

PHILOSOPHY

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My goal as an educator is a simple one: the pursuit of graphic design excellence. In my opinion, design excellence is not merely the creation of beautiful work; it is the process of evaluating, dissecting and understanding exceptional historical and contemporary design. It is the skill and willingness to experiment within the framework of Modernist, Post-modernist and contemporary design styles. It is a love for typography and an appreciation that typographic selection, layout and refinement are the heart and soul of graphic design. It is thinking about design intellectually and engaging the viewer through smart and sophisticated visual communication. And finally, it is about pride in production, craftsmanship and presentation of the completed work.

As part of a successful graphic design curriculum, students should become fluent in traditional design processes and digital Creative Suite platforms. They should be exposed to critical thinking, analysis and inductive/deductive reasoning. They should have the opportunity to read relevant essays and writings on design theory, the Humanities, social sciences, historical movements and manifestos. They must look to the future and learn the importance of sustainable and digital design, and be aware of globalization and the benefits of social media. Students should know of the changing business of design and the opportunities associated with entrepreneurship. They must be aware of information organization and analysis, and its increased role in design.

In my opinion, there are two major skill sets that design educators need to impart to their students. First, establish the importance of critical thinking and reasoning, and provide an environment that encourages the appreciation of design and typographic fundamentals and experimentation; and secondly, provide professional knowledge and assignment/internship opportunities that will make the students attractive candidates for positions at well-respected design studios, agencies and graduate schools. I feel these skills can be successfully gained through assignment selection, professional studio interaction and a commitment to both the professional and intellectual sides of design and design research.

In regard to the classroom setting, I feel it is essential to clearly define my course expectations from the outset. Students are treated with the respect of a developing young professional and will be expected to perform and act as such. I believe in being as forthright as possible, and encourage my students to do the same. I promote an open forum, offering the freedom to engage any issues relevant to the class, including the discussion, understanding and evaluation of professional design and contemporary trends within the graphic design field.

I feel that class critiques in combination with one-on-one student/professor discussions are critical to a young designer's growth and development. Layout, typography and intent should constantly be reviewed and questioned. Intermediate and final critiques are important for several reasons: they force the student to discuss, describe and defend their own work—one of the key abilities of successful practicing designers; they provide the opportunity to evaluate the work of others; and they develop the ability to sift through various opinions, determining which comments are worth investigating.

Most assignments will adhere to a three-phased approach to project development, which allows for concentration on each aspect of the design process—Phase 1: Brainstorming, concepting, researching and writing; Phase 2: Layout, typography, style development, critique and revisions; Phase 3: Production, assembly and final presentation. This approach ensures that students understand and appreciate the full design process, and it reinforces my belief that all aspects of the design process are integral in receiving a well-rounded design education.

This philosophy has evolved through years of teaching at the university level. It stems from insights gained as a working professional, studio owner, adjunct and full-time faculty member. It comes from the belief that teaching, much like design, is a creative process. It requires dedication, passion, self-evaluation, patience and a desire to educate and influence the designers of tomorrow.