

I see my work as a university educator as the ultimate expression of my scholarly interests: the courses that I teach and the undergraduate theses I advise all explore, in various ways, issues of visual culture, the politics of representation, and urban studies, combining my Ph.D. training in art and architectural history with the approaches of media studies and visual anthropology. I believe that engagement with visual culture and the built environment should not be a lofty exercise in how to appreciate high art or become “culturally literate,” but should give students a set of critical methods, vocabulary and competencies that will allow them to draw practical connections between the intellectual world of academia and the realities – and challenges – of life outside of the university. My teaching philosophy centers on the idea that students are best able to forge these connections in a supportive, creative and rigorous classroom environment. I do this in three ways: through valuing student expertise, encouraging self-driven, multi-model approaches to research, and giving them the right analytical tools to undergird these processes.

I strive to value the wealth of knowledge that students bring to the classroom by creating an open, collaborative culture where students are constantly in dialogue with me and with one another. I model cooperative intellectual openness by being frank about the limits of my knowledge, and allowing students to contribute their own expertise to the course. Even in my art history survey classes, which are traditionally given in lecture format, I spend almost as much time listening to students as I do talking. Not only does this encourage them to actively participate in the learning process, but it helps me to understand their positionalities so that I can help them more effectively. The supportive, active and engaging social space of the classroom then becomes a springboard for students to pursue their own research questions in innovative ways.

Grounded in the themes presented in course readings and discussions, students in my applied media courses in the CHID Program use blogs, photography, video, audio and graphic arts to document, analyze and present their research. For instance, in both my study abroad program in Berlin and my UW Seattle class on media and local spaces, students did on-site observations of sites of their choice, documenting them via blogs that combined writing and non-textual media. My course on the nature of home, identity and community gave students the technical and analytical tools to produce their own documentary films on those themes. In each case, I purposely left projects open-ended so that students could identify the sites and topics that most interested them. They were then required to then design media projects that were appropriate to their abilities and to the time constraints of the courses. This style of learning simultaneously encourages the kinds of self-motivated scholarship that students can continue to pursue beyond the university context, and prompts them to consider non-textual media as valid modes of intellectual enquiry.

A focus on media and its application to research must also be firmly based in a body of theoretical knowledge about how media function in our world. Thus my third goal as an educator is to provide both my classroom and thesis students with the appropriate methodological tools to undertake applied media research in an ethical and academically rigorous way. While my courses function partly as studio-style workshops, they also incorporate seminar discussion and short lectures where we collaboratively explore and apply key analytical concepts from the fields of philosophy, media studies, art history, anthropology and sociology. Increasingly, I am utilizing online learning tools such as Canvas to facilitate and extend these discussions. Students thus become not only producers, but critical consumers of media, developing a self-reflexive and intellectually sophisticated form of engagement with daily life that reflects my own passions and interests as a scholar.