

## Nomination Dossier • Award for Experiential Learning

### 1. TEACHING PHILOSOPHY: HANDS, HEAD, AND HEART

I was given the opportunity to teach as an *undergraduate* student at Brock University, as a teaching and lab assistant for ‘Introduction to Geomatics’. One thing was immediately obvious: I *loved* teaching. Teaching complex computer labs and working to clearly articulate concepts for students helped me learn the discipline. Soon, teaching one lab turned into teaching dozens of labs a year, which motivated me to continue my education—and teaching—throughout graduate school.

I quickly discovered the importance of real-world and applied learning experiences after teaching (too many) computer-based mapping and spatial analysis labs using step-by-step point and click directions. I observed that few students retained the knowledge; they were just going through the motions. I felt compelled to update lab assignments to centre on applied learning objectives—thanks, in part, to a special topics course I took to develop experiential pedagogy in my master’s degree. For example, where previous labs provided steps directions for applying map-based proximity and buffering tools, new labs required students to use proximity and buffering tools to locate a new waste management site.

It was immediately obvious: students learn better when they are actively engaged in the learning experience. The applied labs enriched the quality and breadth of learning, leading to more meaningful and sustained learning outcomes for students. It was a more rewarding teaching experience, too.

So, when I became an assistant professor at the University of Calgary in 2016, I vowed to integrate experiential learning in *all* of my courses. I (re)designed all labs and assignments to be problem-driven rather than task-oriented. I partnered with community organizations, including government (the City of Calgary, City of Chestermere), NGOs and businesses (Sustainable Calgary, AccessNow, The Alex Community Food Centre), and communities across Calgary to develop applied course labs and projects. In these service-oriented examples, students were solving real problems facing these stakeholders.

When given the opportunity to teach the Capstone in Urban Studies (UBST 591) course in 2017—the penultimate course for all urban studies majors—I took it as an opportunity to develop an immersive, course-long project that fully integrates experiential learning. What began as a truly terrifying experience for me—“*is this going to work, is it worth the extra work, what if it doesn’t work out*”—lead to the most rewarding teaching experience for me and the teaching team, a transformative learning experience for the students, and a community impact that will last generations.

In reflecting on this experience and preparing this nomination dossier, I discovered this experiential course is best articulated through my teaching philosophy that—inspired by Parker Palmer’s 1997 ‘The Courage to Teach’—centres the *hands, head, and heart* as the cornerstones of effective learning.

First, I start with the hands of teaching. Engaging the hands is about creating an active, service-based, and work-integrated experiential learning environment. This focus is on **content**; providing relevant subject matter that is academically rigorous and current, while rooted in a solid understanding of key research that has shaped current science, knowledge, and discourse.



Next, is the head of teaching, where the focus is on establishing a structured learning environment that best supports students’ intellectual development. The focus is on **form**; setting clear goals and expectations, and aligning course and program learning outcomes with assessment strategies.



Lastly, effective teaching requires a supportive learning environment—the heart of teaching. I take seriously the responsibility to motivate and engage students, the teaching team, and the community, while challenging learners, exhibiting respect, and continuously reflecting on my teaching motivations.

