

## TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

As a teacher, my goal is to guide students toward conceptual processes that rule out extraneous aspects in their design. All elements should be necessary so that if one is missing, the design will not work. A design project works as one complete unit. Typography and imagery should relate and require each other.

The converse may be perpetuated by the proliferation of free fonts, images, and brushes available on the internet. I want my students to make strong conceptual and design choices prior to trying a Photoshop brush or the latest display font. Therefore, I try to inspire my students to work toward creative, unique solutions through thumbnails and rough sketches. This causes them to become familiar with the language of design, layout, line, color, contrast and proportions. Instead of looking at their font menus and thinking, “Which one of these should I use,” hopefully they will step back and think, “Which classification of type is appropriate for this project?” This practice also helps the students to work through many possibilities, rather than reacting to an initial idea and assuming it’s the best solution.

The visual vocabulary they develop along the way aids in their constructive critiques of each others’ work. It also forms a level of knowledge and communication that will help them reach future employers and clients, and those who matter the most—the audience for their design.

However, let me step back some. This process of thinking first and drawing second—all without leaning on computers—may sound as if I ignore the technology issue altogether. Some may even argue that teaching in this manner is best, so as not

to build a student’s reliance on a specific program that may be discontinued or not used by a future employer. This is not my approach. Computers—or other viable means of producing design—come third in my design process. Conceptual thinking goes hand-in-hand with the necessary tools and skills to follow through, whether traditional or digital.

I was taught production processes; “digital natives” should be taught production skills, too. Having worked with graphic design hardware and software since 1985, I find the knowledge gained in one program usually applies to others (or at least helps me to learn others). I began my graphic design education at a technical college. We, too, learned how to draw thumbnails and roughs. But, we also typeset, created mechanical art, worked with stat cameras, and even printed many projects. These traditional methods were definitely a much slower means to an end (in comparison to digital methods); but were necessary skills to produce finished designs. I expect my students to complete finished projects, too. As the majority of my students were born post-1984, the evolving hardware and software now represents their “traditional tools.” My first professor showed me how to cut apart a headline and reposition it again with triangles, blue pencils, and a t-square. I now show my students how to tighten word spacing with option(alt)-left arrow.

My philosophy attempts to develop my students’ creative innovation and conceptual skills. But, I also feel they should have a strong production capability. I want more than artists and clear communicators; I want skilled craftsmen (and craftswomen).

**DESIGN PHILOSOPHY**

My design philosophy runs parallel with my teaching philosophy. As it may simply be stated, "I practice what I preach." Just as I expect clear, appropriate solutions from my students, I try to create the same in my own work. I try to be considerate of the audience's time and as knowledgeable of their habits and education as possible. I try to reach them quickly through design that is focused just for them. At the same time, I create unique solutions so that my design isn't just another amongst their daily barrage. It's not so much that I want

my design to be memorable. Rather, I want the audience to remember or react to the intended message of the design. My philosophy is discussed in detail within my MFA thesis, *Gaining Attention and Encouraging a Response: My Criteria for Successful Graphic Design*. You can download a pdf file of this from my website, or send me an email to request a black and white printed copy, which I designed as a tribute to International Typeface Corporation's *U&lc*. publication.