My journey toward teaching has been a circuitous one. Having a diverse range of interests in creative modes of expression, my curiosity and experimental nature first propelled me into an unexpected career in television advertising. Mentors in this field taught me the art and purpose of a variety of persuasive techniques through my experience harmonizing video, audio, and print storytelling. The greatest surprise for me, however, was that advertising would lead me to the discovery of my own writing voice; advertising shaped me as a poet.

This unusual vantage point influenced and enhanced my scholarly pursuits. My interest in American experimental writing stems from my own experiments in the advertising realm. Poets ranging from Emily Dickinson and Gertrude Stein to Claudia Rankine and Gwendolyn Brooks demonstrate that new forms possess direct relationship with new conversations. Rather than a relation of consequence, formal experimentation affords new voices the freedom to chart new vocabularies of thought, and new vocabularies stretch and transform the formal constraints of traditional media. My own creative responses have proven invaluable methods to enhance critical understanding of such formally challenging work, and this has become another scholarly preoccupation of mine. My current research is invested in the ways such creative experimentation enhances rhetorical understanding of multimodal communication in a variety of genres.

My professional experience and scholarly pursuits further shape my pedagogical approach; in every classroom, I use experimentation and generic intersection as a means to discovery. Disruption of established thought patterns is one of my imperatives as an educator. My job is to assist students in the art of learning, and that begins with a willingness to unlearn, or to challenge established ideas. Experimentation with form has proven to be useful in meeting this goal. For example, last year, I led students through the basics of advertising practices in order to reinforce rhetoric and its function in all modes of communication composition. This fall, students are working with visual artists and designers in order to better understand the value of narrative as a communication tool. Today, technology affords collaboration that does not require in-person interaction. My students have worked virtually with community partners to address issues such as sustainability and social equity in the local and global community. I assign numerous electronic projects that permit students to work with each other online. Even in traditional classroom situations, I have assigned discussion assignments that are purely held in the digital realm, using Google Docs and social media sites to reinforce the power of online forums. My students have generated and responded to blogs over the course of a semester, requiring the development and maintenance of an electronic community.

As a multimodal literature, communication, and creative writing teacher, I measure my success by the strength of classroom involvement and willingness to experiment coupled with each student’s ownership of individual progress. This can be a challenge, but if I model curiosity and a willingness to be astonished, I create a community willing to do the same. In all of my writing
courses, students design and execute their own portfolio. This reinforces discipline and allows the student the space to explore his or her voice over a sustained period of time and maintain focus on one dedicated project. For my creative writing students, I assign weekly writing prompts focused on specific craft elements and genre techniques. On their own, however, all of my writing students are responsible for a semester-length, independent project of their generic choosing. The skills each student exercises on the weekly assignments feed into the semester-length project and the student ends the semester having created a chapbook, short story collection, memoir, or multimedia project designed, executed, and revised independent of my feedback. I have had students use these projects to win fellowships, internships, and literary prizes. It is gratifying to see their diligent efforts find audience in the wider world.

Writing is an act of process and faith in that process, and I use this as a guiding principle for all of my courses.

Investment in one’s own voice is my ultimate teaching goal. When a student believes in his or her ideas, the desire to articulate them follows. Strong academic communities are borne of constructive communication, and I hold myself responsible for transforming a classroom of individuals into a supportive community of writers. Through innovation and experimentation, my aim is to help students recognize their abilities while challenging and deepening their thinking and writing practices. These values coupled with my unique professional and scholarly history make me a valuable addition to a writing department that values interdisciplinary approaches. When generic boundaries are understood, appreciated, and then permitted the freedom to interact and evolve, innovating teaching practices thrive.