

Christopher Brusberg

Teaching Philosophy

My primary objective as an educator is to help young designers find their voice, a voice that is confident, articulate, and aware of the world around them. That voice allows them to communicate their design vocabulary and style through collaboration and technical execution. Providing a safe community, encouraging productive failure, facilitating discourse on global themes, and implementing inquiry-based projects for self-guided learning form the bedrock of transformative design education.

Students learn the best when invited to engage with texts and theatrical art forms they feel invested in. My job is to create a defined structure rooted in design core concepts and give them the tools to discover their voice. Clear boundaries create the freedom to express ourselves. In fostering that environment, students can have an open dialogue, share ideas, question values, and take risks.

Risk-taking is a cornerstone of my teaching pedagogy. Concerning the work in the classroom, it is never about getting it right. It is always about diving in. Past students will tell you I am fond of saying, "I will never fail you for failing; I will only fail you for not trying." I am committed to empowering students to navigate setbacks and harness them for personal and professional growth. I encourage students to venture beyond their comfort zones to help them discover their design voice and style. Designing in and of itself is a process of trial and error; I aim to prepare them for a professional workflow by making space for that dynamic in the classroom.

In addition to fostering a safe community and empowering students to fail and grow, I believe in illuminating connections to help students discuss more global themes. Art doesn't happen in a vacuum, and understanding art's relationship to cultural currents helps discuss complicated social issues while embracing a shared sense of humanity. These types of discussions help to bring a broader range of topics into the classroom and, paired with moderated discussion, create a more inclusive environment.

I assess student progress mainly through project-based assignments. Project-based learning/assignments help mimic the design process to help students become more familiar with institutional practices and help students develop a professional workflow. In addition, project-based learning and assessments combine real-world problems with personal experiences, helping students become invested. Invested student can take greater ownership of their education and explore topics they are passionate about. By prioritizing students using a process of observation, investigation, and discovery, students can express higher-level questioning and learning that mimics an informative and comprehensive design process.

Decentralizing the classroom means I am committed to constantly improving my knowledge base and revising my teaching philosophy. This, in turn, helps me continue growing as a designer. A safe and inclusive classroom focusing on inquiry-based learning allows students, teachers, and a school to perform at its best in creating students with a global and confident voice, the type of students we need in the arts today and who I am committed to teaching.

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DEI Statement

Welcome the discomfort, be bold in change, and love the growth.

As a designer, I am committed to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion (D.E.I.) with the single tenant that all voices deserve to be at the table and heard. I have woven a series of reflective practices and inquiries into my design process to accomplish this. These principles underpin my aspiration to contribute to a more diverse and equitable design community while guiding my approach to D.E.I. topics within educational settings.

Reflective Design Process:

I systematically assess my voice within the design process and its impact on the community it serves. A critical evaluation of how my experiences and perspective influence the design table allows me to recognize potential biases that may affect my interpretation of production materials. These assessments extend throughout my design process, ensuring I make inclusive choices in material selection and community representation. Moreover, I advocate for expanding this perspective to the technical side, ensuring that technical documents are crafted for maximum accessibility and serve as agents for education and equity when collaborating with production staff.

Continuous Refinement and Reevaluation:

These inquiries are the foundation for each design process, evolving through continuous refinement and reevaluation. As an educator, I recognize that D.E.I. begins with self-reflection. Regular assessments of my syllabus and teaching materials for implicit biases and periodic surveys gauging students' interests enable me to identify opportunities for diversity enhancement. This proactive approach empowers me to include diverse viewpoints and subjects, fostering an inclusive educational environment.

Decentralized Classroom Strategy:

Decentralizing the classroom is a crucial strategy, along with inquiry-based learning, to transfer some elements of control from the instructor to the students. I categorize materials into core concepts, supporting materials, and project assessments. While core concepts remain stable, project assessments adapt based on student feedback. For example, mid-semester assessments informed changes to course materials in my Opera THET328 Class at the University of Maryland. Responding to student interest in socially oriented operas, I adjusted supporting materials while maintaining core concepts. This approach empowers students to choose projects aligned with their interests, integrating feedback and creating an educational environment responsive to the evolving needs of a diverse student body. While this process can start with input from students, I need to be the one to do the work in making classes more varied and inclusive, not the students.

D.E.E.P. Lens for Inclusive Teaching:

Finally, I utilize the D.E.E.P. framework as a lens to create a more inclusive classroom environment. I consistently DEVELOP inclusive language for use in class. ENCOURAGE open and honest dialogue while I EMPOWER students to share their viewpoints through the lens of their cultural diversity. Additionally, I create space in the class and within projects for students to PROCESS information, reinforcing it through course content. This approach is where my teaching philosophy and D.E.I. statement converge as I establish a safe learning environment and foster diverse cultural currents in the classroom.