

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY AND METHODOLOGIES

I teach a wide array of courses in the Art Department: studio and seminar courses in contemporary art, art history, art theory, curatorial practice, and contemporary gallery practice. Studio courses and seminar courses require different pedagogies and methodologies. I also consider that I am teaching undergraduate students in a liberal arts university. My teaching philosophy is structured accordingly, and would be different for graduate students, or for students who were attending an art school specifically.

TEACHING CONTEMPORARY ART:

When teaching contemporary art, it is my philosophy that students should be rigorous, dedicated, exploratory and progressive thinkers in their physical and intellectual approaches to artmaking. It is crucial that they understand the history of their discipline as well as the state of contemporary thought and practice; that they consider past and present alike, when making their projects and conducting research. If one knows the progression of thought that comprises the foundation and history of their field of study, they can use that foundation to build upon a contemporary practice that propels their area of study (or creativity) to the next level of discourse and creation. I believe in an engaged and socially conscious practice--a studio practice that is informed by the history of performance art, public practice, social engagement, and relational aesthetics. The artist of today is one who actively utilizes the social, technological, and informational resources at their disposal to create a conscientious and discursive body of work (art) that reflects the social, political, and aesthetic concerns of the community around them (be it a local or global community). I want my students to have passion about the projects they make; to feel empowered by knowledge as they use history and theory to create more complex and engaging works; to feel a sense of responsibility to their field and to their community; and to create bodies of work that contribute to the phenomenological, intellectual, and physical progress of our society. Put simply, I do not want my students to merely make pretty paintings because they feel like it. I want them to make artworks that engage and challenge the paradigms of history, politics, science, art, philosophy – the paradigms of *culture* as we know them.

I also know that not all of my students aim to be professional artists. Regardless of their professional objectives, I aspire to teach them to consider art as a tool for creative thinking and problem solving across disciplines. Through my classes and pedagogies I want my students to learn to be life-long autodidacts, and to use cultural and intellectual curiosity to guide and inspire innovative ideas, projects and life choices. I want my students to learn to recognize their physical, social, and intellectual environments as resources and to use art and critical thinking as a means of identifying and extracting creative potential from those environments.

IN THE CLASSROOM:

While it is important to customize the content of each syllabus to the type of class being offered, there are pedagogical ideas and concerns that can be applied to all class types. I strive to incorporate assignments and modes of instruction that accommodate as many learning types as possible (considering Howard Gardner's nine multiple intelligences – logical

mathematical, kinesthetic, naturalistic, etc.). I also structure my classes so that the content of the individual assignments as well as the overall course provide micro and macro models for the learning domains of Bloom's taxonomy, as they progress from receiving and remembering knowledge through to analyzing synthesizing, evaluating and creating.

It is my objective to create classes that engage progressive and increasingly complex levels of learning and knowledge application. I also believe that the overall curriculum of the art department should progress that way as well, beginning with courses that are designed to introduce students to information, ideas, and genres of thought, and increasing the level of discourse and intellectual independence to include synthesis and analysis as students move through the curriculum. It is very important for students of the visual arts to have exposure to artists and art institutions that support and teach art. As a professor of issues in contemporary arts, I think it is ever important to emphasize both conceptual and practical aspects of the art world, and to provide students with the tools necessary for applying the theoretical knowledge learned in class to the 'real world', practical applications outside of the classroom. Students in both my seminar/lecture classes and my studio classes are required to visit museums and galleries, to attend class field trips, and to have visiting artists speak to them in class.

Students must first learn the language of their discipline within the studio arts. Through foundation classes, students will learn the history and vocabulary of different disciplines. As they move through the curriculum, students begin to develop a personal style, and will learn to articulate the ways in which their artistic practice fits in with the larger dialogue of art history and critical theory. While some of my studio classes addresses particular mediums – video or performance, for example – many of the are post-modern, post-studio classes, which mean that the methodology and ideology surrounding the production of artworks privileges the concept over the material. Students are encouraged to develop an identity and a practice as artists, articulating a theoretical and conceptual direction, and *then* identifying the materials they wish to use in order to best express their concepts. They are encouraged to work in an interdisciplinary manner, incorporating all physical media – video, performance, sculpture, installation, painting, etc. – as well as critical theory into their works.

There are theoretical as well as practical aspects to studying and making art which students should learn during their coursework. They should understand and be able to articulate their own creative process. Students should be able to write clearly and critically about their work, relating it to contemporary and historical art movements. Students should understand how to administer, participate in, and receive an effective and critical assessment of their work in the form of a group critique. This requires students to divorce themselves from the subjective and emotional experience of the art, and understand how to apply formal and theoretical concerns to their creations. By the end of their coursework in visual arts, students should be well-prepared to move on to the next step – employment, graduate school, or professional work as a visual artist, art educator, curator, etc. Such preparation means that students must know how to write an artist's statement, document their work, compile and present a professional portfolio, and write an artist's resume.

For studio classes I use a combination of workshops and demonstrations to teach technical skills, lectures and screenings to expose students to historical and contemporary corollaries to the ideas that we're studying or striving for in the assignments, exercises to practice technical

skills, and progressively complex project assignments to explore ideas and skills simultaneously. Students are then asked to present, critique, and write about their own and each others' works. I assign numerous small in-class exercises and 3-5 larger projects throughout the course of the semester. When larger projects are presented, students receive a group critique, in which whole class participates in a discussion and analysis of the work. We discuss the perception of the project as the viewer's experienced it, the intentions of the artist, and the relevant precedents in art history that might affect the interpretation of the piece. We discuss the formal choices that the student has made, as they relate to the conceptual components of the work. My critique structure models that of the faculty review that students receive during the Junior and Senior Exhibitions. Students are graded using the Studio Art Grading Guidelines that have been agreed upon by the Art Department.

Students are asked to share their artistic process leading up to each assignment or project. They are required to keep a sketchbook and to write and draw in it every day, and to make sketches and proposals for each project. These must be turned in with each main project. I also ask students to write about each piece, using critical language akin to the language expected of them in their Junior and Senior exhibition statements. Each student in my studio classes is asked to keep a portfolio of their exercises, final projects, and written statements. The final portfolio is compiled as a digital folder which may be shared with faculty and other students, but which also may take the form of a blog or a physical book.

It is important to me that I utilize the current and pervasive resources and technologies that surround the study and production of contemporary art. The shifting structures of digital technologies and social media have had a profound impact upon the way that I teach, and the expectations that I have of my students. The results of attachment parenting and the consequential characteristics and learning styles of the generation of "Millennial" students requires an increasingly inclusive and engaging pedagogical approach in the classroom. With each new evolution of social media and Web 2.0, I modify my teaching style, assignments, and expectations of students. I require students to use 'real' books as well as digital resources; I assign blogs and discussion boards online as a means of assessment; I incorporate digital portfolios and print on demand books as part of their final projects. As students are fact checking in 'real time' in the classroom, the language and style with which I conduct and report on my own research has shifted to accommodate the expectation that there will be a simultaneous discussion about history, facts, and reality of the information that I am presenting, as I am presenting it. As it becomes less important for me to deliver rote facts and data (students can Google those as I lecture), it is increasingly important for me to help them build critical thinking skills. The lower levels of blooms taxonomy are accounted for by apps on their smart phones. The higher order levels – synthesis, analysis, evaluation – are satisfied by interactive class activities and project assignments, critiques, and written analysis.

Modes of evaluation for Studio Classes:

These categories are discussed in the statement above. Students are assessed on the thoroughness, complexity, and ingenuity of their projects, from inception to final critique. They are expected to address both physical and conceptual aspects of their work, evidencing awareness of the history and theories of their chosen medium and topics.

Exercises
Projects
Written assignments
Sketchbooks

Group Critiques
Final Portfolios
Class Participation

Modes of evaluation for Seminar and Lecture Classes:

Individual Progress and Improvement For seminar and lecture classes I utilize power point slide lectures, group discussions, written assignments, individual presentations, field trips, visiting artists, in-class reviews, quizzes, midterm, and final exams. It is important that students develop a perspective as critical readers and writers, able to assess both style and content of the writings that they are assigned to read. My assignments are also structured to assess their level of comprehension, their writing skills and critical analysis of works of art, art movements, and theoretical perspectives in the 20th and 21st centuries.

In-class participation
Student presentations
Written Assignments
Quizzes

Midterm Exam
Final Exam
Final Project or Paper

GENERAL TEACHING OBSERVATIONS:

While there have been challenges in growing and implementing the New Genres curriculum (lack of space, equipment, scheduling consistency, and course release for curriculum development), the new BFA curriculum has integrated New Genres as an equal and important part of the coursework that students are required to complete. I feel that I have been successful in introducing a language of contemporary art into my classes and curricula. This has contributed to the expansion of the BA and BFA programs in the Art Department, and has broadened the vocabulary of the students in these programs. I feel that the classes that I was most successful at (New Genres, Contemporary Gallery Practice, Art Since 1970) were those that most directly relate to my area of expertise.

