

JASON BRIGGS Teaching Philosophy

More than 10 years as an adjunct instructor at a private, liberal arts university have taught me something personal and profound: I crave the intellectual stimulation a robust academic school provides. My fondness for teaching centers around the desire to interact with a vigorous, energetic student body and faculty. While I have much to offer in terms of knowledge, dedication, and integrity, learning is a two-way street. Beyond merely passing information from faculty to student, the classroom provides a forum for the exchange of ideas, an integral part of personal growth for student *and* faculty.

I believe beginning and intermediate students need to develop a strong foundation of basic skills, from technical (building and finishing) to academic (composing space). To this end, I incorporate a broad range of assignments, from those that emphasize a thoughtful approach, to those that are more purely intuitive. The challenge, of course, is to promote proficiency with clay while exposing its vast potential as an expressive medium. With clay, technical skills are wrapped up tightly with development of ideas. I believe pressure, applied from faculty, and competition, applied by peers, can be a powerful combination.

Once students begin to identify with their work stylistically, I mentor them more closely, via one-on-one critiques, formal and informal dialogues, even passing comments in the lunch line. I feel this is one of my strengths; I maintain a good rapport, based on trust and communication, while demanding exceptional effort. Serious students understand my motives; lazy kids just think I'm prickly. But I remain adamant. I insist that my students identify and discuss their 'post-degree' aspirations: *"How will you earn money? How will you define success? What will motivate you when nobody is paying attention?"* The answers are elusive and must be allowed to evolve. On these topics, my experience as a studio artist lends me credibility--knowing what one wants from a career in art is as important as the work itself.

Naturally, there is huge importance in understanding history--notably, the ability to break with it--but to me a strong concept comes before any "debt to tradition". As an instructor, I'm impartial regarding style, material, technique, or tradition. I have my biases, yes--I'm a sucker for obsessive craftsmanship--but I remain objective. Students need to search honestly and inwardly for their voice, instead of trying to 'fit' a certain genre. Accordingly, a department should avoid becoming branded for a particular look. A studio should reflect the *character* of its faculty, (i.e., work ethic, integrity, even personality) but not necessarily its *work*.

Just as important as artistic development, art students must develop a meaningful relationship with the studio. Raw talent is valuable, as is a strong intellect, but a ferocious work ethic is the basis for long-term success. Many artistic shortcomings can be overcome simply by working. Therefore, the energy and vitality of the studio is a critical component to a student's full development. Both by example and by design, I foster an atmosphere where students practically compete to outwork one another. The by-product of a thriving studio is intellectual discourse, which tends to carry itself into life outside the shop.