

# Ellen Mueller

Ellen@EllenMueller.com | EllenMueller.com/teaching

## TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

As an artist, I have set three goals for myself and my students: to examine the artist's role in relationship to our society; to create and execute effective visual problems for students to solve; and to familiarize students with the professional skills necessary for their success as artists and beyond.

I view higher education as a civic space in which we learn to seek transformation of our own views and the way we live our lives in society. Therefore, it is important that students come to understand their active roles as individual artists and members of a community. I encourage students to examine themselves in relation to others through a variety of regular critiques. In my Drawing I course, students must present their research and ideas for drawings to the class before they begin their finished product, allowing for feedback from peers. This atmosphere of open critical discussion helps students gain the confidence to articulate their ideas in a decisive way. Through the process of developing their unique understanding of who they are, what they want to say, and why they express themselves using the modes that they do, I intend for the students to develop an interest in life-long learning and active community membership.

My assignments focus on conceptual, craft, critical-thinking, research, and working skills that will aid student success in their chosen discipline. I expect a great deal from my students, as participation is central to our success within the classroom and to their success beyond the academic institution. In my teaching I prioritize helping students to solve visual problems using multiple strategies for idea generation. For example, when students began their drawing projects in my Fall 2011 Drawing I course at Colorado State University-Pueblo, I required them to brainstorm no fewer than ten possible solutions to assignments. This process forces students to move beyond their first impulses, reminding them to deeply examine the subject, form, and content of their work. Also, I aim to increase the level of complexity and sophistication of students' inquiry, by utilizing regular reflection writings in all my courses. It is important to impart to students an awareness that knowledge is evolutionary. By implementing reflection exercises, students have an opportunity to realize changes in theirs and others' thinking.

As I develop these assignments, I bring focus to developing students' professional skills by incorporating blogs and social media, and requiring students to digitally archive their work. When students learn how to create effective web content, links, and high-quality photos, they not only prepare themselves for the basic requirements of being an arts professional, they also gain skills that will help them in any field. Similarly, there is a strong emphasis on presentation skills in my courses. The process of organizing one's research, and making it relevant to others through clear communication requires objective thinking, and the ability to find a sense of the universal in the personal.

I am continually refining my approach to teaching. I have taken and continue to pursue courses and workshops on teaching principles. I also talk to students on a regular basis regarding their thoughts on exercises and projects we undertake in class, and I implement changes based on suggestions from student evaluations, which take place at least twice per semester, rather than only at the end of the semester. By using student projects and artworks as a means of self-assessment, I am constantly developing new ways to inspire curiosity and engagement, while ensuring students have gained the foundational skills for building their own art practice.

In sum, my pedagogical strategies are dedicated to teaching art in a dynamic, hands-on way that will remain with the students long after they leave my classroom.