seek extra help during office hours (which I encourage every week). The teaching methods discussed below have helped students overcome these hurdles.

Mentorship
I have spent time outside of the classroom mentoring students, attending play readings and productions with students, and holding conversations about independent projects. One of those conversations led to a two-semester Emerging Scholars project. Six Entertainment Technology majors built a state-of-the-art Eidophusikon for a dramatic holographic reanimation of the medieval English king, Richard III. With support from Entertainment Technology faculty, I directed an all-student cast in a full production of *Scapino*, my English-language adaptation of Molière's *Les Fourberies de Scapin*. The rehearsal process involved actor training and teaching styles of *commedia dell'arte*, and my work included mentoring the technical director, stage manager, sound designer, set designer, and lighting designer. I have directed six independent internships with Entertainment Technology students at various theaters (Joseoph Papp's Public Theatre, St. Ann's Warehouse, and Smoke & Mirrors Company). I have recently signed-on to be

a faculty advisor of a new drama club at college. These activities speak to a core value I hold as a college instructor: that life-long learning, creative intelligence, and informed decision-making are fostered in mentoring relationships and within strong lines of trust and respect.

Writing

Informal writing assignments are classroom staples and offer a domain for reflection and brain-storming. My students engage in blog debates, in-class think tanks, and metaphorical response writing, often pursuing lines of creative investigation that produce unexpected results. For example, after a free writing exercise asking students to imagine alternative uses for the seventeenth-century "Chariot and Pole" scene change system, two students from separate majors approached me after class to ask about constructing a computerized model of Torelli's machine. In my *Play Analysis* course, formal essays are built around short, scaffolded writing assignments that help students read carefully, develop original arguments, and embrace the revision process.

There are a number of ways that I measure the success of these approaches. Collaborative learning and group projects are an essential aspect of my curriculum design, some of which occurs in group projects in and out of class and some of which occurs on Blackboard and OpenLab. Collaboration helps students identify individual strengths that support group outcomes, and provides opportunities for students to measure their own progress among peers. I often have students maintain a writing portfolio throughout the semester. This allows me to track progress and offer guidance as needed, and gives students the opportunity to appreciate the value of writing as a process, rather than a finished product. Looking back over a collection of written work, students can track and assess their development as writers and better understand the basis for a particular grade.

Interdisciplinarity

From 2015-2018, I developed three interdisciplinary courses. The first is an ID version of *History of Theater: Stages and Technologies*, which incorporates disciplinary concepts and methods of analysis from Architectural Technology. The integration of architectural history, design, and theory into the *History of Theater* is logical and productive, since the course has always focused on the material aspects of performance (stages, buildings, set designs, etc.). The collaboration with Architectural Technology has been very rewarding and the response of the students has been positive. Students are provided with general conceptual tools of analysis from both disciplines at the start of the semester in order that by mid-semester they are highly engaged in classroom discussions and activities. The materials Profs. Ting Chin and Anne Leonhardt bring to the curriculum have helped students understand performance space as a social phenomenon that is shaped by design, engineering, and use. Seeing how these methodologies have positively impacted the work of students, I have adopted Architectural Technology observational and

sketching practices in my own research: a recent article on medieval stages reflects the same attention to the details of historic images.

Place-based Learning

I developed two iterations of the Special Topics ID course, *Learning Places: Understanding the City,* which has a strong place-based learning component. In this course, my co-teacher (Prof. Almeida) and I arrange over 8 site visits each semester to natural and built environments under stress, as well as to research archives such as Interference Archive, the New York Historical Society, and the New York Public Library. The culminating project of the semester is a performance intervention. Students choose an urban location where a specific environmental, economic, or human rights issue needs addressing. Students identify the connection between the local man-made objects, technologies, and activities that threaten the quality of human life and/or the natural world. Next students compose a research question that reveals information about the physical elements and history of the site and generate data related to inequalities and dangers. Finally, using the archive of current and historic strategies and interventions for inspiration, students create and participate in a live, public performance intervention at the site of investigation.

In my Play Analysis course I take students to see the plays they are reading for class. In past semesters we have read and attended plays like *Big Love* (based on the Greek tragedy The Suppliants) and *If Pretty Hurts Ugly is a Muhfucka*. Students are imaginatively and intellectually stimulated by these performance events, and go on to give inspired readings of dramatic texts. Additionally, theatre attendance deepens their understanding of basic elements such as character, plot, theme, and poetry.

Each semester of History of the Theatre, we do a backstage tour of active theaters in NYC -- from Broadway to Brooklyn. We have visited converted spaces, such as St. Ann's Warehouse (an 18th century tobacco factory), and architectural gems such as the Signature Theater (designed by Frank Gehry). Students take notes and sketch design elements during tours with the theater managers, and use these to compose low-stakes blog entries on Blackboard or OpenLab.

(Digital) Place-based Learning

Incorporating research conducted by students in multiple sections of History of the Theatre (ID), I developed and published a [historical map of New York City Theater](#) that extends back to the colonial period. This ongoing curatorial project will soon be published as an OER on the University of Minnesota's *Theater Historiography* site for use by educators across the globe. My fellowship on the NEH grant "Cultural History of Digital Technology" supported the

development of this tool. I continue to teach a module on digital mapping in my ID courses to teach research methodologies and to help students explore topics in spatio-temporal ways.

Going forward, I would like to strengthen these approaches with further research and collaboration with my peers. My goal is to bridge the often wide gaps in academic preparedness among City Tech students, which manifests in disparities of personal motivation, critical reasoning, and writing skills.

More about my teaching methodologies [here].

The Living Lab fellowship has had a lasting impact on my curricular development projects. I undertook the fellowship early in my tenure at City Tech and it set the stage for the collaborative, interdisciplinary work that has defined my teaching. In Spring 2019, Prof. Ting Chin and I presented a Works in the Works presentation for the college community discussing the architectural learning module (GIS research and map-making). Prof. Chin and I have an article placed in an interdisciplinary collection about this learning module. I recently submitted a $50,000 NEH grant proposal to support the development of interdisciplinary curricula that uses GIS technology for courses in computer science, architecture technology, information science, English, and mathematics.

Professional Development Workshop

I propose to lead a two-part workshop on GIS (Global Information System) digital mapping that will be open to the entire faculty body. Digital mapping has been a part of a number of learning activities in my courses over the past three years. It is a tool that can be applied in innovative ways across the curriculum, and City Tech faculty will learn about a relatively easy-to-use mapping application called "Story Maps" from ArcGIS/ESRI for use in their classes. By passing on these skills to my colleagues, it is my hope that they can use the tool to offer their own students with project-based assignments that engage their disciplines in new and illuminating ways.

Day 1: Discussion of the current use of Story Maps in theater history and architectural technology. Brief how-to module on using ESRI Story Maps (it's easy!). Discussion and brain-storming: what subjects in participants' own fields would be illuminated by spatio-temporal exploration and articulation? Free writing to answer this question. Homework: outline the goals and stages of a mapmaking module in one of your courses.

Day 2: Workshop participants bring in draft proposals for their GIS modules, either in paper form or set up in Story Maps itself. Participants share their work and provide feedback to their colleagues.

Goals: participants will obtain rudimentary skills in GIS map-building using the open software ESRI Story Maps. They will make connections between mapmaking and data analysis and subjects from their particular disciplines. They will have an outline of a teaching module for use in the classroom. Database archives and online GIS tutorials are provided to participants when they complete the workshop.

Target audience: open to all.

Pedagogical approach: free writing, collaborative workshoping, presentation and feedback.

Assessment: Participants complete an assessment of the workshop: how likely are they to apply what they learned in their classroom? What further supports do they need?