

MARY JO MCGONAGLE

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TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.” – W.B. Yeats.

In my teaching, I strive to evoke the same excitement that I feel every day for art and design. I aim to have my classroom atmosphere encourage curiosity and self-confidence, allowing every student to reach their potential and to continue into the world with a contagious passion.

I teach students to think, and problem-solve. Today, more than ever, technology and a constantly changing world demand a fresh and developed skillset. My content and approach to learning must constantly evolve to stand the test of time throughout our rapidly advancing, digital world. I believe teaching students the creative thought process and how to transform creativity into action is the most effective way to stay relevant and employable in graphic design. Time in the classroom is divided up through exercises, lectures, discussions, and working studio time. Creativity and conceptual thinking, along with critical theory and history, are integrated into every lesson plan. All lessons are centered around UX/UI design and innovative thinking, which are the two tools anyone needs in an unpredictable and ever-changing field. Each project a student completes is handed in with a personal evaluation, which is completed along their design process, documenting their concrete creativity output and conceptual thought process. Understanding the various approaches to a problem and appreciating the thought process from start to finish widen the scope of the student’s palette.

Pedagogy and psychology are the roots of my syllabus. I am always looking for ways to expand my knowledge and better myself for my students. I have taken CT State courses about educational psychology, learning more about Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and the theories behind human development in the classroom, such as Vygotsky, Piaget, and Erikson. Child development plays a large role in learning styles and how students absorb information. My explanations and lessons must take multiple approaches to make sure there is a clear understanding from everyone in the class. Additionally, I present writing and projects not to evaluate the students, but to determine the effectiveness of the classroom time, as well as for them to process the work. Students are encouraged to contact me, if they need extra help, whether it is to plan through their assignment or the execution of their idea. Diversity, equity and inclusion allows personal and professional barriers to fall in the classroom, encouraging students to take a more personalized approach to their designs.

Learning is built on professional experience. As a multidisciplinary artist, I have always used the necessary materials to express myself through my art, whether it is through Graphic Design, Painting, Neon, Video, or Installation. My students are asked to explore different uses of material, expressing their thinking in both conventional and unconventional methods. I believe exploring the world around them and building on real-life experiences is the most effective way to stay creative. I encourage explorations outside the classroom in museums, shows, and artist talks, which broadens the students’ education and adds to the course scope. Additionally, using my time working for ad agencies and independent clients, I have constructed a syllabus

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of projects all based on real-life examples and instructions. Students graduate with a portfolio brimming with applicable designs and modern solutions and have the proper skill set to deal with every professional pitch from beginning to development and through to fruition.

Diversity inspires dynamic thinking. I have spent countless years in various universities' classrooms, each semester uniquely diverse in ethnicity, geographical location, gender, sexuality, and age. Every week, my students engage in design reviews. Each student has time to speak in front of the class about their process and intentions behind the art, opening up a dialogue to speak on the pros and cons of a design or to provide emotional support on personal issues connecting to the work. As a group, we work together to appreciate those around us and respectfully encourage everyone's work to a higher level. Every week, I am amazed by the courage of every student and find myself learning from their ways of thinking, stories, and younger perspectives. It is wonderful to see how each student has approached their work with a unique way of thinking and how the comments of others may influence a project. I find that I am able to establish a close relationship with my students by sharing my experiences, so they can develop the same deep passion that drives me into my studio every day.