

## Reflection on Teaching

The Winter 2015 semester was my first experience teaching at the Art Institute of Michigan, Troy, Michigan campus. I can say, without hesitation, that this has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. Syed Kazmi, Associate Dean, was correct when he told me that in a short time, things like a long stressful commute would become a short relaxed drive, when coming to teach class. The overwhelming joy and enthusiasm I discovered using my abilities to teach is awesome.

It was a whirlwind of information and tasks before the semester even started. There was training for new faculty and to use the eCompanion System. The Faculty Development took place during this time period too. Everyone, especially Melissa Grunow and Tracy MacPherson, were extremely helpful. I got acquainted with many of the instructors from both the Troy and Novi campuses. The IT support and technology is excellent.

Once I was assigned my class, Design Fundamentals, I quickly downloaded my ebook for the course. I also contacted the publisher, Cengage, for additional resources. They were very helpful with presentation and vocabulary quiz and testing materials. There are great suggestions for projects of their website too. This support was key in addressing the core competency of vocabulary and developing a midterm and final exam.

The first big task I tackled was the syllabus. Tracy and a few instructors gave me examples of past syllabi. I made a few modifications and put together a solid document. I began the process of uploading all class materials to eCompanion with the syllabus. Then I sent an email to welcome the class. I also put together a pre and post assessment and a student information sheet.

The first night of class, I began with an introduction of myself and then opened it up to the class to introduce themselves as well. This is when I realized how truly blessed I was to have such a great group of students. They interacted like old friends and shattered any nervousness anyone was feeling. This was the case throughout the semester. The students filled out the syllabus forms, pre-assessment, and information forms.

I was unaware how strict the attendance policies are at Ai and had to get used to the reporting duties of attendance. I was also surprised that my class was a studio class and not computer based so I had to adjust on the fly as well. It was very cool digging up a lot of my old graphic design tools and demonstrating for the students as well as displaying some of my work. The other surprise was the attendance problems that quickly arose. Being a small class, there was a core group of 8 or 9 that attended regularly, but a few struggled. I decided to come up with an incentive to attend class.

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Then it was on to the weekly schedule of the class. I broke the class up into three main segments. I began each class that had assigned reading with a short Power Point presentation and lecture on the chapter assigned. Then we took a quiz I developed for that specific chapter. I graded the quizzes as the students took a break. We went over the quizzes as a class after the break. These quizzes were meant to be study materials for the midterm and final. Chapters 1-6 would be covered on the midterm and chapters 7-13 on the final exam. The second part of each class would either be a brainstorming session or a workshop or sketch session. This is where I added an extra credit opportunity. Students that were in attendance during workshop turned in their sketch to receive 5 points extra credit on their project. The third part of class was devoted to project work time or a short lecture on a graphic design topic like type or color. This format worked very well. We were able to cover all material necessary at a relaxed pace while giving the students time to work on projects during class to insure completion and to allow me to help them if necessary.

I assigned four small projects and one final project. The projects built on each other in creativity while connecting to topics covered in the book. This helped me relate concepts from the textbook during critiques. I felt that the flow of the class went very well. I was able to tie in the book, projects, work experiences, and critique smoothly where each would overlap and reemphasize each other. I did make another adjustment to project deadlines during the semester. A few students did not turn in their projects on time. I allowed them to turn projects in late with a reduction in points since they lost their opportunity to present their project. This helped reduce anxiety over deadlines even with consequences.

A tipping point in the class came after our guest speaker, Mark Moten, a graphic designer and photographer, spoke to the class. It was after the midterm, which was good timing because the students needed a break. Mark's presentation was very inspirational. All the students were asking questions and very enthusiastic. This paid dividends in our third project. All the students made a huge leap in creativity and quality of production. They also spoke more professionally during the critique. This is the time period where I really believed I was making a difference and connecting to the students.

We were on a roll after that. All the students were giving very good effort and attending class regularly. We did have a few withdrawals but we also gained a student too. The final project is really where it all came together. We were lucky enough to get time in one of the computer labs to work on the final project. I laid out the basic parameters but many of the students wanted to do something different so I modified the creative direction as long as all of the necessary elements were met. This was a huge success with many projects designed at a very high level.

Overall, I believe that every single student in my class, learned a lot and enjoyed themselves in the process. I totally underestimated the amount of time working outside of class to prepare, which was substantial, but it was worth every minute. The only regret was one student did not turn in his final project which really affected his grade negatively. I spent more time helping this student than any others during this time, which was frustrating.

I am thankful for the opportunity to be a part of the faculty team at Ai and look forward to my next teaching assignment with enthusiasm and confidence.