Faculty Development Plan

Personal Statement

In order to represent and serve BYU the very best, I need to develop myself significantly as an artist, as a teacher, and as a citizen. Most of my experience lies in digital painting and visual development for games and film. These are the areas I’ll focus on most in my teaching and scholarship.

My greatest ambition is to give the students at BYU the best chance at having a positive impact in the animation industry. Becoming a sought-after character designer and digital artist in the entertainment industry myself helps serve this goal, since my experience will translate directly to better teaching and greater opportunities for students trying to network and get jobs. This will require quite a bit of skill development on my part and some ambition in the type of work I seek out. I also want to push the students to achieve more, setting an industry-level bar for their performance. All of my own learning will be done in the context of finding clearer ways to communicate some of the most difficult concepts. Most importantly, I want to improve in my role as an example and spiritual guide to the students going into the industry, so that when they have job opportunities, they represent BYU and the church in impactful ways.

Self-Assessment

I’ve always been playing catch-up with much more talented artists, even though I’ve had good fortune in my opportunities. My teaching has benefitted from my scramble to keep up, because I empathize with the struggle to understand what makes other successful artists so effective. However, my weakness in art is also standing in the way of my potential at BYU.

My weaknesses in teaching and scholarship come directly from those areas that my artistic skills are lacking in, so keeping up with my field of expertise will help fill in those gaps. Some of the classes I’ve been asked to teach, like gesture drawing and figure drawing, are particular weak spots for me because my own knowledge and skill isn’t that well-developed in those areas.

One advantage I have is the reputation I’ve built up working in the industry. I’m able to work on a lot of higher-profile and interesting projects based on my connections and strength of portfolio. My biggest weakness in scholarship comes from the fact that most of my projects have come to me---and if those types of projects ever sputter out, then I’ll need to figure out a way to search for new scholarship work. My plan will be to address this problem through better exposure and networking.

I’m interested in eventually developing my ideas for teaching into print. I think there’s a clearer and more interesting way to communicate a lot of the concepts and techniques I’ve read in art books. While I have writing and artistic ability for such a venture, I have very little experience and knowledge in graphic design. I’ll need to address this problem somehow since the design of the book and how the concepts are presented are inextricably linked.

Teaching goals:

Some of the comments in my student ratings talk about needing to improve organization. I feel this is mostly because the interrelated nature of design makes an effective linear approach to learning difficult. Some chaos is inevitable. However, I think I can address these concerns, particularly in
subjects like gesture drawing, by starting with the fundamental principles and progressively circling back to more advanced applications in later assignments and lectures. I can also do more to make the connections between the principles we learn as evident as possible. When I'm reacting to trends I'm seeing in the students' learning, I'll be as clear as possible with why we are making adjustments to the planned structure of the class.

Short term-goals:

• Get clear and early feedback from students (with both interviews and mid-course evaluations) on which aspects of the class are meeting the course objectives and which ones are not

• Work with the Center for Teaching and Learning to design a curriculum for the digital sculpting class that will improve students' chances at getting jobs in the highly competitive area of industry digital sculpting

• Weave gospel principles into all my courses so that spiritual discussions will flow naturally and appear most applicable to the art principles they are learning

• Spend time getting to know each student better so that I can adapt lesson plans to their needs

Long-term:

• Refine classes for circular, interdependent subjects in a way that uses the linear structure of the class as a strength

• Rework assignments and critiques so they are maximizing students' potential

• Create slides or handouts for each major lecture

Scholarship goals:

I plan to actively cultivate new relationships, and maintain the relationships I have with companies and industry professionals. I'll do this in part by attending any useful conferences and workshops. I will also keep in close contact with the companies I have worked with via e-mail, planned lunches, or other activities.

I would like to start developing a more robust online presence, starting with making a presence on more art sites such as Artstation and Tumblr. I’d also like to lay plans for my own website, so I will research what kind of site covers all my needs, and how to develop such a site. I would like to get everything in place before going public with the site since I have a significant online following, so my goal is to make the site as clean, beautiful, and functional as possible this year, and then get it running publicly next year.

Short term-goals:

• Contact and follow-up with groups that offer workshops to artists

• Create and maintain online galleries

• Regular contact with ex-coworkers and past clients
• Use social media to foster client and fanbase relationships

Long-term:
• Develop a personal website with gallery and online journal elements
• Create an art book

Citizenship goals:
My hope with citizenship is to make better use of the time I have allocated for it. There are a lot of things that I'm not even aware of as a new faculty member, so part of this allocation is time spent researching what I'm supposed to be doing. I'll work with my mentor and department head with each task I'm given to make sure that every facet is addressed.

I also want to better prepare and serve the students within my assignment to advise Animation pre-majors. I feel like in the last year I didn't help them realize just how difficult it is to get into the program and I didn't direct them to all the resources that could help them get there. I plan to give them more careful and specific feedback, and to prepare a list of resources they can use for anything they might be struggling with.

Short term-goals:
• Seek out ways to better prepare pre-animation students
• Increase involvement in senior game projects by organizing more interactions with the game team throughout development

Long-term:
• Set up learning opportunities for students working on the senior project, in form of visiting speakers or workshops
Scholarship Strategy Proposal:

I have had a lot of success with high-profile projects in the past, so my strategies for scholarship will be focused on keeping the door open for new projects and increasing my visibility to potential clients. My plans for scholarship will have three parts: developing high-quality personal art, bolstering my online presence, and seeking out opportunities to do presentations or workshops.

I need to schedule time almost daily to produce personal art if I'm going to continue to attract clients. My online presence will depend on a constant stream of high-quality art, and I can't count on work for clients filling that gap since that work is so often protected by non-disclosure agreements. Since I have a lot of client work, losing focus on personal projects is very easy to do, so I will schedule a non-negotiable 1-2 hours a day for this effort.

I'll continue to seek out online galleries or image feeds that improve my visibility for both clients and customers across the industry. Maintaining these sites will take a weekly effort. I also plan to create a personal site that combines my weekly postings and tutorials with a more static gallery for potential clients. I'll work with my mentor to develop a compelling and easy-to-navigate site, with the hope that I can leverage my user-interface design experience and my mentor's complimentary design experience to create something that can set a new standard for artist gallery sites.

My long-term goal is to create an art book that has art tips and tutorials, bridging between fans that love my work and aspiring artists that have shown interest in learning from me. This is a massive effort that will take years to complete, but if I chip away at the images and tutorials a little at a time, it won't be such an overwhelming task.
Citizenship Project Proposal

In addition to my current service as an advisor to pre-animation students and any work assigned by other committees, I plan to contribute more to the Animation Major's yearly senior game project. Last year I helped organize some of the early art and game design work, but due to schedule conflicts with their scheduled dailies, I missed a lot of opportunities to guide the decision-making as the project developed. I plan to schedule time with the game directors and be more involved both in helping the students achieve their goals. I also believe that due to my extensive game design and art experience, I need to help develop, with the other faculty, the process and overall direction of these projects going into the future.

Last year I brought in an experienced game designer to talk to the students as they were developing their pitches. As part of my effort to be more involved with the game project, I plan to bring in experienced designers as well as artists that are experts in visual development for games or movies that have similarities in look to the games market. I will also give presentations and tutorials myself, focused separately on the process of game play design, and the challenges of art and animation development.
**Course Development Project: Digital painting**

**Course background**

I’ve taught this class since 2009 and it has been fairly successful so far, but most of that time was as an adjunct. I feel the class is getting stale and doesn't match my teaching style now. Even though the class continues to be rated well, I haven't been satisfied with the progress of students in it recently, so I’d like to find a way to improve student performance as well.

Course purpose: Students will be trained to create digital paintings with a focus on animation industry design work. **Students will be able to produce professional-quality paintings customized to the demands of an art director.**

Expected course outcomes: Students will

- Be capable in PS/other programs, but know how to learn more when they need it
- Be able to light and paint a scene when reference is unavailable
- Use rules of color and value composition to guide audience experience
- Use style, story, and theme to guide painting decisions
- Recognize the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful painting
- Select and appropriately use reference to aid painting
- Work collaboratively with groups
- Take positive action from critiques by peers and directors
- Balance hard work and smart work
- Be truly humble and teachable while confident in their ability to figure out difficult problems
- Learn self-mastery and autonomy, and learn to believe in contributing to a higher purpose

New course syllabus on next page.
Digital Painting
VAAnm 365R Section 1, F250 HFAC Fall Semester 2013, T-Th 4-5:50pm

Instructor: Sam Nielson
E-mail: artsammi@gmail.com
Telephone: 801-819-2144
Office hours T-Th 3-4pm, F484 HFAC
Class Blog URL: digitalpaintingclass.blogspot.com

Course Objectives

Students will be trained to create digital paintings with a focus on animation industry design work. Students will be able to produce professional-quality paintings customized to the demands of an art director.

Required materials

Any recent version of Adobe Photoshop, Corel Painter, or an alternative program as approved by instructor
Computer, Wacom stylus and pen
Off-hours access to a computer lab with the above programs and hardware is acceptable

Attendance

Attendance will not affect your grade. However, daily lectures and tutorials include important insights and in-class-assignments that will be factored into your final grade. If you need to miss a class, make good friends with an excellent note-taker. Also, assignments are due even if you are absent. If you won’t be around for a critique session and get your assignment progress to me early, I will e-mail a critique back to you at your request.

Grading

94_100% A  90_93% A-  86_89% B+  82_85% B  78_81% B-  74_77% C+
70_73% C  66_69% C-  60_65% D  0_59% F

Assignments must be posted on the class blog before class on the due date. Certain assignments will receive two grades: a professional portfolio grade, and a “Tilt” grade that modifies the portfolio assessment based on your personal ability and progress. Your final grade will be based on your Tilt grades. The portfolio assessment is an honest evaluation just for your personal benefit, so you know what needs to be improved if you want to make your painting a competitive portfolio piece.

Late assignments will receive half credit. If you can’t make it to class on an assignment due date, make sure to post or e-mail me your assignment before class starts.

We will critique everyone’s assignments each week. You’ll receive credit for turning in progress on your assignment for the critique.

Project Groups
Each person in the class will be paired with other students who have similar portfolio goals. These groups will act like mini visual development teams and the teacher will act as art director. The project groups are intended to be inspirational and helpful—not controlling—yet your grade will be based in part on how well you synergize with your team.

**Final Project**

The final project is worth almost one-third of your final grade. You will have a lot of autonomy over what goes into your portfolio; in the end it should be less about the criteria of the original assignment and more about what shows the best, and what is most likely to impress an art director. However, I will be your acting art director, and your portfolio should be trying to appeal to me as much as your target audience. Final projects must be printed out in color for the final critique. You must also deliver your final as a .jpg file.

**Extra Credit**

Students may choose to do an optional extra credit assignment worth 100 points, due the day of the final. For this extra credit, you may do an extra painting for your final portfolio. This piece must be approved by the instructor before you finish it off.

**Preventing Sexual Discrimination or Harassment**

Sexual discrimination or harassment (including student-to-student harassment) is prohibited both by the law and by Brigham Young University policy. If you feel you are being subjected to sexual discrimination or harassment, please bring your concerns to the professor. Alternatively, you may lodge a complaint with the Equal Employment Office (D_240C ASB) or with the Honor Code Office (2_4440).

**Students With Disabilities**

If students have a disability that may affect their performance in the course, they should get in touch with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (1520 WSC). This office can evaluate the student’s disability and assist you in arranging for reasonable accommodations.

**Honor Code Standards**

In keeping with the principles of the BYU Honor Code, students are expected to be honest in all of their academic work. Academic honesty means, most fundamentally, that any work students present as their own must in fact be their own work and not of that of another. Violations of this principle may result in a failing grade in the course and additional disciplinary action by the university.

Students are also expected to adhere to the Dress and Grooming Standards. Adherence demonstrates respect for themselves and others and ensures an effective learning and working environment. It is the university’s expectation, and the Department’s expectation in class, that each student will abide by all Honor Code standards. If you have any questions about the University Honor Code Standards, please contact the Honor Code Office at 422_2847.

**Final Exam Policy**

It is University policy that Final Exams are to be held the day and the hour they are scheduled on the Final Exam Schedule. Final Exams are scheduled according to the beginning hour. No early exams should be given; reading and examination periods are firmly scheduled parts of the semester. Students should not make plans that interfere with these important academic activities. Instructors may give Incompletes, depending on the circumstances.
Sep 1  Go over syllabus, Give character design assignments, Tutorial: Theme and good design.

Sep 3  Tutorial: Digital painting process, Matte and specular surfaces.

Sep 8  **Character designs due**, give environment design assignments

Sep 10  Tutorial: Materials part 1, Spheres in-class assignment

Sep 15  Critique groups for portraits. Tutorial: Materials part 2, Spheres in-class assignment

Sep 17  **Character portrait due**, critiques

Sep 22  Tutorial: Color Composition, the Power of Contrast

Sep 24  **Environment designs due**, critiques. Tutorial: Effective research

Sep 29  **Full character due**, critiques

Oct 1  Tutorial: Advanced Lighting

Oct 6  Tutorial: Atmosphere

Oct 8  **Environment detail due**, critiques

Oct 13  Tutorial: Handling detail and texture

Oct 15  Critiques

Oct 20  **Environment wide due**, Assign character/scene in environment

Oct 22  **Sketches due for character/scene in environment**, Tutorial: Using Lighting to Affect Emotion

Oct 27  Color rough critiques for character in Environment

Oct 29  In-class workshop: composition

Nov 3  Critiques for Character in Environment

Nov 5  **Character in Environment Due**, Critiques

Nov 10  Give Final Portfolio Assignment, Divide into groups and work out plans

Nov 12  Tutorial: Digital Painting in Production and Pre-Production

Nov 17  Paintover: in-class assignment

Nov 19  Tutorial: Putting in the Finishing Touches, Removing the Digital Artifice

Nov 22  No class, Friday classes

Nov 25  No class, Thanksgiving Holiday

Dec 1  Critique groups

Dec 3  Wall of great art comparisons

Dec 8  Paintover in-class assignment

Dec 10  Last day of class. Final critiques.

Dec 15  8-10pm Final: Portfolio Review