**Candidate’s Statement on Teaching Jim Dawkins**

I have spent the better part of my thirty years in the architectural and interior design profession guiding, mentoring and ‘growing’ creative design talent in the form of both architects and interior designers - professionals and students alike. I have come to see that design growth requires an understanding of basic ‘design’ physics – the ability to turn creative *potential* design energy into *kinetic* design reality. Both instructor and student need to realize that this basic principle takes patience, tolerance and innovative discipline – discipline that, in the end, results in a more substantial and grounded freedom of personal design expression.

It is my experience that discipline does not come easy to creative persons. It takes consistent practice and a painstaking work ethic to finesse design skills without impeding the unconditional freedom of expression. For the design students in both my graduate and undergraduate studios, this means consistently employing the fundamentals of design to conceptual thinking while grinding through creative problem-solving scenarios over and over. It requires a do-it-again attitude that eventually evolves into a highly effective and efficient design behavior. Within my graphic techniques classes, students are required to engage in repetitive and perhaps mundane introductory exercises as simple as drawing freehand lines, relearning how to write letters and numbers in architectural fashion, and drawing scale figures in order to develop an eye for scale and proportion in design sketches. These basic drills are completed at the beginning of each class period for the entire semester and are done over and over. It helps develop a drawing behavior that reinforces the connection between mind, eye, and hand. It creates a firm foundation on which to engage in subsequent and more complex tasks such as perspective construction, drawing composition, and the use of shade, shadow, tone, texture, and material to describe design intent.

I started my career in higher education already possessing a degree of expertise in both design and drawing. What I considered to be natural about my use of design to communicate ideas has since been revealed to me through introspection and research to be the result of deliberate practice and a commitment to the constant development of my work, both design and drawing. I find Ericsson’s (Ericsson, Charness, Feltovich, & Hoffman, 2006) theory of deliberate practice and even Malcolm Gladwell’s (2008) perspective on the singularity of events, moments, and people in shaping expertise and success to be effective frameworks for guiding my teaching and informing my instructional effectiveness. Deliberate practice is defined as “time [spent] per week on activities that [have] been specifically designed to improve performance” (Ericsson et al., 2006) whereas the notion of singularity might include distinctive factors such as a person being born at a particular time and in a particular neighborhood as a child to successful parents and going to a prestigious school – all advantages unique to some but not available to all. As a teacher, I have the opportunity to reinforce to a student the value of ‘doing it again’ over and over, redirecting the student at significant points in their development to address their individual growth while seeking to create that singular event or be that particular person that helps shape the student’s expertise and success.

My teaching centers on providing instructors and students the chance to develop the practical intelligence necessary for academic and professional achievement. In the studio classroom environment I demand adherence to the ‘3-R’s’: respect for oneself (one never impugns oneself), respect for others (one never rebukes another’s peer), and respect for instructors (one never undervalues the ‘preaching’ their instructor has expertly practiced). Students have responded positively to my instruction, supervision and mentoring. I have a five-year “Excellent/Very Good” student evaluation average of 90%. Students under my direction have won the North American finalist award of the International Interface Reconnect Biophilic Design Competition, received NEWH’s national Platinum Scholarship ($10,000), completed and presented an undergraduate Honors in the Major thesis at the 7th Annual ACC Meeting of the Minds Conference at VPI, and joined leading design firms in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Miami, and Atlanta.

I *want* to teach because it is critical in the design industry that academic instruction in creativity be effectively and expertly applied practically and competently in the professional business arena. Having spent a career developing from an intern architect into a licensed architect and rising to the vice president and president positions of the firms in which I worked provides me a broader view with more focused solutions leading to professional preparation. I am *compelled* to teach, because after twenty years of architectural and interior design practice, I find myself in a strategic position to help narrow the gap between academic actuality and business practicality. My professional responsibility now lies in helping students reach a high degree of maturity and professional preparedness that our industry requires. While acknowledging the rigor of an interior design education, I constantly seek to honor the distinctive (and varied) needs of student designers as they navigate their way through academic preparation for professional practice.

My attitude towards teaching is wrapped around the notion of ‘craftsmanship’ and is most aptly described by Jody Brown (2011) who said that “craft is about precision and perfection and elegant design. Craft is about that moment of clarity.” The moment of clarity is only possible when students truthfully engage in their work, when they are completely ‘in the moment’ whether it is in the studio, classroom, or some other place. That moment, brief or prolonged, is the point where a student has the chance to move beyond competence to proficiency and expertise. This is the power a creative soul anxiously seeks – the fuel that catalyzes the additive part of learning which occurs directly or indirectly, overtly or sublimely; and is an opportunity for kinetic design energy.

My role as a design instructor is to facilitate the moment of clarity and guide creative design energy. I think *with* the students by actively participating in *their* design processes, giving them the confidence to open up perspectives or creative thought not previously recognized by the student alone. I encourage my students to think outside the confines of a single studio, insisting they meld all of their studies together rather than compartmentalize their education. My goal is to steer the student beyond any notion of boundaries, supposed or imposed, by modeling and applying clear, concise, and complete design behavior each and every day, bearing evidence for both faculty and students alike that design is an expression of creative potency, the transformation of potential energy into kinetic energy, of being wide awake when others are dreaming.

References

Brown, J. (2011, November 1). The Craft of Architecture. Retrieved from http://www.archdaily.com/180775/the-craft-of-architecture.

Ericsson, K. A., Charness, N., Feltovich, P. J., & Hoffman, R. R. (Eds.). (2006). The Cambridge handbook of expertise and expert performance. Cambridge University Press.

Gladwell, M. (2008). Outliers: The story of success. Penguin UK.