

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

My teaching philosophy focuses on three basic principles:

- Empowering the student
- Bestowing confidence and establishing the freedom to fail
- Receiving and interpreting criticism

Navigating project deadlines throughout the semester can be terrifying and exhausting as a student. Bearing a full class load, a student may find deadlines for individual classes often bottleneck around the same time of the semester, leading to mediocre work in both classes. Students have the maturity to manage their schedule, if given the opportunity. Therefore, one component of my classroom practice is to work with students to establish their own project deadlines, especially in upper level classes, such as Web Design. After understanding the scope of the project, the student and I work together to build a production schedule, just as they would in the professional field. If they have another class project due or exam around the same time, they can move the deadline around to accommodate their schedule. This, not only gives the student a sense of empowerment, but relieves the burden of looming dates, freeing their mind to a more creative outlet. Also, from a time management standpoint in the classroom, this means critiques are not scheduled on a single day, which often makes the process tedious and unproductive.

A designer's confidence is critical in the professional world. Often, a designer can sway a client with a persuasive pitch or confident attitude. In order to achieve this, the designer has to trust in their knowledge and skills, as much as the client. In my classroom, I try to evoke that spirit of confidence in each student's work. This includes making work, as well as, presenting work. This is typically achieved by positive reinforcement, and just as important, acknowledging and applauding ambitious failures. Any student that pushes the bleeding edge of any project, conceptually or technically will be awarded with positive feedback, just as another that decided a safer approach. The classroom is the fertile ground where students have the ability to start taking chances in their work and seeing an impact. As students move into the professional arena, the opportunities to create something unconventional or atypical, become limited. I like to give them the chance to experiment early on, and understand that failure never means the design problem is hopeless. It just means they should just try again from a different angle. If my students are not overpowering failure in my courses, then I am not pushing them hard enough.

Being a designer means undergoing constant scrutiny from clients, peers, the general population, and beloved internet trolls. This means the designer must grow a thick skin to handle the criticism that goes along with being an artist. In my classroom, the critique environment is a two-way street. The first side is for the presenter. A student in my class will learn how to effectively present and manage feedback in front of a group. This is critical, as even the best work will become shadowed by an anxious presentation pitch. The other side of the lane is for the audience. In my class critiques, I discuss the importance of providing productive feedback. We discuss different methods of giving feedback and practice those skills during each critique. As a student progresses through the semester, I will often present increasingly difficult questions or feedback, directly related to my experience with my clients in the past. The effectiveness of this critique practice is evident by the growth of each student in class throughout the semester.

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