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Teaching Philosophy

Because the field of design encompasses such a broad range of opportunities for students, it is necessary to arm them with skills and knowledge that will help them to define their personal goals and to succeed as professionals. Teaching within this field requires a pragmatic — yet engaging — approach to course and curriculum development. My philosophy reflects this: I believe that design and design education should be built on a foundation of critical thought, practical knowledge, and professional practice, skills which are essential for academia and business.

An example of this approach is from my Fall 2011 Senior Studio course. During the semester, I wanted to supply students with the tools necessary to not only create design solutions, but to also develop their own professional skills including proper attire, building contracts, pitching design concepts and interviewing/interacting with clients.

To do this, I required students to find their own local clients for whom the students would develop actionable design elements, then helped them draft professional contracts. Students developed and delivered project proposals and creative briefs, while I offered support and feedback during the entire process, from approaching clients to design solutions. Students were able to see how other groups were challenged while working with clients, and through group discussion, presentation and critique, all were able to develop their own methods for handling a variety of situations. By the end of the semester, students had built many of the tools and documents necessary to work confidently as professional designers outside the walls of the university.

When designing courses, I also focus on engaging students through the integration of ‘serious play.’ Pentagram designer, Paula Scher, defines serious play as an opportunity to create without limit, producing new works that are devoid of the ‘solemnity’ that is manifest within day-to-day professional practice. I enjoy adding these spontaneous, less-solemn elements to ‘break up the monotony.’ As a result, students are actively involved within the course and will be more likely to find pleasure, pride and confidence in their own future practice.

During Graphic Design I (GRA 3110) in the Fall of 2010, I integrated ‘Design Challenges’ during one full class meeting every two weeks. At the beginning of class students were given a challenge which had to be successfully solved by the end of the two-hour class. The challenges ranged from practical — concept-based logo design — to less-serious — photo illustrations which began with an online ‘celebrity baby name generator.’ These projects forced students to work under very tight deadlines while honing their skills and seriously having fun.

As an educator, I also find it important to maintain my own personal practice as an active freelancer while continuing my research, which focuses on personal identity and branding. Students benefit from my continued research and education — such as courses on online marketing and self-promotion — which I use to not only stay abreast of current professional trends but also as a method for leading by example. This continued research, combined with my pedagogical strategies, is dedicated to teaching the principles of design in a dynamic, professional, and hands-on way that will remain with students long after they graduate.