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Teaching Philosophy

Here, at Adelphi, my philosophy of teaching continues to evolve with each new group of students that I encounter. The guiding principle that remains constant is my belief in a strong formal studio art education. I believe the most important year in the education and development of a young artist is the first foundation year. This is when students are introduced to the intellectual and physical skills that are necessary to understand and develop a visual language to solve complex visual problems. The students' understanding of the concepts introduced in two-dimensional design and beginning drawing classes, coupled with their art history education, is what gives them a sound background from which creative responses may be elicited.

In the first year of a studio art education, I try to instill good work habits, disciplined studio practice, and a desire to look at as much art as possible. I find the experience of looking at, responding to, and communicating ideas about art to be imperative in my development as a teacher as well as the students' development as young artists. Students have to want to learn, but it is our responsibility to make the learning process accessible and attainable.

I approach each course that I teach with a series of goals. I formulate these goals into a structured syllabus with specific objectives. This armature remains constant but the pace of the class and the specific assignments must remain flexible. I have found that two sections of the same course can never be taught in the exact same way. The students' ability, their interests, and their interaction with each other dictate the way they participate in and receive instruction.

The first step in the process of a studio art education is learning to see. Studying from direct observation is an essential part of the development of a young artist. One of the ways in which I instill this idea is by making my drawing students start each class with a series of five-minute drawings of the head. This practice gets the hand and the eye working together quickly. I have found that this exercise makes students find focus early in the class. Because the students have so little time, these drawings make them experiment with the act of drawing itself. I encourage them to look back at these drawings and recognize their progress. The understanding of the picture plane, composition, and presentation are equally essential in the development of a young artist. I insist that my design students spend considerable time working on thumbnail sketches and preliminary designs. I explain to them that the "work" is in this part of the process and that the finished piece is the end product of their discoveries. One of the challenges of teaching is making students see the connections between these concepts and how the information they gain in one course informs each course that follows. When students see the links between these concepts, they are more likely to continue making these connections throughout their education. Finding unity across the curriculum is essential in this development.

Writing about art and articulate communication skills are an important part of art education. I ask students to define words that we use often. In an ideal class, these

questions will spark further dialogue among the students. Class critiques and weekly reading assignments make students more comfortable talking about their work and the work of their peers. I have two rules in critiquing; you are not allowed to say that you like something or that you think something is interesting without a further explanation of why you feel that way. I express the importance of student community and how their criticism and support of each other is vital to their development. I often make students describe what they are looking at formally before they talk about what they think the work is about. When I give an assignment where students create a series of images, I make them include a written artist statement. I emphatically express the importance of these skills to my students.

I believe I am an effective instructor because I teach from experience. As a working artist, I make sure not to separate my struggles in the studio from my students' struggles in the classroom. I often talk to my students about my own experiences both as a student and an artist. I believe it is important for students to see that I have experienced what they are experiencing. And that in addition to teaching art, I am also making art. As a student I recognized that the teachers I gained the most from were patient, enthusiastic, and truly knowledgeable about the subject matter that they taught. These teachers made me feel that they had something that they really wanted to share with me. I strive to be one of these teachers.