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Teaching Philosophy

Over the past five years, I have taught studio, technical skill-based and theoretical courses at North Carolina State University's College of Design as an Assistant Professor of Art+Design. Studio courses have been primarily comprised of Art+Design studio major students. While technical and theoretical courses have been a homogenous mix of students from across campus including business, engineering and humanities students interested in the course topic. I have embraced this diversity within these courses and have encouraged students to discuss the course topics from the viewpoint of their own discipline and have designed projects to take advantage of this diversity. Each time the conversations and class dynamics have always been richer for it. Additionally, this has allowed me to grow as a professor and shape my teaching to appeal to a broader reach of students. It has offered a unique challenge to disseminate knowledge and spark interest within a broad group of students while maintaining the academic rigor needed for the Art+Design students for which the courses were originally designed.

In studio-based courses, I encourage students to focus on the process of their making and research, in addition to physical construction of their artwork. Students are encouraged to explore what influences them and express themselves both through the creation of artistic work and through written reflections and discussion. Making is an important part of studio work. In the physical creation of samples and artifacts theoretical concepts come to life. These pieces can be used as a discussion point to critically evaluate the research, process and expression of the student artist. I challenge students to approach their materials with a critical eye and an adventurous spirit. Emphasizing theoretical and historic research provides students with the opportunity to build a solid conceptual framework for their artwork and to better understand their own work within the context of their chosen medium. Within studio-based courses, I stress the importance of a creative design process that provides enough guidance that students have a process framework and enough security that it enables them to push beyond creative challenges to discover something truly unique and innovative. Students are instructed in refining their craft to better enable them to communicate their conceptual ideas. The balance of fine craft and solid concept allows artistic expression to be clearly communicated. By challenging students to research in a broad variety of mediums, students are able to connect conceptual trends across disciplines and better formulate their own unique voice within the medium of their choice.

Technical skill-based and theoretical courses serve as a foundation for studio-based students and provide an opportunity for collaboration with non-studio students. As part of this intellectual support system, I feel it is important to present a balance of historic and contemporary resources. Students need to understand the cultural, social, economic and philosophical issues that have shaped art throughout history while also seeing the contemporary relevance and interpretation of concepts. This balance of the historic and the contemporary enables me to reach a broader population of students and allows the students to reach beyond their identified interests. One way to accomplish this within a course is by incorporating local exhibitions and events that the students can attend extending the concepts of the course. Artist and curator talks from notable museums are incorporated into course assignments via digital media and contemporary articles. This introduces students to influential people in the art community and important exhibitions and museums regardless of their ability to physically visit them.

I set high expectations for myself and encourage the students to do the same. I strongly believe that you cannot expect students to maintain a high quality of work if you do not model this yourself. For this reason, I create handouts that are very thorough for each demonstration and lecture so the students have a summary of topics discussed and guidance for further learning on the subject. I provide a comprehensive list of resources, designers, artists and exhibitions that are utilizing the skills the course topic addresses so students can see how others are addressing the same information, both historically and in contemporary work. I utilize a mix of digital and traditional materials and resources and stress the importance of primary research if it is possible. There is not an article, book or website that remotely comes close to the multi-sensory experience of viewing art in person.

I feel that it is vitally important to maintain an encouraging and congenial environment for students. I have found that the best studio environments are ones where everyone's views were welcomed. I hope to cultivate an open atmosphere wherever I teach, ensuring students the freedom to address concepts of both universal and personal topics. Most importantly, I hope that my enthusiasm for art and design is recognized by the students and serves to energize the classes each semester. I incorporate my design process, influences and travels into courses. I openly share the extensive research that has gone into many of my pieces and how I have worked through issues that were difficult to resolve. I feel strongly that to have enthusiastic students that I need to show them how excited I am about art and design and about their ideas. I love the unexpected nature of teaching and the fact that you can share the same topic with a group of students and each one takes that topic into a different direction. I learn by paying attention to the varied discourse in the class. By showing the students that I am constantly learning and growing, they seem to be more open to do the same.