Jason Boumstein

Jason's teaching experience spans a wide range of subjects, including U.S. and world history, geography, architecture, engineering, problem-solving, robotics, interior design, and skilled trades. With a background in design, humanities and political science, his passion eventually led him to full-time design, blending both technical, creativity, humanities and human-centered approaches. He has taught at both junior high and high school levels and values an educational philosophy that prioritizes creativity, innovation, and memorable, real-world learning experiences over rigid lesson planning.

Jason is deeply committed to human-centered design (HCD) and has integrated it into his teaching and facilitation work. He has led numerous design thinking initiatives, including "Arts Revolution," which expanded a traditional fine arts day into interdisciplinary immersions featuring industry experts. His work with industry, high-education universities has helped shape his perspective on HCD and the powerful process behind it. Most of all, he loves engaging students with design challenges that push their thinking, open up their agile thinking and grow in problem-solving process methodology. It's one thing to say you innovate, it's another thing to look beyond your own framework to design the best solution for users.

Beyond the classroom, Jason has facilitated HCD-driven projects in various sectors, including mental health initiatives, many different discipline department retreats, and adaptive design for children with disabilities through the "Go Baby Go" project. His approach emphasizes problem-solving through hands-on experience, collaboration, and iterative thinking. He challenges both students and professionals to align their actions with true human-centered principles, ensuring that solutions remain practical, inclusive, and impactful.

Jason's vision for education extends beyond just using HCD as a tool—he strives to embed its core values into every aspect of learning and community engagement, continuously pushing for authentic, meaningful applications of design thinking.

Mark J. Bowers

Mark Bowers has been teaching at New Trier for 23 years, offering a diverse range of art-related courses, including photography, computer imaging, comic art, animation, painting and drawing, and AP Art. Before pursuing a master's degree in teaching, he worked in museums, but his desire for daily engagement with adolescents in the arts led him to the classroom. His personal artwork is represented by Gallery Victor in Chicago's River North Design District.

As both an artist and educator, Mark is passionate about fostering creativity in students. He believes that truly knowing his students is essential to helping them discover their authentic artistic voices. By understanding their perspectives, experiences, and aspirations, he can guide them in developing an authentically meaningful and personal creative practice.

Mark's approach to teaching evolved through his introduction to human-centered design (HCD) during professional development opportunities. He recognized that many of the creative problem-solving methods he already used aligned with HCD, but the framework provided a more structured way to teach creativity. His teaching now emphasizes idea generation, helping students build confidence in their concepts while exploring connections between process, materials, and meaning. He encourages unique questioning through HCD, using forward-thinking critique and idea-generation methods.

Notable HCD-driven projects include a collaborative student-parent design project based on the school's core values—"Be Brave, Be Kind, Be Proud"—as well as guiding AP students in sustained investigations of deeply personal artistic inquiries. He also led a mural project with graffiti artist Verloe, where students worked together to create a kindness-themed artwork. Looking ahead, he hopes to expand collaborative projects while balancing portfolio requirements with meaningful group work.

Chris Van Den Berg

Chris Van Den Berg has been teaching for 31 years and has taught a wide range of subjects across multiple schools. His teaching experience includes U.S. History, World Geography, World History, Contemporary World History, and Civics. This year, he is teaching modern world history and co-teaching civics.

His interest in human-centered design was sparked during the COVID-19 pandemic when he frequently connected with fellow teacher Mark, who introduced him to a student-centered, empathy-driven teaching model. Mark saw Chris as a teacher who valued relationships with students, and this, along with the involvement of Julie and Jason, helped solidify his commitment to the project. Chris appreciated the alignment between human-centered design and his own teaching philosophy, finding new inspiration later in his career through the collaborative work with these educators. He emphasized that HCD empowers students to take control of their learning, collaborate meaningfully, and approach challenges with new perspectives. The projects consistently produced fresh, innovative ideas, and students were able to experience creativity in ways they hadn't before.

Chris sees great value in Human-Centered Design (HCD) for students, especially in fostering equality and amplifying the voices of all students, not just the most vocal or outgoing. He believes that HCD allows quieter, less vocal students to thrive by tapping into their creativity and providing a space where their contributions are valued.

Within his class, he dove into a large project with a voting unit focused on increasing voter turnout among young people. Providing a space for students to empathize with others around them, taking ownership of the project, to create solutions in collaboration with the League of Women Voters. Additionally, Chris has regularly integrated smaller HCD activities such as empathy mapping, to help students engage with history through contextual empathetic lens.

Julie A. Bar

Julie Bar has been teaching since 2001, starting with seventh-grade math before transitioning to high school, where she has taught Algebra 1, Geometry, and various computer science courses, including AP Computer Science and Intro to Coding and Design Technology. She explored careers in healthcare and business before ultimately deciding on teaching, inspired by her love of math, and a desire to help others.

Her approach to teaching evolved with her exposure to human-centered design (HCD) through Innovation Hub workshops, where she became excited about fostering student agency, teamwork, and problem-solving through real-world applications. She has since implemented HCD in her curriculum by shifting from traditional assignments to projects that address authentic problems. Notable examples include:

- **Attendance Data Project**: AP Computer Science students analyzed real school attendance data, identified trends, and presented insights to the school's attendance committee.
- **Courtyard Project:** Geometry students created blueprints and design solutions for an outdoor research garden, integrating empathy interviews to address practical needs.
- **Cell Phones in Schools:** AP Computer Science students analyzed survey data on cellphones to provide insights for potential school and state policy decisions.

By integrating HCD principles, Julie has transformed her teaching to include new ways to promote student collaboration and problem-solving, ensuring that students engage with meaningful, real-world challenges.