

Jason Sauer, MFA

Creative Educator and Professional Artist
Teaching Philosophy Statement

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Introduction

My philosophy of teaching is rooted in my core belief that every student deserves to have their learning journey positively impacted by art, regardless of their degree or career path, and that every student is a unique individual driven by different means and to different ends. I strive to create an experience in which each student feels empowered to meet their full potential by accepting and expressing themselves, celebrating the differences among the group, taking risks, and embracing failures as critical learning moments.

Core Values

Lead with empathy

In arts education, it is critical for the educator to accept and celebrate that many of our students are not in the classroom with art career motivations, but because of elective requirements. I celebrate this as a unique opportunity to help students open their minds to the possibilities of how art can have a positive presence in their lives, regardless of their backgrounds or career goals. My goal is for students to conclude the semester viewing art as a positive experience that enriches their lives, no matter their unique career path or lived experience.

Learning is a lifelong adventure

I approach teaching as a lifelong researcher and learner, consistently improving and evolving, acting as a guide while also being a listener, and leading as a role model in and out of the classroom. I share my real world experiences as a professional artist to give students a true glimpse of how different every artist's journey is, and how continual learning and self-adjusting is part of the process. I share personal, real-life scenarios—including stories of failure—from my time in the army and my unique career as an artist to guide them through career and life choices that will best fit their goals.

The community is the classroom

I believe that field study for students is just as valuable as the time we gather in the classroom. Each semester, I assign each student to go visit two art galleries, and to go sit in their local coffee shop for twenty minutes to observe what's on the wall before they leave, and then write a reflection on the experiences. I have learned from years of teaching art that many students have never stepped foot into an art gallery or experienced art on the wall in a curated environment. My goals are two-fold: for students to begin noticing art in all kinds of places they never previously considered as vessels for art, and for them to carry this experience forward regardless of career path so that art continues to play a positive role in their lives.

Classroom Climate, Process, and Methods

In week one of all my classes, I assign students to reflect on and craft individual goals and expectations for the semester. This is how I grade—not by one blanket set of standards for the whole class, but by measuring each assignment completed against the goals and expectations the individual student established for themselves during week one of the class.

I create a well-rounded, versatile curriculum that includes historical context and technical training, and teaches critical and analytical thinking, public speaking, self-reliance, and collaboration.

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I believe that students should use an experimental process grounded in the fundamentals. A process of theory, hypothesis, and fact to create unique art. Since mastery is built through thoughtful repetition, I encourage my students in the beginning stages to hone these areas by creating large bodies of work. Creating in this way empowers students to embrace experimentation and invention in a risk-free environment. The classroom becomes a laboratory where students explore different techniques, materials, and media with traditional and non-traditional methods.

I promote a classroom culture where students are empowered to express themselves through their work, regardless of level of experience or technical skill. I structure assignments as conceptual prompts that can be completed in a range of media and varying processes. In this environment, my students quickly realize they are free to explore how materials and processes can be merged and that different materials carry with them different connotations.

Technical skill balances conceptual knowledge. Without technical knowledge, a student will face barriers to successfully executing their ideas. It is part of the student's responsibility to employ the techniques that best suit their work, thereby promoting a self-reliance in making important decisions. Exploring and developing many of the technical skills used in sculpting are beneficial in many other crafts and trades.

I incorporate feedback loops throughout the semester, including individualized attention and group critique, helping students learn to explore concepts, let down guards, practice acceptance, and execute with confidence.

I also bring my professional experience as an artist into the classroom, as the practical knowledge and skills gained through professional practice. My teaching is informed by my personal and professional growth and therefore I strive to be well-versed in new developments in the field, to be an ongoing participant in the art community, and actively exhibiting my artwork.

Lastly, I invite guest presenters and artists into the classroom regularly, demonstrating how unique the artist community is, and complimenting the curriculum and lived experiences I've shared with brief snapshots into those of other artists and educators with different ones.

Influences

I am fortunate to have been personally mentored and developed by artists including: Patricia Belen Gillen, who taught me how to have presence in a classroom and captivate the attention of students; Dale Chihuli, who taught me about translating preparatory drawings into three dimensional artworks for mass production; Kent Lovelace and Scott Frish, who taught me how to engage and empower students from diverse backgrounds; and Christopher H. Martin, who was key to my development and evolution in digital arts and technology—especially in simplifying art display on walls for large shows. Christopher also reinforced my philosophy to be a forever learner, the most critical lesson that I am compelled to pass along to my students.