

Teaching & Research Philosophy

As a Graphic Design educator, I believe in an integrated approach to teaching formal, technical, and conceptual skills in order to develop highly skilled and knowledgeable students. Students must have a solid foundation in traditional art skills, composition, typography, art and design history, and photography, as well as an understanding of research methods and the ability to work through a range of solutions. Throughout the curriculum, I teach students to develop these fundamental visual and critical skills, while taking on more complex problems as they advance in their coursework. I am equally at home working in various different media – from print to interactive to video – and, while each medium may have specifics to consider, I believe that well-prepared designers with strong conceptual foundations are capable of moving between and integrating these different media in their work. As the field changes and expands, it will become more important for design students and practitioners to have a broader understanding of communication media and related concepts and technologies.

My approach in the classroom is one of balance, keeping in mind both the objectives of the course, program requirements, and demands of the discipline. At the beginning of each project, students in my courses spend time analyzing, questioning, clarifying, and researching the messages and objectives for the project they will develop. I encourage them to see the importance of contemporary art and design, art and design history, and to draw on these and other related resources to develop their ideas. I believe it is important for students to explore what design means and how it functions in the world today, so I foster research and discussion to this end. In addition, I encourage students to continue to learn and apply design concepts and principles as they explore and put their own ideas into practice. I find that a balance between the two yield the best results. Living only by the rules does not encourage creativity and, perhaps even worse, students don't learn to think for themselves. Their work should not be formulaic nor will they learn to adapt the rules from one situation to the next.

Students and designers working today need have a broad understanding of design, the ability to work intuitively, flexibly, and integrate a range of knowledges into their work. To achieve this, I provide them with the opportunity to explore their own ideas, which I hope is an important reason why they want to be graphic designers in the first place. I believe that there are hundred of good solutions, not just one and students needed to explore them by both following the rules and invention at the same time. In addition, I require students plan their projects, and apply traditional design skills in their sketches before sitting in front of the computer to design. However, computer technology is both a production tool as well as a partner in the design process. Having experience teaching and designing in a multimedia context, I believe it imperative that students feel they have both an understanding of and control over their work. Technical ability should not be subsumed to other areas but is critically important to the student's development as a designer.

I believe that a historical understanding of graphic design history is crucial to being an effective designer. Students can still learn a great deal from the philosophy and work of early modern pioneers from the Bauhaus, Constructivist, and Dada movements as they continue to speak to many of the issues we encounter as designers today. The post WWII periods is also significant in order to understand the relevancy of contemporary design standards and how design has contributed to cultural and economic development. This is one of the reasons that projects referencing design history are included in my courses. For instance, an oral or written presentation, supplemented by a project provides a foundation for understanding the specific topic. Connecting multiple projects in a public forum begins to shape all of the students' conception of design and demonstrates how design projects are not isolated by interconnected and shape our world.

Finally, I encourage a broad range of critical thinking through research as well as discussion and critique. The classes I teach are highly interactive in this sense. In addition to sharing research, students are encouraged to honestly and constructively approach the critique process. This is not only important to improving the work, but aids in articulating the project concepts – skills that are invaluable in the professional arena. I think that by developing the skills that I mentioned above, students will be equipped to develop into successful design practitioners.