

LUC PHINNEY

TEACHING - A NARRATIVE

LEARNING BY DOING

Teaching is an act of design, a gathering of collaborators, a disciplined exploration and forging of insights. Students learn from the world, each other, and their teachers (often in that order), and they learn most memorably by solving problems and being unafraid to try new things. At best, the classroom is a place of preparation for action, an intellectual and cultural safe harbor, a place that builds skill and self confidence and directly connects the student to meaningful work. “Learning by doing” is the beating heart of my pedagogy, and I strive to make every subject I teach, from building technology to architectural history, alive and actionable.

Class: ARPL 211/511, Architectural History 1 at Catholic University
Students created their own amphora, reenacting the ancient Roman trade routes to Ostia, and broke their amphorae to create our own small Monte Testaccio at the center of the architecture school.



MATERIAL CURIOSITY

From history-theory, to construction detailing and design-build, I delight in cultivating curiosity for how things work. That material curiosity is, as I have studied and argued, pivotal in the occurrence of innovations in practice. I encourage students to bring whatever makes them unique into their architectural explorations, and I have found that it is precisely in their diverse cultural and socioeconomic origins that my students find shared purpose and common ground.

Class: ARPL 408/508 On Drawing at Catholic University
On a field trip to the Reach at the Lincoln Center, students study materiality through drawing, and speculate about the “missing” element in Holl’s design (a pavilion in the Potomac).



PASSIONATE PEOPLE AND INSPIRING PLACES

The world is full of talented designers and craftspeople engaged in culturally and environmentally significant projects. Engaging with experts in their work gives my students a sense of shared purpose, and widens their scope of vision with regards to their future selves, and paths. Sometimes it seems my work is simply to bring students into the wider world and connect them to inspiring people and places, trusting them to find their own paths and meanings. (Perhaps it helps that I am often fortunate enough to get to share with them my own passions, and my sense of the wide-ranging connections between disciplines.)

Class: Residential Design Studio at Montgomery County Public Schools Student-built House Program
Architecture students (high school seniors) lay sod to help their counterparts in the construction trades get the nearly-complete student-designed-and-constructed YA43 house ready for opening.



THE DETAILS

These are the days students remember, and yet they are grounded in structured preparation, contextualization, and integration in a balanced curriculum. This is why I think of teaching as an act of design: we all love the result, and tend to overlook the drawings and specifications that make it possible. In fifteen years of teaching I’ve designed more than a dozen wholly original classes and collaborated on core curriculum revisioning co-taught courses on three distinct occasions. Pedagogy is a pleasure. I dig the details.

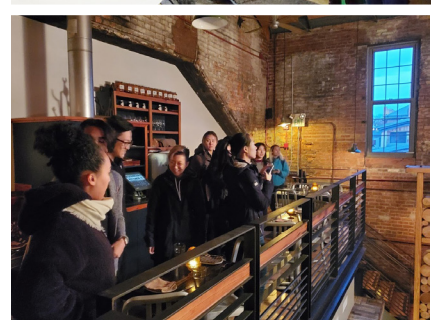
Class: Design Studies: Detail, Product, Prototype
Architecture students research sustainable detailing and tour an architectural specialties fabricator.



TECHNE and PHRONESIS

Alongside my students, I love to play, and grapple, with the rapidly changing technologies in our disciple. From generative AI to ArcGIS; from design representation to emerging technologies in architectural structures and the building envelope. In collaboration with community organizers and organizations, I situate the changing technical landscape of practice in its deeper import for our daily lives, families, and communities and help students find sustainable and equitable opportunities for change.

Class: The Art of Infrastructure at Johns Hopkins University.
Students tour Woodberry Kitchens, a leading farm-to-table restaurant, taste local agriculture products, and learn about the networks that underlie local food.



LEARNING HOW TO LEARN

And perhaps it is in the production of their own work that all our lessons and preparations finally, fully come home to students. Applying knowledge, producing something new, and, ultimately, seeing their own work enrich the world - these are the sorts of ‘tests’ that empower students rather than find them insufficient to ‘the facts’. In creative, hands-on, collaborative work, students learn how to learn.

Class: The Art of Infrastructure at Johns Hopkins University.
Exhibition of student “Cupola Challenge” drawings.



EMPATHY

This is as true outside the classroom as inside. Reaching every student means listening to each of them when they have something to say, meeting them where they are, and trying things we ourselves may be new to. We learn from them as much as they do from us.

Class: Architecture IV, Phelps High School, Washington, D.C.
Architecture students visit an urban agriculture nonprofit.



DELIGHT

Over time I have begun to hear from students who have moved on to places I have never been, involved in work I can’t begin to understand. My students have become biomedical engineers, law review editors, even, on occasion, practicing architects. Perhaps this shouldn’t surprise and delight me; yet it still does, every time.

Class: Flash Fiction / Prose Poetry at Johns Hopkins University
Student stories and poems recorded, produced, and created as a transient installation in the campus landscape using QR codes.

