ZACK TUCKER TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

⊡ @zack.tucker
✉ zack@zacktucker.me
⌂ zacktucker.me

My primary goal in teaching is to empower student designers to develop a unique design voice. I serve as a guide in this process by emphasizing a consistent and professional work ethic, promoting an appreciation and understanding of critical theory and creative thought, and establishing an experimental approach to investigating, problem solving, and making. I believe that designers are producers of mass culture and have great influence on their surroundings, human emotion, and society at large. It is important for students to understand this ethical responsibility as they emerge into the world. My primary goal for instruction seeks to underscore this unique power of design.

Developing a consistent professional work ethic in students is important for their long-term success. Professionalism is an expectation in every working environment, so it is an essential skill to emphasize while students are in a safe learning space. Professionalism not only addresses design-specific professional practices, but also basic workplace etiquette. I do this by laying out clear expectations and holding students accountable to these standards. I also encourage students to have input into this process by regularly soliciting both formal and informal feedback about the classroom environment. This provides students a helpful framework to conduct themselves within and fosters a mutual sense of respect between the student and instructor. I always expect students to respect one another's time, property, beliefs, and space because these skills will be important no matter where they work.

I encourage students to be experimental in their investigative, problem solving, and making processes. As design continues to evolve, it is important for students to be comfortable with change. I believe that working in an iterative, exploratory process can facilitate this transition. Rather than prescribe a specific design practice, I introduce a number of design thinking models that students can use to develop their own methods. In researching and creating, a design process should be flexible and personal in order to generate unique results. In addition to encouraging an experimental design process, I find it important to showcase and demonstrate a number of design making techniques. By working in an environment that embraces multimedia, students are able to become comfortable and confident with a variety of conventional and inventive tools. This approach is in response to the rich scope of media available to create work and the technical and craft proficiency expected of designers today. In order to help guide this experimentation, I show and connect students with a diverse range of designers, artists, and everyday people that use a mix of media to express their ideas. An experimental process can promote risk-taking, in turn providing an opportunity for students to contribute new work that is both culturally and personally significant.

In working with aspiring designers, I stress the importance of an appreciation and understanding of both critical theory and creative thought. As a designer, these skills serve as the basis of innovation and help students become competent in approaching unknown challenges. I work to nurture these processes by employing an inquiry-based curriculum. This curriculum asks directed questions that challenge pre-conceived perceptions of design and provides an open-ended environment to explore a number of possibilities. As part of this inquiry-based course of study, I encourage interdisciplinary research and collaboration. I have students read and view materials from a number of disciplines, employ different writing exercises and discussions, connect students to working professionals, possible mentors, and collaborators through field trips and guest lectures. All of these opportunities help students synthesize new ideas into their own creative practice. Design is primary influenced by external sources, so it is important for students to be constantly immersed in ideas that are dissimilar from their own. Synthesizing these ideas with design can produce exciting and compelling results. Within this context, students are able to connect their own ideas with the presented research question to further develop their own interests and creative concepts. At the same time, this line of inquiry can serve as an opportunity for differentiation. I can easily provide more directed research questions for beginning students while simultaneously being able to provide more open-ended inquiries for the more advanced. These explorations, while always connected with broad themes for conceptual development, may provide different objectives. Beginning students will focus on acquiring basic design skills, while advanced students will learn to be comfortable with developing their own questions. As students propose new perspectives, it is important for me to promote individual critical thought and reflection about their solutions. This is to provide multiple perceptual viewpoints. By engaging in formal and informal iterative critiques, students and I are able to work together to strengthen design ideas and ability.

I believe in providing a supportive environment for students to learn and grow within. It is important that students leave my tutelage with a better understanding of the world and how they work within it. By encouraging a consistent and professional work ethic, establishing an experimental approach to investigating, problem solving, and making, and promoting an appreciation and understanding of critical theory and creative thought I believe I can help students develop their own personal vision and design voice firmly grounded in both the historical and contemporary contexts of design.