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Teaching Philosophy

My goals as an educator are to encourage my students to develop creative thinking, robust research abilities, and technical skills. An education in the arts should not only teach a student how to make, but instill in them a curiosity that drives them to think. I push my students not to be afraid to fail, because it is often in our failures that we learn the most and grow to understand who we are as artists. When providing a space where students can learn it is essential to recognize where the students are coming from, communicate clearly about expectations and requirements, be accessible not only during office hours but also as needed on a case by case basis, and above all to create a classroom environment that is based on mutual respect, openness, and understanding.

Ceramics is a process and material driven field; hands on learning is vital to obtaining skills and understanding the way materials can be manipulated to create form and content. Balance between technical demonstrations, lectures, and critiques offer a wide range of information about process, material, and content. In the classroom, skills are developed hands-on through practice and repetition; information is offered in multiple formats to suit different learning styles; demonstrations are given and repeated as needed; and one on one instruction addresses specific student needs. I assign short technical assignments that introduce students to new skills and larger projects that allow students to develop those skills and bring their ideas into existence.

Research and writing assignments teach students to ask questions, explore ideas and strengthen their personal aesthetics. Imparting in them the curiosity to ask questions and search for answers puts them on the path to becoming life long learners. In addition to research, I foster students' participation in the culture and community by requiring that they attend campus and community events while assigning written reviews of these events strengthen their critical thinking and writing skills.

Critiques, in which students install work in a gallery space, eat meals together from their handmade tableware, or learn to document their portfolio, help them acquire fundamental aspects of professional practice. This approach gives students the skills they need to talk about their work but also provides the practice and experience that are essential to understanding the way their work is presented to and perceived by an audience.

I believe that digital learning platforms such as Blackboard are useful tools for checking students understanding of key concepts and providing students with alternatives to classroom demonstration in the form of instructional videos, written direction, readings, and key terms and concepts. In addition to being a useful communication tool and providing alternative learning methods, Blackboard's ability to give online surveys and quizzes is a versatile resource for evaluating student understanding and effectiveness of classroom instruction.

Whether teaching a ceramics for non-majors class or an advance level ceramic sculpture class, my goal is always to structure a learning environment that fosters exploration, research and discovery. Above all I believe the most important thing anyone can learn is to self-critique and take risks.