

Teaching Portfolio

Thomas Wilder

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Teaching Philosophy

Every discipline can be compared to a conversation between individuals. If one wants to make a meaningful contribution to a discipline, as one would do in a conversation, they must listen before speaking. Imagine someone who walks up to a table of people who have been hotly debating a topic for hours and begins speaking immediately. What comes out of the mouth of this individual barging into the debate will have extremely little or no relevance to what the others have been talking about. In order for this individual's contribution to have any substantive meaning to the others, the individual must listen, listen some more, and then keep listening. This is the key to a meaningful addition to an ongoing discussion. Similarly, anyone interested in engaging a larger discipline or area of study, whether it be drawing, philosophy, art history, physics, theology, or photography, they must first rigorously research the relevant issues within the field.

The purpose of education is the preparation of individuals for meaningful contributions to their respective and eventual disciplines. The primary role of the professor is to empower their students towards this purpose. Empowerment within the context of education occurs through a three-fold process: educator's knowledge of discipline, increasing the student's interest in discipline, and giving the students the tools to research independently beyond the range of the course. If you remove one step in the process, it weakens dramatically and potentially falls apart. A teacher may be able to provoke the students to love a subject, but if they don't have adequate experience or knowledge of the field, they are completely unable to answer questions in class or present relevant information. Conversely, a professor may be the most informed person in the field, but if hearing them lecture is duller than watching paint dry, the students will quickly lose interest. My duty as a teacher is to know my discipline and subject as well as I possibly can, inspire the students to desire further independent research, and give them the resources to do so.

The best professor I've had taught philosophy and embodied these qualities to a T. She had an incredible wealth of knowledge surrounding the history of philosophy (this is the course that I took from her), an enormous respect for each student, and gave us useful resources (including a course packet, which she wrote) to continue our research beyond the duration of the course. She held a high standard for us all, never dumbing things down as if we didn't have the capacity to understand. Rather, she made concepts clear and simple without sacrificing their integrity or ours. Through her respect she made me feel valuable. Because of this I was confident to ask questions in class. Unless a student feels comfortable, safe, and valued, they won't participate. One of my biggest goals as a professor is to foster a class environment that is comfortable for everyone, without sacrificing the integrity of the subject at hand.

Diversity Statement

When the word diversity is brought up in relation to academic institutions in the U.S and me, I think about how I don't possess a single attribute in the typical way of understanding the term diversity. Obviously, there are many things that make me unique; yet, most of the attributes that I possess are not underrepresented attributes within higher education. In light of the lack of my diversity I am on a continual journey of learning the ways in which I am privileged in my life. One way of thinking about privilege is as an opportunity for ignorance. If one can live without being required to acknowledge something, this individual is experiencing privilege with regards to that thing.

If I choose to, I can ignore the fact that I am white, cis-gendered, male, straight, upper-middle class, and tall. I am completely accepted by my society without being questioned about any of these attributes. Conversely, those who are not as privileged often have to recognize a given attribute they possess because of discrimination, prejudice, micro aggressions, or intolerance solely on the basis of their possession of said attribute; regardless of whether these happen on interpersonal, institutional, or societal levels. Because I firmly disagree with and want to fight against any form of discrimination, as faculty, I am dedicated to equal treatment of all students.

One way in which I aim to implement this goal is through the use of a class exercise demonstrated by a fabulous professor of mine. At the beginning of the course, they asked each member of the class to think of a code of conduct, particularly geared toward inclusivity and respect toward others that would be incorporated into our class standards. We went around the room, each student giving their wish for a new class standard. This activity greatly inspired me as my professor demonstrated a simple but powerful strategy for engendering a high level of sensitivity for diverse perspectives within a classroom. In the future, I hope to execute the same activity at the beginning of each course with the aim of hearing every student and allowing their voice to influence classroom dynamics.

Course Proposals

PHOTO 139 - **Intro to Digital Photography: Laying a Foundation**

3 Credits - Capacity: 15

Prerequisites: none

Estimated Material Cost: \$100

Course Description:

This course serves as an introduction to the technical foundations within traditional digital photography. Anyone who takes this course will become familiar with RAW image capture with a digital single lens reflex (DSLR) camera, processing RAW photographs using Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop, and printing with the department's high-end Epson InkJet printers. Through assigned projects, readings, demos, and critiques, students will begin to learn how to produce and read photographs using technical and theoretical criteria. The primary goal of this course is to lay a primarily technical foundation for students who are interested in experimenting artistically using the medium of photography. Anyone can break the rules, but few can break them with the awareness that they are or the ability to follow them.

PHOTO 324 - **Digital Photography: Applied Technique**

3 Credits - Capacity: 15

Prerequisites: PHOTO 139

Estimated Material Cost: \$150

Course Description:

In this course, students will apply the foundational skills they learned in the prerequisite course, PHOTO 139, to their individual artistic pursuits. This class is aimed at teaching students to use their technical abilities in favor of their artistic production; even breaking rules they previously thought were static. Students who take this course will be pushed to read images with a critical and theoretical eye alongside the technical.

PHOTO 355 - **Describing Photographs: Theory, Criticism, and Interpretation**

3 Credits - Capacity: 15

Prerequisites: None

Estimated Material Cost: \$100

Course Description:

Why is description considered a basic action? What role does description play in criticism and one's artistic practice? What are interpretations of photographic work based off of? Through theory, critique, and interpretation, this course emphasizes description as a method for discovery. Students will be asked to continually return to description as a process of learning to see. This course will accompany student's other studio production through critiques, readings, lectures, writing assignments, and discussions. Students who take this course will be asked to drastically reconsider the method by which they approach photographic making and criticism. Figures such as Barthes, Barrett, Fried, and Heidegger among others will be considered.

Syllabus

Describing Photographs: Theory, Criticism, and Interpretation

Rhode Island School of Design – Photography Department

Wintersession 2020

PHOTO 355

3 Credits

Capacity: 15

Prerequisites: None

Elective

Open to Non-Majors

Estimated Material Cost: \$100

Design Center - Room 308

Tuesday's 11:20-4:20PM

Thomas Wilder

Cell: 630-379-2115

Email: twilde01@risd.edu

Office Hours: N/A

“Description is not a prelude to criticism; description is criticism.”

– Terry Barrett in *Criticizing Photographs: An Introduction to Understanding Images*

Course Description

Why is description considered a basic action? What role does description play in criticism and one's artistic practice? What are interpretations of photographic work based off of? Through theory, critique, and interpretation, this course emphasizes description as a method for discovery. Students will be asked to continually return to description as a process of learning to see. This course will accompany student's other studio production through critiques, readings, lectures, writing assignments, and discussions. Students who take this course will be asked to drastically reconsider the method by which they approach photographic making and criticism. Figures such as Barthes, Barrett, Fried, and Heidegger among others will be considered.

Goals

- To Expand understanding of possibilities of making and criticism through a methodology of description.
- To Learn how to delay evaluation, interpretation, and theorization during the process of making and criticism.
- To Grow in one's ability to describe visual work with a broad variety of language and high level of comfort.

Learning Outcomes

- 40% of grade - Fluency in employing description as a methodology for criticism and analysis

- 30% of grade - Understanding of broad range of theoretical texts on photographic meaning and criticism
- 30% of grade - Robust ability to critique work without making visual assumptions about what one is seeing

Course Methods

This course will employ the following activities, methods, and repeatables as a means to encourage the maximum amount of diverse learning opportunities throughout the semester:

- Critiques
- Lectures by Instructor
- Class Discussions
- Written Reading Summaries
- Museum Visit
- Lecture by Visiting Artist
- Slide Show Presentations
- Unique Critique Activities

Disability Statement

In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as well as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), RISD attempts to make its classes, programs, events and services accessible to everyone. Reasonable accommodations are made for people with disabilities or special needs who request assistance. These accommodations may include relocation of the class, program, event or service, if necessary; duplication in an accessible location; provision of a comparable substitute at a fully accessible institution; and/or interim measures authorized by federal law.

If you need assistance to participate in any class, program, event or service offered at RISD, please contact Director of Disability Support & Academic Support Brittany Goodwin at bgoodwin@risd.edu or 401 709-8460.

Diversity Statement

This course strives to insure that all people feel respected, comfortable, and safe in order to learn to the best of their ability. It aims to cater to all learning styles through a wide variety of techniques, material, and activities. Every student will be treated equally and no discrimination of any kind will be tolerated. One way in which this will be employed is through an opportunity for students to contribute to the class code of conduct. Another method that will be used to encourage the contribution of many different learners is a style of conversation called *Mutual Invitation*, which ensures that everyone has the opportunity to speak, but also the opportunity to remain silent.

Requirements and Grading

Attendance: 20%

Class Participation: 25%

Reading Summaries: 25%

Critique Participation: 20%

Critique Preparedness: 10%

Required Materials

- Archival Inkjet Printing Paper. Recommended brands: Avery, Canon, Canson, Epson, HP.
 - Please acquire at least a 17"x50" Roll. Matte is okay, but Luster paper is preferred.
- *Criticizing Photographs: An Introduction to Understanding Images (5th ed.)* By Terry Barrett

Resources: bhphotovideo.com, amazon.com.

Emerging Ideas

Outcomes:

- A Broad conception of art critique methods
- Experimentation with alternative forms of criticizing
- Expansion of language with which one can speak about photographic work

Class #1

Lecture: *Introduction to Interpretative Methods for Photographic Criticism* By Thomas Wilder

Activity & Discussion

Slide Show Presentation

Class #2

Reading summary due (300 words): Excerpt from, *The Critique Handbook: A Sourcebook and Survival Guide* by Kendall Buster and Paula Crawford

Discussion

Slide Show Presentation

Class #3

Critique - **Group A**

Class #4

Reading Summary Due (300 words): Chapter from, *Criticizing Photographs* by Terry Barrett

Discussion

Slide Show Presentation

Class #5

Lecture: *Description as Criticism* By Thomas Wilder

Slide Show Presentation

RISD Museum Visit

Developing Ideas

Outcomes:

- Postponement of evaluation, interpretation, and theorization within critique in order for them to be more robust later on.
- Allowance of one's photographic work to arise primarily from seeing rather than ideation

Class #6

Museum Visit Written Response Due (300 words)

Critique - **Group B**

Class #7

Lecture: *A Brief View of Abstraction Within Photography* by Thomas Wilder

Activity & Discussion

Class #8

Guest Lecture – TBD

Critique - **Group C**

Class #9

Reading summary due (300 words): Chapter entitled, *Thomas Struth's Museum Photographs* from *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* by Michael Fried

Discussion

Class #10

Critique - **Group A**

Mastering Ideas

Outcomes:

- Exhaustion of an image's visual elements via solely description
- Fair interpretations and theories based off of the work presented
- Defense of description as a valuable method of criticism
- Recognition of an unfair interpretation that isn't based out of description

Class #11

Lecture: *Beyond Description, Based on Description* by Thomas Wilder

Activity & Discussion

Class #12

Reading summary due (300 words): *The Photographic Message* By Roland Barthes

Discussion

Class #13

Critique - **Group B**

Class #14

Lecture: *If You Dare to Give Yourself* By Thomas Wilder

Discussion

Critique - **Group C**

Class Project

Taking Away the Eyes: A Method of Critique for Description Accountability

What is outlined below should be taken as a recipe - that is, those who implement this method are encouraged to alter the ingredients and their amounts as needed.

The method:

- The individual presenting work sets up their pieces on three or fewer walls - if it's sculptural or work which needs to occupy space in the center of the room, enough space should be left to allow the critics to face a portion of the room containing nothing.
- The critics are ushered in with their eyes closed to seats which are facing away from the work presented (the critics can also be seated first and the work hung as they face away). Upon reaching their seats, they are allowed to open their eyes but are not permitted to look at the work.
- One volunteer or randomly chosen critic is asked to view the work and *describe* what they see for a distinct duration of time (this is based off of how much time is available overall). This individual is encouraged to describe as many or as few works as they desire; though this is partially determined by what is asked from the others. However, their criticism should remain within the realm of description alone. They are strongly discouraged from moving into theorization, interpretation, or evaluation.
- After the allotted time expires, the critic will rotate with another volunteer or selected critic. This happens one more time, with the total of three critics repeating this process.
- Any time one is seated, facing away from the work, one is encouraged to ask questions of the individual describing the work, take notes, and form a mental image of what is described.
- After three critics have taken their respective turns everyone may turn and view the work as the criticism is opened to interpretation and theorization for the remainder of the time.

Goals:

- To increase ability to describe what one is seeing
- To illustrate the complexity of looking
- To heighten curiosity of images in general
- To hold students accountable to listening and looking through note taking

Outcomes:

- A compiled list of notes on the visual components of one's work %40
- A vocabulary by which to describe images %30
- An opportunity to form questions to ask of the way an image appears %30

Basic Competency Qualities:

- Questions are asked but do not aid, challenge, or advance the thought of the entire class
- Adequate notes are taken throughout the duration of the critique
- Descriptions do not wander into interpretation or theorization

Advanced Competency Qualities:

- Questions are frequently asked to aid, challenge, and advance the thought of the entire class
- Copious notes are taken - including sketches
- Descriptions seek to aid in forming a robust mental picture of what's being described in the minds of those listening

Mid-Term Course Evaluation

PHOTO 355

Course Goals

- To Expand understanding of possibilities of making and criticism through a methodology of description.
- To Learn how to delay evaluation, interpretation, and theorization during the process of making and criticism.
- To Grow in one's ability to describe visual work with a broad variety of language and high level of comfort.

On a scale of 1 to 5, please rate the following questions, 5 being absolutely, 1 being not at all:

1. The lectures and readings are conceptually well connected during discussions.

1 2 3 4 5

2. The readings are informing my studio work in a meaningful way.

1 2 3 4 5

3. The discussions contribute to my conceptual interest and understanding of the material.

1 2 3 4 5

4. I am getting the support and input I need with respect to the research aspects of the course.

1 2 3 4 5

5. The critiques are functioning well and connecting to concepts within the class.

1 2 3 4 5

6. Please respond to the following open-ended questions:

Are the concepts within the course interesting? Do they challenge you? Are they frustrating?

Are you being challenged to push the boundaries of your practice? If so, how? If not, what do you think might achieve that?

Do you feel that the instructor is responsive to your feedback and input?

Do you feel clear about the expectations of the course?

What are the strongest/weakest parts of the course thus far?

Name (Optional):

Grading Rubric

PHOTO 355

All grades are subject to change. If you receive a grade you feel is in anyway unfairly given, please speak to me.

Conceptual Knowledge - 30%

- Needs improvement
 - Regularly does not demonstrate conceptual understanding of the material given through discussion, lectures, and reading.
- Competent
 - Shows adequate awareness of theories and ideas
- Excellent
 - Displays proficient grasp of terms, theories, and dates
 - Continually volunteers clarification and seeks to know more

Inquiry/Critical Thinking - 30%

- Needs improvement
 - Consistently shows a lack of interest in topic
 - Never seeks to understand anything more than what's offered
- Competent
 - Contributes substantive questions and thinking regarding theories discussed in class
 - Displays initiative to incorporate concepts into one's own thinking
- Excellent
 - Frequently provides new information relevant to the topic at hand
 - Displays high level of interest in pursuing knowledge outside of the material offered

Participation/Engagement - 20%

- Needs improvement
 - Rarely contributes verbally or otherwise during class time
 - Body language does not display interest or attentive engagement
- Competent
 - Regularly asks questions in lectures and contributes during discussions
 - Is attentive and present during all activities
- Excellent
 - Frequently looks to contribute and make rooms for others to contribute
 - Is present, interested, and active in participating in all activities and discussions

Preparedness - 20%

- Needs improvement
 - Frequently shows up with incomplete projects and assignments
 - Does not complete assignments on time
- Competent

- Regularly arrives at class with all homework completed
 - Active and ready to display and share work prepared
- Excellent
 - Always arrives at class with all assignments completed and in hand
 - Regularly displays numerous attempts and ways of thinking