

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

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I have been privileged throughout my academic career to be exposed to a variety of teaching environments and pedagogical practices: from a broad background at a liberal arts college, to the focus on experimentation and exploration of art school; various learning modalities such as experiential internships, lecture, seminar, and practice-based work in studios; as well as immersion in both US and UK higher educational methodologies. I have also had the opportunity to turn my professional practice as a print and motion graphic designer towards education through my academic research.

This diverse experience allows me to analyze how myself, my peers, and students from a variety of backgrounds respond to each learning modality and apply those lessons to my own teaching. My goal is to teach students to effectively communicate, both through their work, and about it—whether that work is art, design, writing or a combination of media languages.

I strongly believe that one of the keys to this is to recognize that there is no one ‘right’ solution to any problem posed. My students are empowered to bring their own unique insights to the classroom environment, learning as much from each other as they learn from me. I emphasize group critiques where my viewpoint is weighed alongside the views of the student and their peers.

Another key to creating effective communicators is being one myself. I believe that starts with being aware of the assumptions and privileges I bring to my educational encounters and striving to be transparent in my attempts to counteract such biases. There are many different knowledges and ways of understanding and my role is to help students find which work best for them and to encourage those abilities.

My own experience of acculturating from the U.S. liberal arts collegiate environment to the U.K.’s more narrowly focused and independent higher educational system taught me to never make assumptions regarding a student’s or my own understanding of a given cultural environment. It is natural to take for granted the structures inherent in a system we are embedded in, especially when we are not exposed to alternatives. Over the course of my time in Scotland, I have learned that the British university system privileges deep learning over broad exposure to multiple viewpoints we privilege in liberal arts. Experiencing this different pedagogical methodology made me aware of my presumptions. I ensure that students are not only aware of what is being asked for them, but also how their assessment fits into their overarching educational development. I want to make explicit my assumptions and allow students the opportunity to understand the methodology behind student learning objectives.

Assessment is a crucial part of the educational process, and I am aware that students come to higher education with diverse learning styles that do not all benefit equally by any one method of testing. I incorporate a variety of formative as well as summative assessments for students to articulate their mastery of key concepts; students are asked to submit written critical reflection, practical exercises and contribute to class discussions. Any single aspect of these methods may not suit a given student’s learning style, but taken as a whole, the student is able to exhibit their knowledge while developing skills and confidence communicating in each medium.

Each group of learners is unique, so I make sure to check-in with the class throughout the semester to make sure that the methods I am using resonate with that particular cohort through exercises like stop-start-continue, and project wrappers. Project wrappers and rubrics also allow students to self-reflect on their learning and provide indirect measures to assess how well the program is addressing learning outcomes. I find students engage deeply with practical work where they can ground theory in concrete application, and so I always integrate some form of project-based learning.

I am particularly interested in making sure that lessons from the classroom relate to students’ professional goals and overall learning experience. By surveying students’ goals and competencies

at the start of the semester, I can tailor the experience in the classroom to be as productive for the group as possible. I make sure to stress to students that while they are learning technical skills in the classroom, the objective is never to learn a program for the sake of mastering the software. The objective is for them to have another tool with which to achieve their, or their client's, communication goals.

It is my role to encourage students' analytical skills through a guided examination of an archive of canonical work, and their own subsequent application of this critical rubric to their own, and classmates', projects. Often, it is easier to objectively look at the work of their peers or of past masters than it is to take a step back from the work they are personally invested in. By looking at the work of others with attention to detail, students can turn the same attention to their work and view it with a more critical eye.

Students must develop confidence not just in the choices made in their work, but in their ability to articulate these choices to a group of peers, in preparation for co-workers and clients. They often find themselves at a loss as to how to communicate their intentions in verbal and written language initially. This is not simply a matter of learning vocabulary, but also of developing the ability to critically engage with communications problems in order to understand underlying structures and analyze the effectiveness of a solution.

In order to fully understand the structures we use to communicate, students must be exposed to a wide range of artistic voices. In selecting examples, I strive to be inclusive of minority and under-represented viewpoints. Exposing students to a wide range of artistic voices, especially from minority and under-represented backgrounds, my students are challenged to explore ways of seeing that are different from their own. Simultaneously, every student can see themselves contributing to a shared continuum.

I am open to feedback from students and my peers in order to more fully meet the needs of the full cohort of students. For example, I wanted to encourage more students to engage with discussion during a workshop I was giving. I approached a colleague who had many years of teaching experience. She suggested that during the upcoming group critique, I ask the students to place their work on a central table and encourage students to take five minutes before coming together to make one note about each of the other student's work. That way, students who are anxious when put on the spot have something to help them focus their thoughts and can contribute more. This technique aids students who may not otherwise have the confidence to speak out, without taking anything away from more verbally engaged students. This is something I have integrated into other situations, especially when I have a cohort who is more reticent to communicate during critiques. I have also broken critiques down into small groups so that students who feel anxiety when speaking in a public environment can work on their skills with lower stakes, and build up to full class presentations.

In order to engage students in learning objectives, I deliver classes through multiple delivery channels. While lectures may be an appropriate way to cover key topics, I always include time for discussion to encourage student ownership of the material. There may be a more formal seminar discussion of pre-assigned reading material, or a more conversational discussion of how they can apply these topics beyond the classroom. Workshop or studio-based lessons interspersed throughout the semester can be used to integrate course goals with student's practical work and open their processes to external stimuli. By utilizing a range of teaching, engagement and assessment tools, I hope to provide a robust learning environment that provides effective access to knowledge for every student.

