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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

As an educator, I foster students' innate curiosity and creativity and encourage the development of an internal teacher in the context of a cooperative, critical and creative environment. Emphasis is placed on developing creative and conceptual skills specific to each student's unique creative process in order to encourage their development as self-educators and engaged citizens who possess critical, theoretical, research, and studio practices. My role is to enable students to recognize their capabilities, question their limitations, broaden their ideologies, and develop their strengths.

Interdisciplinary thought: My undergraduate and graduate education emphasized interdisciplinary thought and de-emphasized grades. Ideas and creations were viewed in their cultural context and from various disciplinary angles, and analysis of one's individual thought process was encouraged. This meta-cognitive process, in combination with the de-emphasis of grades as ends in themselves, helped put the real goal into focus: to challenge the limitations of one's conceptual and creative capacity. I bring this approach to my teaching.

Empowerment of the internal teacher: I stress student involvement, intellectual rigor, and accountability by avoiding extensive lectures, focusing instead on student-centered activities that ensure participatory knowledge. I encourage all students, from Foundation students to Graduate students, to take responsibility for their work and question what they are doing, how they are doing it, and why. Fostering students' capacity for critical analysis of their own work and the work of others is an important part of my role as a teacher. It empowers students to recognize themselves as learners and as teachers, and encourages critical reflection on larger social issues.

Cultural context: Many students enter the arts perceiving themselves as outsiders. Part of my job is to teach them about the long history of "outsiders" who have helped create a rich, diverse milieu relevant to their creative pursuits. I also highlight how students' creative contemporaries are constantly borrowing from and refocusing the achievements of their predecessors to create new art and new ideas. My studio classes are not just hands-on; they are also "minds-on" - we discuss slideshows, interact with books, journals and websites, critique the work of historically significant and contemporary artists, and parse visual ideas and trends to make these challenging concepts relevant to each individual's creative development. In this way, students learn to position themselves as artists and thinkers, contributing to the same history. In seminar classes, I always relate new and potentially intimidating ideas to what students already know. Establishing this cultural context helps students understand that history is not fixed, but constantly evolving. It helps students understand their role as culture-makers and often leads to wonderful bravery in developing new concepts and approaches.

Skill-building: In studio courses, I emphasize the importance of possessing technical skills in order to be able to execute one's ideas. I encourage students to identify their technical weaknesses and strengths, stressing that everyone possesses both. The strengths are then built upon and the weaknesses developed. This technical development is driven by students' own goals. The laborious process of technical development must be made relevant to who they are now, and who they wish to become. A focus on individual growth downplays the natural tendency towards competition, focusing instead on creating a supportive yet challenging environment.

Criticality: Developing students' capacity to give and receive critical feedback is an important part of allowing them to be mutual partners in learning and teaching. I implement a variety of scenarios, including peer review and small group discussions, in addition to full-class critiques, to foster this important skill. In these supportive settings, students learn to become active, engaged listeners, and generous, insightful critics. I also make room for a diversity of learning styles by varying critique formats. In any critique, my role is to facilitate and deepen constructive conversation rather than to pose as the ultimate authority.

There are as many rewards to teaching as there are students. But perhaps the greatest joy is witnessing a creative mind light up and lurch forward, knowing that it will never return to its former state. Fostering such development is utterly fulfilling, and, I believe, has the potential to be world-changing.