

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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The past few years were defined by unprecedented experiences. From the pandemic and vaccine hesitancy to the untimely death of George Floyd and the critical reckoning his death inspired, fundamental inequalities in the country are cast in a new light. History is happening in front of us, and technology plays a great role in shaping how it gets documented. As a designer, writer and educator, I see this as an opportunity to reflect on whose stories are being shared and to contribute new ones meaningfully – both in my own practice and in the classroom.

Graphic design and writing are the essence of communication – words make thoughts tangible, and design gives them form. Both disciplines provide a vocabulary to evaluate what makes something “good” and the ability to expand that definition. A commitment to asking questions that encourage students to reflect on their biases and form opinions define my teaching philosophy. For example: What are we looking at? Why are we looking at it? Why do you care? What does it look like? Why?

For both writing and design, these questions help students pinpoint their own research interests, and encourage them to develop reasoning for the form and content. Design and writing share a similar research process, and though the outputs vary, are equally defined by a grasp of narrative, structure, style, and critical thinking. Throughout my classes, I use journalistic, open-ended prompts that require students to develop their own content. We look at what they’re inherently drawn to, reflect on how these interests connect to current and historical events, and find opportunities to highlight new voices along the way. We use technical design training to figure out the best media for the project and respond sensitively to how it looks.

In Art of the Web, a class I teach at the University of Pennsylvania, I assigned the project “Helpful Website,” where students were asked to design a platform that assists an audience larger than themselves. We explored the idea of generosity on the internet and some of the ethical issues behind large tech platforms. We studied “friendliness” in design, and discussed how interfaces can encourage less tech-savvy people to use technology, but that smoothness can hide what’s happening behind the scenes, and hinder knowledge on how the technology is actually working. Students were encouraged to interview users and experts of their topics, and to evolve it based on what they learn. One student began a prototype of a web archive of Asian American contributions to art history for this project. After the class was over, she pitched the project to The Asian American Studies fellowship at The University of Pennsylvania. She received funding to turn it into a full scale project, and I’m currently working as her design advisor.

While my classes focus on design as an output, all of the projects are rooted in journalistic vocabulary. Another project I’ve developed is called the Fan Page, which is essentially the web design equivalent of a profile. Fan Pages were hallmarks of the early web, and we research digital folklore and the idea of handmade websites. These historical examples of the “amateur web” offer a new perspective on how everyday people were publishing independently and how that differs from today

where most people rely on existing services. These early examples also offer a more expressive look and feel, and it pushes students to challenge their own biases instead of immediately dismissing it as “ugly.” Beyond the aesthetics, observing early internet bricolage in the classroom contrasts European Modernism formerly taught as the pinnacle of good design, which is something my research is focused on. In these moments, I also like to look at the Yale School of Art website and craigslist to discuss why these websites look the way they do, how their form reflects their use, and that design is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor. During this project, we discussed the difference between a topic and a story, and how being specific adds interest – both visually and in content. One student initially wanted to focus on Taylor Swift, and through the course of the project pivoted to a Taylor Swift super fan. Her [Fan Page](#) became an interview with this individual about “stan” culture at large.

While many of my class projects involve ideating and creating something from scratch, it’s also important to remember that everything is always in conversation with something else. I taught a five-week workshop at Parsons called [What Did the 2010’s Look Like?](#) in which students were invited to reflect on the near-recent past and contribute to an online anthology. I set up a website and design system that each student had to use to publish their contribution. While there was an overarching system, we explored ways of exercising creativity within it. We looked at different image-making techniques, and how some stories could be more text driven while others could use a combination of media, or be purely video or photo-based. In the end, we had thirteen reflections on the visual culture of the 2010s ranging from instagrammable food to Pakistani feminist posters.

Throughout my teaching practice, I’ve worked at three universities and one online bootcamp. Since I’ve worked with a range of students from different educational and cultural backgrounds, I’ve learned to prioritize accessibility in the classroom. Even before the pandemic, I opted to keep all of my class materials online and use a variety of open-source frameworks to enable real-time collaboration. Students who speak English as a second language have reported that this allows them to review the course work in their own time. Using real-time tools like Figma or Dropbox Paper allows more soft-spoken students to share their thoughts and contribute to class discussions. With my professional design and classroom management, having multiple ways of viewing content and participating with it, allows a wider range of people to engage with you, and ultimately, an opportunity to respond.