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Teaching Philosophy

Class begins. My captive audience surrounds me, a group of students, some eager to learn and some ready for sleep. My goal: fill the classroom with energy and excitement. Students learn easily when the course content and activities entertain, stimulate interest and connect to their own lives. I strive to create an engaging, positive, focused atmosphere conducive to learning. Each student is encouraged to listen, experiment, explore and participate. I want to successfully impart the course material and orient my students to the field of graphic design. I also want to help students understand that education does not end with the four-year degree or even with an advanced degree but that it's something they'll want to pursue their entire lives, especially with today's rapidly developing technology. I insist on showing practical and professional applications of what I am teaching to help students understand why they should invest their time and energy. I promote creative problem solving, teamwork as well as competition, and a classroom that welcomes constructive criticism. I aim to be fair, approachable and supportive.

Seated at computers, technological distractions beckon my students. Interactive and hands-on-learning are musts. I keep the class moving with lots of exercises and activities so students don't become distracted, bored or restless. Students learn by doing, so active participation is a requirement. From day one, students need to know what I expect of them. I present clear course, class and project objectives to help keep students on track. I distribute a detailed syllabus that includes my rules as well as a class-by-class breakdown of material and homework assignments for the entire semester. In addition, I provide my students with a website which includes syllabi, project descriptions and examples for each of my courses. The site offers additional resources such as recommended books and links to related topics. I believe that more and more students are likely to peruse a web site of information than a book, especially in new media classes, so any information that can be disseminated online is helpful.

Students require examples to understand possible project outcomes. I present sample solutions, then interject practice exercises and ultimately assign a project to allow students to demonstrate an understanding of the material and practice problem solving strategies. I am generally more interested in the degree of learning than the project outcome. I often employ a three-step learning model to maximize the students' development. First I ask them to imitate a design to demonstrate particular technical skills. Secondly, they must redesign, which requires analytical skills to assess the strengths and weaknesses of a design. Finally, I require them to produce their own thoughtful and original solutions. In this manner, they gain the confidence to make successful design decisions.

I believe that students learn through the process of revision. I allow students to rework projects to try to improve their grades throughout the semester. Students must turn work in completely and on time to qualify for this opportunity. This enforces the importance of deadlines and helps to imitate the professional setting for which I am preparing them. Overall my revision policy fosters a more productive learning environment in which students grow from their mistakes. Also as a result, students contribute more meaningful comments to critiques. Those students that rework their projects, inevitably improve their skills and produce stronger work.

Writing is also an important component in any course I teach because I want students to be as capable of expressing themselves literally as well as visually. I require students to describe their projects and justify their



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design decisions in writing. I often include a research project to force students to look beyond the classroom for more in-depth information. Getting students to read presents a challenge so I carefully select texts that might appeal to them. Reading assignments and quizzes go hand in hand to ensure students are doing the work and understanding what they are reading. In addition to writing and reading assignments, I hold students accountable for absences, tardiness and incomplete work. I hold myself equally accountable for always being prepared for class, making myself accessible to students, grading often, fairly and in a timely fashion.

So how do I tell if I'm doing a good job? Certainly traditional school evaluation forms have provided me with some feedback that students are enjoying and learning in my courses. But the real evidence is in my classrooms where almost all of my students are always in attendance (regardless of championship sports games the night before). When students time after time come to class beaming and describe how they have used the skills they learned in my class to complete some other project, I know I must be on the right track. The friendly but respectful atmosphere I maintain in the classroom allows me to converse openly with students about their expectations and opinions of the course. I have learned a great deal from these exchanges and sometimes modify my courses accordingly. Many students continue to maintain contact with me via e-mail long after they have been in my class and many often request letters of recommendation from me. I have done this with a select few of my former professors, those whose opinions I especially respect and value.

I always wanted to be a teacher. From a very young age, my cousins and I set up a play school and I began teaching my younger cousins math and reading skills. I loved school and I love learning. I feel energized when I am learning something new and teaching is a unique profession that encourages and even demands my continued acquisition of knowledge. I have always had great respect for teachers. I understood very early on the influence a teacher could have in developing or, regrettably, hindering learning. I've had some amazing teachers that have positively affected my entire life (some of whom I still keep in touch with) and others who were so bad they completely turned me off on particular subjects. I always knew I wanted to be the kind of teacher that students remember years later as having made a difference in their lives; as having turned them on to a subject they might not have previously considered; as someone who wasn't just a teacher of a particular subject but could act as a mentor and role model.

I had some college professors who stressed rote memorization. I can't say I really remember anything I learned simply because I memorized it. I learned best when I understood why I was learning something. I think this is true for most students. I don't want my students to simply regurgitate what I say. I want my students to be excited about the material. I encourage them to have opinions. By showing interesting examples and by continuously linking abstract concepts to practical and applied examples, I strive to impart students with skills that they can use, not just in my classes and other classes, but for the rest of their lives. I enjoy challenging my students and seeing their excitement when they accomplish what they never thought they could. Likewise, I continue to look forward to my teaching challenges: to help students stay focused, to practice patience, to make students understand that the best ideas aren't always the first ideas and to always generate excitement about learning.

Teaching is one of the most rewarding professions. My students continuously inspire me. When they come into class proud of what they've achieved and anxious to show me, I am filled with pride. When students e-mail me months, even years after they've been in my class, to share something they recently did or ask me a question, I know I am becoming the teacher I've always wanted to be.