

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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My classroom is the platform for students to learn, to express their personal aesthetic through their work, to engage in dialog and critiques, and to develop themselves as creative professionals. I want the classroom experience to allow each student to develop their internal creative resources and to broaden their perspective of the world, their chosen art form, and the relationship between the two. It is my hope that students come to feel as though we are working together, and I work to foster that climate in the classroom. Encouraging participation through inclusive discussion and discourse is essential in order for students to fully engage in class and to gain experience in expressing themselves and communicating their ideas.

In terms of teaching practices, I have worked to find a balance between practice and theory, as well as a balance between modes of delivering course content: lecture, discussion, and practicum. Studio classes are primarily focused on visual media production practices, artistry, and craft; and theory and history are important components as they provide context and understanding of the “how and why” behind the practice. In examining the theory and history of the moving image, students gain a better understanding of and grounding in the foundations of the art form that serve as *primary informative forces* in their work. Examining *why* we use certain tools and techniques, and *how* they evolved, rather than focusing exclusively on teaching craft and technical practice, provides students insight, reveals meaning, and helps them to better grasp course content, concepts and application sink in better. For example, there is a connection made with writing students when they come to understand subtext and how to make it work in a script; that we *don't* write is just as important as what we write. It is essential to their work that they develop the editorial skills. Connections occurs in video editing when a student puts two disconnected images together for the first time to establish an entirely new meaning – they see the power in putting the tools and techniques into practice in an informed way to tell a story, and in ways that allow them to express their ideas and personal vision.

I have learned to take nothing for granted when it comes to students. Every student is different, and it has been important for me to recognize these differences, and to take them into account when teaching. All students are of course required to follow the syllabus, complete their assignments on time, and show up for class. Understanding their backgrounds and knowledge levels allows me to adapt to better serve my goal of communicating the material – to be a better teacher. A group of students may be comprised of visual, auditory and kinesthetic learners. Being sensitive to these differences has helped me to improve my teaching effectiveness and to become more flexible in my approach to teaching course material. I worked one semester with an animation student “on the spectrum,” challenged by a number of learning disabilities, who had struggled in many courses. In spending time with this student and analyzing our interactions, I was able to adapt my teaching style to better convey course content without negatively affecting the learning experience for the other students. This student made progress and illustrated a better understanding of the process and elements of visual narrative. It was exciting to see the progress. It has been a learning experience for me as well.

When it comes to working with first-years and sophomores, I find a fair amount of imitation in their work, and in the kind of work they want to make. I encourage them to understand that imitation is a way *into* learning, and that they will come to develop their own style and approaches to making through their unique perspective and manipulation of the medium. Getting them on this path early can have significant positive impact, and can jumpstart development of their skills and creative voice. As

students move into more advanced territory, I encourage them to stretch themselves and their creative process through experimentation by pushing themselves in new ways, by trying new things, whether those things are in a creative direction or simply working with new tools – *take risks*. Many students are afraid to make mistakes, and I strive to get them to see mistakes as learning opportunities - *failures are as important as successes in the learning process*. Through mistakes, we discover what did not work, and then move forward to find another solution or approach.

Guiding students through the process of conceptualization, critical thinking and preparation, execution, and reflection is essential to my teaching process. This goes hand in hand with mentoring them toward an understanding that art and design are often iterative processes. In ideation and execution, we create more work that what will make its way into the final project. It is important for them to become comfortable with the idea that their first effort is not the *final* effort. In practice, this may mean a student creates many storyboards or designs in pre-production to refine an idea, shooting camera tests in order to find the best shooting style and camera, or learning a new technology that will allow them to take their work in a new direction. For students, time is their currency, and my hope is that I can guide them to understand the importance of investing their time in a meaningful way toward development of their art and craft.

Students and beginning filmmakers often struggle with identifying intent in their work - answering the “why” question. I don’t propose to give them the answer. Discussions of intent, meaning, and thematic unity are key to my teaching, just as they are keys to cinema and other art forms. I encourage students to research subjects that interest and inspire them, asking the questions, “*What are you passionate about? What is important to you as a storyteller and a human being?*” - to look at what has come before, and to research their craft through experimentation; again, to *take risks*. It may take shape in a student approaching challenging subject matter that is important to them, and may push them a little out of their comfort zone. It may be the student who takes on the challenge of a particularly difficult technical or stylistic approach where the risk comes in the form of their schedule, available resources, and completing the work on time. Whatever the case, my goal is to be supportive in their endeavors as they grow and develop as artists, designers, and storytellers.

I am a lifelong learner and storyteller. I teach from a perspective defined by those roles. It is essential that my passion for the connection between art, design, meaning, and the human experience be reflected in the classroom. As I am engaged in my own practice, I am continually inspired to share my experiences and commitment to film production, and meaningful storytelling with young filmmakers. I endeavor to encourage and inspire them to find their own connection to the art form. And in turn, I am inspired by students’ energy, engagement, creativity, and seeing the artistic process through their fresh eyes. In the classroom, we work together to find answers and to discover the connections between the work, process, theory, and practical application. Seeing students make the discovery is but one of the many reward of teaching.



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