

Kyler Zeleny

Teaching Philosophy

Coming from an interdisciplinary background I have had the opportunity to instruct and support students in a variety of fields and situations. I have had the privilege to privately mentor some talented young photographers who are passionate about their practice but are outside of the traditional academic system. I have attended workshops by some of the most well known names in photography (including Magnum photographers: Alec Soth, Jim Goldberg, and Mark Powers). Learning from their approaches, I have adopted some of their methods and approaches from their workshops into my own teaching. I have advised and mentored emerging and established academics in my roles as a guest publisher/editor with the independent publishing house *The Velvet Cell* and as a guest editor with *Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies*.

In addition to my more informal roles as an educator, I have also been a Teaching Assistant in the Communication Department at York University for the last two years. Before proceeding it is worth noting that teaching assistants in the communication department account for 1/3 of all teaching and are responsible for the majority of grading and face-to-face interaction with students. Through my weekly seminars and office hours I am able to follow the development of students as they progress through each stage of the year course and make interventions when necessary to help improve the standing of the students in the course. In a classroom, learning is viewed as a collaborate venture between the instructor and their students. An instructor's primary responsibility is to present course content accurately and efficiently while also letting the students know they have an equal responsibility in applying themselves to learn that content. Viewing learning as a collaborative process draws on my personal work (visual projects and editing assignments) and ensures responsibility is placed on both the student and the instructor. However it is not enough to simply deliver content, superior teaching requires more than that. The American writer William Arthur Ward once wrote, "The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires". As an instructor it is my responsibility in the classroom to facilitate the growth of students, and to encourage them to tap into their unknown potential. Following the Teaching Perspectives Summaries (TPS) I do this primarily through apprehension and student nurturing. Apprehension emphasizes the "inner workings of skilled performance and must translate it into accessible language and an ordered set of tasks which usually proceed from simple to complex, allowing for different points of entry depending upon the learner's capacity". This is achieved by acknowledging that not all students arrive to the classroom with the same academic 'tool-kit' and that there is no one learning system. As well as by having students anonymously fill out a mid-semester 'progress reports' so further gauge what learning approaches are most effective. Questions are structured to produce two outcomes: firstly, to determine the level of effectiveness I am having with my teaching methods, this allows me to be accountable and to make changes to the instructional style if required. Secondly, to hold the students accountable, to ensure they know what their responsibilities are, this is done by asking students to self-rate themselves on a number of categories (student preparedness, student engagement, etc).

My background as a practicing photographer and researcher allows me to lead by example. Because of this I can stress the importance of the skills students gain inside the institution and how these skills can be utilized for personal projects, or how they can be applied to 'real-world' situations. An objective of my teaching, which has been adapted from my own habits of production and learning, is to apply an interdisciplinary framework to student learning. I encourage students from different disciplines to enter into a constructive dialogue with each other to help develop their own methodological approach and personal voice. It is important to bridge not only disciplines but also approaches, students are encouraged to bridge theory and practice as each can lead to a better understanding of the other.

In my role as a Teaching Assistant (Introduction to Politics, Policy and the Media & Media, Culture and Society), I make a concerted effort to teach course material through the application of popular examples. Combined with the use of multi-media learning techniques (imagery, video, etc.), these examples resonate with the students and help sustain their interest in material that at times can be rather dry. The use of audio-video content to supplement course material creates a situation where students are enthusiastic and engaged with the material. The goal is to get the students invested and impassioned by appealing to both their heads and their hearts as supported by the nurturing perspective of 'good teaching' (TPS).