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Teaching Philosophy

Everyone can be a successful student artist. It requires training and practice, motive, and the right medium. I approach this concept by holding my students to high standards of excellence and participation. My students are expected to be in every class, hand in assignments on time, revise where needed, and participate in all discussions. Because I develop assignments that build on one another, students are slowly introduced to art concepts and must master those concepts before moving on to the next. For example, my Two Dimensional Design students must master mixing gray values before mixing colors in varied values. They start with standardized compositions before introducing their own design ideas and style. I motivate students by offering incentives for future projects; if they complete a project requiring cut paper and show they understand how colors relate to one another, they can move on to direct painting for the next assignment. Students also learn that critiquing and revising is part of the artistic process; artists must be open to criticism, think critically about other artworks, and revise their work when it isn't reaching its full potential.

Making mistakes can be productive for learning. My students are encouraged to cut shapes to play with composition and color placement before deciding on a final design. This allows them to feel free to try anything without feeling like they will “mess it up.” I ask students to provide feedback to each other in the middle of an assignment by holding critiques, providing critique worksheets, or by grouping students together for discussion. This helps students get out of their personal space and think critically about how to help each other master the techniques at hand. Students then have time to revise and we hold a class critique at the end of an assignment to evaluate how well it fulfills all of the project goals.

Class critique is our major opportunity to use art vocabulary and analyze artworks and, as such, is included in the participation grade. I provide each student with a rubric before they turn in the assignment, so they are aware of what criteria I will be assessing. Practicing artists must consider how their work is presented so, to form good habits, presentation is weighed about as much as adhering to assignment objectives. Presentation includes neatness and how well formatting directions are followed. Objectives vary from assignment to assignment, but always include benchmarks in composition, use of hue, value, and saturation, and creating movement and depth in an image. Students learn what is expected in these areas, and work to improve their skill with each assignment. They are often inspired by the success of other students, challenging themselves to push further.

Looking at all forms of art and looking in person, beyond the classroom, is crucial for students to become motivated, inspired, and well rounded in their perspective of art. I organize frequent studio visits for my Two Dimensional Design students. We visit graduate students on campus working in all forms of media and visit exhibitions at the University Museum. I encourage my students to attend visiting artist lectures and go to exhibitions beyond the university and offer a small amount of extra credit for doing so. Keeping them updated on local art events ensures that they are aware of the many opportunities in the arts in our area. I want to expose my non-art major students to as many forms of art as possible in our time together because I know this may be the last structured experience in visual art they receive. Many students become frustrated with 2D media because they feel they “can’t” draw or paint. I try to emphasize that everyone can do it with practice and patience. I have experience with video editing programs and photoshop, as well as performance and installation art, so my personal experience has shown me that drawing connections between 2D media and other media can be beneficial to all artists. I even try to make some of my assignments digital to introduce other 2D media.

Walking into my classroom, you would see students working at their own pace, researching, planning, and making artworks. I want the content of my courses to encourage my students to start looking at the visual world around them with a critical eye. How do things they see make them feel, how do those things affect their day to day interactions, are they aware of how advertising targets them through visual processes, and what do they now notice in their environment that they didn’t see before? Making these connections and observations is an important part of being aware of art’s potential. A student in my 2D design class recently came up to me while working on her color wheel and exclaimed, “I noticed that different lighting affects the way the colors look! If I am working on this at home, it looks entirely different than it does here.” What a great observation! Students also learn how to balance intensive course loads with their other responsibilities, which is something artists deal with regularly as they create art while juggling jobs, family, and other responsibilities.

The ideas and perspectives of every student matter and contribute to the diversity of the classroom experience. Everyone has an equal opportunity to share their opinion, whether in a traditional critique format, or in written or partner feedback. Students work at their own pace and receive individual instruction in addition to instruction given to the entire group. They often have the freedom to select topics and artists of interest to them to explore in their artwork. My students are diverse in major, experience, age, race, sex, and artistic ability and every single student has valuable ideas to contribute to the class’s understanding of any given topic or artwork. Sometimes I provide opportunities for them to sit in different groupings so they can get to know other students better and respect their ideas. The key philosophy that guides my teaching is the belief that every student matters and can be successful in the arts.