



## Reflective Teaching Portfolio

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### **Define your teaching philosophy.**

Like many adjunct professors, I arrived at undergraduate teaching amid a full-time career practicing the very subject I teach. I feel a deep personal commitment to give back to my community and guide the next generations of young visual artists who will follow in my footsteps. As a practicing photographer, artist, and entrepreneur with more than twenty years of experience, my teaching philosophy is rooted in inquiry-based learning which reflects the contemporary environment students will enter upon graduation from FIT as aspiring professionals.

My approach to classroom and remote learning is a combination of teacher-centered and student-centered pedagogy that works together to complement the individual needs of students while balancing the educational goals of the college. With an emphasis on creative problem-solving, my methods of teaching seek to move undergraduate students, who are deeply engaged in the discipline of photography and related media, to a deeper understanding of the historical and theoretical underpinnings of photography as an artistic medium.

Emphasizing collaborative learning with a strong commitment to enhancing cross-disciplinary partnerships my approach supports diversity and inclusion for all students. I place great emphasis on contemporary case studies and invite relevant guest lecturers to offer unique perspectives as successful photographers inspiring students to discover and pursue their latent potential.

Empowering students with the skill and personal drive to master difficult subjects, a valuable asset in any workplace, while stimulating their natural curiosity builds a solid foundation of transferable skills they can leverage as they transition to high-performing careers in the arts. My approach is to guide students as they refine their visual communication skills toward a unique signature look grounded in discovery, reflection, and innovation.

**Have you ever observed a master teacher? If the answer is yes, what do you recall most from the experience?**

When I was coming up in the industry I feared failure and criticism but learning from master teachers has proven that accomplishments are as valuable as failures and both are essential to real growth as an artist. The master teachers I have witnessed first-hand were all willing to reveal their accomplishments and pivots along their journey to success and prominence. Among the many incredible teachers and mentors I have encountered, they all possess a vigorous blend of enthusiasm, clarity of intention, and boundless curiosity despite advances and failures that set them apart from their peers.

Among the most powerful influences in my education was Distinguished Professor of Photography, Gregory Heisler, from the S.I. Newhouse School of Communications at Syracuse University, who was one of the most masterful teachers I could have ever hoped to know. His unique point of view informed by a prodigious knowledge of the history of the medium and hands-on approach to all aspects of the image-making process introduced me to a level of artistry and craftsmanship previously unimagined. Learning with Mr. Heisler was like watching a master chef transform a bag of groceries into a feast, balancing a bewildering technical mastery with earnest thoughtfulness and endearing charm. The profound impact a master teacher can have on a receptive student does not end after the semester finals but continues to educate for a lifetime.

**Give examples of your most successful lesson. Why do you feel it was successful?**

My goal is to teach the classes I wish I attended when I was a student. To do that I engage students and encourage them to commit to the lessons by making them relevant and relatable. I constantly reinforce that what may work for one student may not work for another—but developing your creative process and promoting the best possible conditions for your creativity to flourish is an essential part of a sustainable career as an artist.

Constant review and systematic analyses are key to a successful lesson in my classes. For example, one of the most rewarding assignments for PH265 Professional Procedures/Contemporary Trends challenges students to choose between options, executing the task, and defending the project during the photographic critique. I offer every student three different photography scenarios and have them decide for themselves, which is the most relevant to their career goals, which will lead to better opportunities, and which will net the greatest profits. The students are often surprised when they engage with each other examining their own rational and personal motivations for their choices as compared to another student who holds opposite views. This illustrates that there is no single right answer for every goal or photographer but when we fully commit ourselves to a project we will create our own best work.

## **Do you have an example of an unsuccessful lesson? How did you address the challenges?**

In my teaching approach, there is no such thing as an unsuccessful lesson, just poor execution of a concept. My professional practice directly influences my teaching which makes the successful and unsuccessful lessons applicable in the contemporary marketplace. We all make mistakes but building a strong foundation for success is learning from our failures.

When there is little to no engagement in a project or all the work submitted is wildly different than the directions I ask myself and my students the same question, where was the breakdown, and how do we get to a breakthrough? Thinking about what works and what doesn't in teaching reminds me of a quote by a Chinese painter, Shen Jianhua, who said, "Science and maths are like peeling an orange. Art is like cracking a walnut."

Making a mistake and having the courage to talk about it is a quality I reward because it is as close to real-life as any student will ever encounter on campus. Tell me about a project that went exactly as planned...ever. What is most important is your thought process? How did things pivot? What did you learn? What would you do differently if it happened again?

Challenges are inevitable, no matter how capable and talented you are as an artist. I teach that you have to be critical of your own work in order to evolve. What I want students to understand is how they respond is the difference between true success and failure.

## **Why are you introducing and/or expanding the use of technology into your teaching?**

Technology is a tool that evolves and changes at breakneck speed, at least that is true in photography, and being able to adapt, apply, and upgrade your process is vital to ongoing success. Artists that rely on a single technology or technique to create their best work are painting themselves into a corner. So I ask you, what is the value of learning to write with a Palm Pilot stylus, navigating BlackBoard, and Copyrighting your work with the Library of Congress ECO system if each of these technologies will be replaced or made irrelevant with each iteration of new technology? The answer is deceptively simple, expanding your use of technology is what matters, not the individual technology itself and I try to reinforce that core lesson with every new assignment.

## **How do you feel these technology innovations will affect the student experience?**

The exponential acceleration of technology has created a creative culture where transformation is the norm. Technology moves faster than our imaginations can adapt

so anchoring on any one technology is a fool's errand. However, building skills and strengths that complement each other enable students to embrace technology innovations as a cycle that can enhance the creative process instead of derailing it. If students, as users of technology, are open to employing new tools to address perennial problems then their creative process can flourish and evolve over a lifetime.

### **How do you think it will affect your experience?**

Building creative strategies to connect with students, in a dynamic technological landscape, has a direct impact on their experience, virtual or in-person. In the spring 2020 semester, the technology transition during the COVID-19 pandemic from the classroom to the dining room table was a struggle for everyone but the core of academic material remained relevant. Instead of being paralyzed by the monumental changes, I used it as a learning opportunity to help students embrace their adaptability and resilience. The lessons of that spring and the ensuing semesters have reinforced that students can overcome any obstacle if they choose to meet the challenge straight on and embrace new technologies.

My instructional approach is about incorporating and expanding technology use in the classroom to help students achieve their ultimate goals. The examples I use in class come from my professional experiences working for real clients under high pressure, real money, deadline-driven productions. I balance the fluid elements of technology with a core of cumulative skills that allow students to build a solid foundation of technique, concept, and personal vision despite the challenges at any one moment.

### **Please describe new teaching ideas you plan to implement as a result of this technology certificate program.**

The Teaching with Technology (TWT) course offered by the Center for Excellence in Teaching at FIT was an invaluable experience to educate me about the benefits, challenges, and opportunities for employing new technology in the classroom. Being exposed to other masterful teachers who shared how they regularly employ the wide-ranging technology available in their classes help me adapt my thinking and pedagogy to create a more flexible classroom environment.

### **How will these new technology tools/approaches contribute to your classroom practice?**

Employing new technology and tools to help students engage with the core material and learning outcomes allows me to meet students where they are at now and when we can return to the classroom. While some students have been disrupted by the transition to online learning others have flourished and it is vital to my growth as a teacher to understand the challenges while learning the benefits of synchronous and asynchronous learning methods. While the current situation is exacerbated by the

pandemic I am grateful for the opportunity to witness first-hand how to adapt the classroom and lessons for everyone's benefit now and in the future.

**How will you evaluate the success of your activities and what do you consider to be the bigger picture items with regard to technology and learning?**

As a result of the pandemic, students and faculty will all be better prepared and more open to implementing technology in the classroom. My classes will be stronger, more inclusive, and more engaging as a result of new technology and alternative means for delivering the core of the academic material. The learning outcomes remain the same, develop a unique signature style grounded in discovery, reflection, and innovation while understanding the possibilities of photography as an artistic medium and career.

Evaluating the success of my ability to teach effectively has not changed with the addition of new technologies, rather it has been enhanced by them. While I never would have chosen to learn the lessons of the pandemic the way I did I am grateful for the opportunity to grow as an educator. I am committed to teaching with the same sense of unyielding resilience that I promote in my students; when we commit ourselves fully to creative challenges we create our own best work with clarity and authenticity.