

Teaching Philosophy

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I have been privileged to benefit from personalized attention and small student-to-teacher ratios throughout my entire education. As an educator in art and design, I want to maintain cooperative and creative environments where I can provide as much individualized attention as possible. Creating an intimate supportive environment in which to give regular and constructive feedback is critical to the role of a facilitator in creative education. I want students to develop simultaneously as educators and strong communicators, because I imagine expertise in all of the members of a learning community, not simply in the instructor. Additionally, I want my classroom content to be as diverse in its scope as possible, so that diverse student bodies see themselves included in the art and artists about which they learn. I am committed to making peer review, critical thinking, and effective communication the foci of the “creative classroom” in which I teach.

I like to build a rapport with my students in order to understand what they find comfortable and what they find challenging. Through intimate and sustained interactions, I aim to surface students’ existing knowledge and then encourage them to reflect upon, assess, and strengthen this knowledge. I help students identify their strengths and recognize that which they bring to the classroom, and I ask them to also exchange this knowledge with their peers through similar interactions. Typically, in a studio class I will regularly meet with each student on an individual basis to discuss, first, their objectives for the class and, later, their approaches to, and reflections on, each project. I have students then share this information as a group throughout the term, to build a collective understanding of the expertise and interests in the room. In larger classroom settings, I would try to break students into groups that work in and outside of the classroom, and meet with them in order for connections to be built between students as well as with me.

To cultivate students’ abilities to give and receive critical feedback to each other, and to become mutual partners in learning and teaching, I design a variety of exercises that put students in contact with each other. One peer review exercise I use is the “project trade”, where two students pair off and interview each other about their work. The first step is interviewing each other through a set of questions I generate in advance. For example, if the project asks a student to deal with the concept of memory through any media, the questions might ask the student to explain how their use of materials, color, scale, or time responded to that conceptual prompt. Then, each student trades projects and presents the project back to the original artist using the explanation just given, until both feel comfortable in a mutual understanding of the project. As each student is asked to demonstrate the connections between the concepts she explored and the creative decisions she made, the other student must be an active and engaged listener and be able to understand the process her partner went through. The final step is for each student to present her own original work in a full class critique. This allows everyone to witness and comment upon the variety of approaches to an assignment, and it allows me as the instructor to evaluate their work.

I encourage my students to develop skills of reflective judgment and effective communication, and to see this as crucial to their creative process and production. When I ask students to develop conceptual frameworks and draw upon theory, I make sure students see how these skills can be useful outside of the classroom. To that end, I ask students to develop articulate assessments and presentations of their own work. I frame each project with the expectation that students should see explicit connections between the original assignment and their creative decisions in response—and be able to articulate their reasoning verbally and in writing. As students build a creative project through conceptual exploration, they need the confidence to translate their intentions to a wider audience. To ensure that students are prepared to articulate their ideas in advance, I assign students a self-assessment exercise before we gather in a traditional in-class critique, wherein they write answers to a set of evaluative questions drawn directly from the objectives of the original project proposal. For example, if a graphic design project asks a student to create a template for a bus route mapping system, questions might focus on how the student accounted for the multiple variables to consider in producing such a system, such as user, budget, and production considerations. From these questions, I ask students to build a one-minute presentation for intermediary and final critiques, and during those critiques, I make sure that each student addresses these questions directly. They develop confidence and an attention to brevity and clarity, useful in any environment. To measure the efficacy of a student's presentation, I complement the group critique by meeting with students individually to review their answers and discuss the strength of their work as well as any discrepancies they found when evaluating their own work.

I expect to encounter students who represent a variety of differences in backgrounds, experiences, and learning styles, and as a woman of color, I am additionally sensitive to the importance of diversity in course content as well. This sensitivity drives my emphasis on individualized attention and evaluation, and my commitment to intensive collaborative learning. In addition to regular individual meetings in which we set goals, I try to expose students to other artists' responses to the same themes that we might be exploring in class. When looking at a broad range of artists and art, students can begin to position themselves as artists contributing to that same history. Additionally, when I increase the demographic diversity of the artists to whom they are exposed, more students can see themselves included in the canon. Furthermore, I believe that a transparency of expectations is critical to engaging different types of learners, so I share with students the questions that I would use to evaluate work to students and I explain my rationale at the beginning of the project itself. Finally, to engage students who learn and produce in different ways, I emphasize my students to share both their process and their outcomes with each other, so that they become exposed to the variety of possible responses to creative prompts instead of narrowly imagining the existence of one right answer. My process of evaluation is not to compare students to each other, but rather to evaluate a student's progress from the beginning of the term to the end.