Developing an "Advanced Web & Interactive Behavior" Course for the BFA Program
Brittany Schade, Department of Design

PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

I am applying for the Summer Teaching Grant for 2014-2015 to assist in the development of a new "Advanced Web & Interactive Behavior" course that will be proposed as a rotating topic for DSGN480: BFA Seminar. Advanced web design, which includes interactive behaviors, introduces techniques that contribute to the emotional connection of interactive storytelling between humans and technology (i.e. movement, intuitive behaviors). My goal with this grant is twofold, to develop the course curriculum and teaching materials; and to learn the advanced scripting and programming languages necessary to provide direct and substantial instruction to the students. I will address the evaluation criteria in sections (some questions combined) according the Summer Teaching Grant general guidelines.

Will this activity expand the applicant's professional development and expertise as a teacher?
Designers are now required by most employers to know basic coding languages including html and css. Furthermore many client projects also require advanced behavioral elements only achieved by scripting languages. Javascript adds motion and user-driven behaviors to a website otherwise unavailable with basic html and css. As a professional designer, knowing this advanced scripting language adds considerable opportunities to build more dynamic web experiences. With my current skill set it would be an easy step to become a fluent front-end developer by simply adding Javascript to my skills. Unfortunately, the task of learning Javascript would not be possible during the regular school year. With a teaching load of seven courses per year (most of them 5 credits) combined with my creative/scholarly activities and service, the amount of time needed for this course development and skill acquisition simply does not exist.

Learning these scripting languages also expands my expertise as a teacher by increasing the type of projects offered in my web courses as well the capacity to develop other advanced courses. In some projects students are required to use jQuery (a Javascript library, or “abbreviated version” of Javascript) as a substitute for Javascript because of my lack of expertise. Learning this scripting language would allow me to design projects for students that remain current with industry practices and trends.

Will the activity enhance specific courses, the program, or the departmental curriculum?
The grant activity benefits the proposed BFA Seminar by introducing new topics, however it will also significantly contribute to the content taught in DSGN360: Digital Media Design I (web design) and DSGN361: Digital Media Design II (Interactive Design). These current courses, which are offered as part of the regular curriculum, introduce
students to the basics of code and interactive systems; however, there is large demand to incorporate behavioral features into projects later in the quarter.

In addition, the results of this grant will contribute to the expansion the department’s current interactive curriculum. The Department of Computer Science currently offers courses in these topics, however the integration of scripting language into the context of design offers unique and highly polished projects that are born out of both visual and user-centered theory. Working towards a curriculum that offers students the opportunity to take a variety of interactive design courses yields both a competitive and cutting-edge program.

Will the activity enhance student learning and better serve students?
The primary intention of this grant is unquestionably for the betterment of the students. There is often a gap between the computer science and design industries, usually occurring because designers do not share the basic skill sets with. The additional knowledge of scripting languages offered through an advanced web design course means that designers can work more efficiently with developers or can execute the coding themselves. This means greater visibility within the job market. On the conceptual side, students who learn scripting languages will have the ability to think about the web as a medium for deeper storytelling and provide users a dynamic and “felt” experience. The difference is a static or responsive website with standard navigation and content, and a website that is able to respond with an intuitive behavior when the user clicks or scrolls (i.e. animations, transitions, 3d effects). Ultimately, by incorporating this topic into the BFA curriculum, it will increase the qualifications of our graduates into the field of Interaction and Web Design, an industry that is rapidly growing and with not enough talent to fill those jobs.

Does the activity promote the mission of the department, college or university?
This grant proposal supports several key points to Western’s strategic goals including, “Build upon Western’s strengths to address critical needs in the State of Washington.” The state of Washington is the “the fifth fastest growing state in the nation for tech jobs” according to Dice.com. In another article, Brett Thompson, VP of Human Resources at Tableau Software stated, “It’s no secret that Seattle... is suffering from a shortage of tech talent.” This is great news for Western’s design students as they are considered part of this category. The addition of a course focused on advanced web design and scripting languages could be the key maintaining a high rate of alumni success and ensuring that our students achieve “success in an ever-changing world”. Likewise the result of this grant would address the Department of Design’s mission to “develop adaptive learning strategies to sustain successful communication careers in a constantly changing world”.

I thank you for your consideration and hope to have provided enough support for this grant proposal’s contribution to both the curricular needs and student development.