

STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

“Good Teaching is more a giving of right questions than a giving of right answers”
Joseph Albers

“When the outcome drives the process we will only ever go to where we’ve already been.”
Bruce Mau

Let us begin at the end and consider what precisely I want my students to leave the classroom with on the final day. I find myself frequently repeating phrases like: “I care more about you leaving here with work that you feel excited about (and represents growth for you), than I do on how strictly you adhere to my prescribed assignments.” Absolving undergraduates from the High School

mentality of pleasing the teacher, I try to play more closely to their strengths and interests. Students will rise or fall to the level that is expected of them, so I treat every student like an adult. I assume each one is coming into my class with distinct creative trajectories and media that they are most comfortable with. My goal is that of a facilitator and enabler. Depending on the nature of course, we are there to learn new skills and consider how specifically each student can apply newly wrought knowledge to their own, personal studio practice, despite how they identify themselves. Perhaps along the way, I can also open them up to new production strategies, new venues for distributing and exhibiting their work or cross-talk challenges from neighboring creative fields.

When I look back on my own college experience the most valuable thing I learned was not a technical trade that goes obsolete after the next software update, but more hard-won lessons on how to approach learning as an ongoing practice. I recall building my first major interactive installation, under the tutelage of artist Golan Levin. When he lauded the outcome, I shyly guffawed, claiming that he helped me so much there was no way I could have executed it on my own. To this he replied simply: “Well, you asked good questions.” This was the first time in my academic career that it seriously occurred to me that even though I was able to implement my idea technically with assistance, the real take-away was how best to find resources and seek out appropriate, guiding questions. Now that I am on the other side of the equation, I try to channel these memories and anticipate what guiding questions can be helpful to my own students.

The way I see it, for any given course we are engaging in two interlaced processes: learning new knowledge (usually technical but also observing successful practices of strong artists and designers) and learning skills (methodologies and strategies for best applying that knowledge). In terms of technical knowledge, I have experience with most digital editing tools for still image and video as well as authoring custom software. I also have experience teaching physical computing, electronics, construction and mechanical/kinetic courses. Conceptually, I try to pull back and focus less on teaching a specific piece of software and more about what skills are actually at work. For example, I wouldn’t consider *Photoshop* to be the topic of my course but rather, an exploration of manipulating images. Instead of *Processing/Java programming*, I would consider the course to be about procedural literacy and how those skills can transfer to visual strategies and other programming environments. I draw this technical knowledge from much deeper sources than textbooks and tutorials. I teach directly from my own learned experiences and often bring in pieces of my own projects to demonstrate such topics as designing for permanence and what to be careful of during installations or public works. My CV contains a more detailed list of the exact courses I have taught and projects I have completed.

As a facilitator, I help guide their conceptual direction by asking them to defend their interests and put their decision making to language and justify it, rather than allowing them to run with arbitrary choices. I can show them similar works as reference and inspiration. If I'm going to assume that my students are capable adults though, then it is not entirely their concepts that I worry about. More often than this, I find issue with their ability to structure and direct their time and talents. For this reason, bringing an iterative, design methodology into an art classroom is a skill I try to encourage undergraduate art students to try. To do this, we simply examine what is truly essential for a work to effectively communicate. We separate *Step 1s* from *Step 10s*. We begin with contextual research and background proposals. I sometimes review early stage work in "micro-group" critiques, where I combine 3-4 different students at a time. I have found students speak more in intimate groups. This also opens up each student to more opinions than just my own (but not too many that they feel they become overwhelmed). Then we advance to prototyping ideas with fast, cheap, accessible materials. Then we work on the technical challenges out of context, finally finding a confluence of these stages that works for each student. At all points, of course, we leave ourselves open to the idea that we may *not* wind up where we expected. By slightly constraining the students and providing a step-by-step context for their efforts, I find that my students become more creative and the paralysis of "too much freedom" can be assuaged. When graduate students take my classes, I am clear with them about their goals from the beginning. Most times, they prefer critique and technical advice over structural advice, or approach my classes with an established pre-existing methodology. Similarly to undergraduates, I ask them to articulate their decisions very carefully and hold them to a professional, adult standard. However, I am generally less prescriptive with graduate students.

The most frequent issue in the classroom is how to negotiate the various backgrounds, skill levels, ages and interests that an instructor is given to face in any cross disciplinary studio. This is especially an issue at the graduate level, where students often come from mixed undergraduate and workforce experiences. The challenge is often to negotiate the different levels of engagement in this sort of "one-room schoolhouse" and find strategies to do the most for the largest number of students. Sometimes this means giving tiered assignments or thinking of additional challenges for advanced students. Or being vigilant enough to spot opportunities to pull your more advanced (perhaps *bored*) students into your lessons and have them help you teach others. Skill-sharing and group teaching assignments allow everybody to find something of interest to contribute. I also frequently mix skill levels on purpose when arranging students into micro-group critiques. On average, the trend is that technically advanced students require more conceptual advice and vice versa.

At the end of every course, I evaluate myself by looking at each individual student, considering what skills they arrived with and honestly asking if they are now better equipped (to think, make and dialog about the topic at hand) than when we began. This growth will look different for each student.