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teaching philosophy

It is my belief that knowledge is a fundamental aspect of the human condition and understanding is made possible through curiosity and creative inquiry. I feel that learning is best achieved in the visual arts through a study of the conventions and traditions that have established a medium with a focus on the contemporary techniques and concepts driving it. In addition to a solid foundation of theory, it is imperative that skills and techniques—traditional as well as contemporary—are honed through investigation, experimentation, and practice. How are we to advance without knowing where we are and where we have been?

The studio classroom is a creative environment that should be built on community, discussion, experimentation, practice, and enthusiasm. While it is my role as a professor to impart knowledge, I believe that an exchange of ideas is more successful than rote learning. Rather than dictate why something is the way it is, I strive to inspire investigation by the students through on going demonstrations and inquiry. Showing a student how to do something and why it is important is far more engaging and effective than simply saying they should know it. As important as the relationship between the student and the professor is, the interaction between peers is invaluable. The breadth of creativity and interests within the classroom environment should be taken advantage of and I feel it is important to encourage students to work together to generate ideas and resolve issues. I believe an excited and creative community that interacts with and learns from each other is essential to fostering and significantly impacts learning.

While theme-based assignments are at times necessary to facilitate the understanding of technique and process, I strive whenever possible to motivate students to explore their own interests and ideas. Experiencing the variety of solutions from classmates to a structured assignment is important and demonstrates that there are always multiple ways, stronger or weaker, to approach a concept. However, I believe it is more important to encourage self-reflection and inquiry into those interests that pique the students' curiosity in order to develop a greater sense of self-reliance and motivation. I also believe that allowing students the freedom to investigate personal interests builds a stronger sense of accountability for their creative decisions.

I want my students to not only learn the course content, but to synthesize it through experience with their interests and goals. I do not want them simply to be able to regurgitate an answer, instead I want them to be able to thoughtfully apply what they have learned in new and challenging situations. It is important to me that students understand the concepts discussed; develop and refine the techniques demonstrated; as well as learn how to think abstractly, creatively, and to develop problem solving skills. Furthermore, I feel it is necessary to realize and consider the connections between the concepts and processes within art and design and those of other disciplines, especially science, mathematics, and history. The visual arts are not an isolated and self-contained practice; they draw much significance from how we experience and understand the world around us and function not only as a means of self-expression but an instrument of social commentary as well.

As conceptual and technical skills are developed it is extremely important for students to cultivate and hone their abilities to meaningfully communicate and discuss ideas. From my experience, this capacity is best strengthened through multiple approaches to critique. Individual discussions with students and progress critiques serve as opportunities to guide the thought process and resolve issues during the production of a work. In contrast, the formal group critique provides the best means for engaging and discussing a student's work and the decisions that they made. I believe a varied method of formal review is most effective and I like to approach each successive critique differently. I prefer to begin with instructor-lead critiques as a way to establish a model by which students can learn the conduct, depth, and significance of meaningful constructive criticism. As the course progresses, I believe that moving from class-lead discussions; to small student group critiques, in which the students are responsible for analyzing a small set of work produced by their classmates and presenting their comments; followed by student-artist lead talks serves to build the skills and confidence to thoughtfully and objectively discuss the formal qualities and conceptual content of artwork.

Lectures and reading assignments are important to convey factual information and establish solid foundations of understanding, but I feel that exploration and hands-on experience are essential to developing a thorough knowledge of a discipline and the application of its concepts and techniques. In an open and respectful community, I feel it is important to promote the exchange of ideas through balanced critique to cultivate the creativity and confidence of learning artists and designers. Establishing an enthusiastic, imaginative, and interactive community is essential to forming a strong and applicable knowledge and skill base in the increasingly diverse student populations of today's dynamic classroom environments.