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Teaching Philosophy

A student once asked “you spend a lot of time thinking, don’t you?” I replied, “Yes. It’s important.”

I spend a lot of time thinking about my teaching, both in the broader sense of a teaching philosophy and in the focused sense of how I approach specific courses, specific class groups, and specific students. My general approach to teaching melds the technical with the conceptual. But teaching is so much more nuanced than this. Teaching is listening to students and responding. It’s supporting them without carrying them. Teaching is introducing new ideas (and skills) and providing space for dialog.

Throughout all levels of courses I teach, I am actively conscious of these nuances. In beginning level courses, there is weight is on the technical - learning camera function, digital workflow, and darkroom skills. The conceptual, however, is not left behind. The very first projects and assignments ask students to think outside of their understanding of photography - which, as we all know, is such a ubiquitous medium that anyone privileged enough to find themselves in college has some kind of experience with it. Each subsequent project or assignment builds upon that foundation. I share the history of photography as well as the work of contemporary photographers (and frequently artists outside of photography) throughout the semester, this to give students a sense of context and a sense of what is possible. While we, as a society, are inundated with images every day, it’s incredibly important for students to look at, think about, and digest photographs in an intentional manner so that they may push beyond what they already understand, and utilize the medium to its full potential.

Reading and writing also take important roles in the courses I teach. The more students read, the better writers they become, and the better writers they are, the more articulate they can be when discussing their own work and the work of others. Beginning level courses include assigned readings from books like *Criticizing Photographs* by Terry Barrett; as the courses become more advanced, so do the readings. Depending on the group of students and the particular course, I assign readings from writers like Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag and/or Rebecca Solnit. I also frequently inject articles as they come up in Art Forum, Aperture, Ain’t Bad, etc., especially when an article pertains specifically to a student’s work.

Responding to students’ work is a key element in my teaching philosophy. My course calendars are always open to change as needed, based on how students are working. I do not hesitate to add a field trip to a gallery if there is a relevant exhibition that comes up, provide an article if it will add context to a discussion we may have had in critique, or add a demonstration on something the students are interested in. The base information is always covered, but no two semesters of a single course I teach are ever identical, as I adapt and respond for the best growth of all students in each of my classes.

My goal as an educator is to provide agency to the students I teach, providing each of them with the skills and information they need to think deeply and to become confident in creating their own work in the context of the contemporary art world.