

Joshua A. Fisher, Ph.D.

Teaching Philosophy

I have had the privilege of teaching for around a decade at a diverse range of schools. I have interacted with students of various ages in South Korea, Turkey, Chicago, and Atlanta. Most recently, I have been teaching practice-based studio and lecture courses at Columbia College Chicago. What connects these experiences and underpins my teaching philosophy is a belief that students become empowered and curious learners through storytelling and a dialogic pedagogy. Students take to their passions when they share openly and critically with one another through classroom discussions, scholarship, and media artifacts. As an educator, my primary goal is to spark students' curiosity and provide them with the training they need to express themselves best. It is a balance of theory and praxis—a constructivist tack that, along with pedagogists Paulo Freire and bell hooks, influences my teaching.

My work is best achieved in the classroom by weaving radical connections between the subject matter, community structures, and students' lives. When this focus is directed towards bettering the campus or community to which they belong, I find many students energized. For example, in my Serious Games and Simulations course, students use ethnographic methods to produce serious board games about community issues. Then, in groups, they turn structural injustices and community dynamics into game mechanics, using procedural rhetoric to argue for representations of these issues. In the most recent semester, students produced games on food deserts and wealth in Chicago, COVID vaccine distribution, and imposter syndrome.

It's also vital that students leave my classes capable of teaching others what they've learned. In our field, this often includes imparting not just technical, programming, and media development skills but also design thinking, media theory, and critical studies. Education should flow in and out of the classroom between the campus and the community. This applied focus is a lesson I learned from my graduate studies in Chicago. I try to instill this belief in my students so that they can immediately begin helping their community by teaching others. Pre-COVID, the opportunity to involve students in community workshops made this possible.

My methodology involves lectures led by students and me; guided dialogues and critiques, depending on the material; and technical lessons, ranging from design to media development. All my lectures involve a practice component to apply the lesson immediately. I find this helps with mastery. I will rely on essay exams, papers, and well-scoped research projects for assessment in the more theory-driven classes. This work involves meeting with students one-on-one or in small groups to advise on writing, research methods, and concept development. In the creative classes, such as Interaction Design, I will help students build technical skills and produce a portfolio.

To continue to grow, I am regularly making connections within the community and throughout campus. These interdisciplinary relationships have provided a diverse range of learning experiences and fruitful collaborations. Whenever I can make these connections, I provide my students with opportunities to engage. I have found that this has helped some students to discover new passions or skills that they otherwise would not have. Beyond this process, I pay close attention to my student evaluations and adjust course materials and expectations accordingly.

Working in emerging media, I intentionally learn new skills and platforms to grow my research and applied practice. Key to my stance toward education as a tool for empowerment is supporting and strengthening my students' skills with these very same platforms. On occasion, students' interests in these platforms have led them down an entrepreneurial path. My entrepreneurial experience in the start-up space in Chicago has helped me guide them to begin their practices and small businesses. These are some of my favorite moments as an educator. Over my professional career, I hope to continue to see my students research and materialize their ideas, whether as scholarship, digital works, businesses, or community organizations.