

Steven Nunoda - Philosophy Statement

Understanding visual art is crucial in a visual culture and practicing studio research is a key component in this understanding. I approach teaching informed as much by this belief as by my experiences as a student, a technician, an instructor and a practicing artist. My own research into the interrelation of form, concept, material and craft, as well as over two decades of teaching and technical experience have led me to believe that art is not merely a skill of the hands, a sensibility, a form of communication or an intellectual discipline; it is all of these.

“Making” is arguably the central activity of studio research, combining physical acts with creative and critical thought. Post-secondary art education should therefore develop intellectual and technical skills together. In my work as a technician in support of students’ research, I have looked for a balance between technical instruction and an awareness of contemporary and traditional contexts of practice. Even in my consultations with foundation-level students that have extremely varied skill levels and experiences with art, I strive to convey how the techniques, materials and presentational strategies they use affect their viewers and support their ideas and expression. Since this “making” is not over until the work is presented to an audience, I am also involved in the students’ exhibitions and galleries, supporting the development of their professional practices [p. 3]. It is my concern that students learn to make informed choices about the work they produce and how they present their work to an audience. For this reason, mentoring through one-on-one consultations has long been a central strategy of my teaching, allowing me to get to know individual students and their needs [p. 2]. Recent graduate Chelsea Steer noted in a testimonial letter: “Steve goes above and beyond in his work and creates opportunities to challenge me. His mentorship has helped me to develop new skills that relate to my art.”

The students’ day-to-day class work and wellbeing are my main priorities and so I provide rigorous training in safety [p. 5] and the best practices of material choice, manufacture, and machine output. I prepare for each of my presentations and demonstrations with care and commitment, logically organizing activities so that each step and skill addressed reinforces their instructors’ lessons and introduces students to their next level. To be effective with students with diverse experiences and learning styles, I am adaptive and innovative in my delivery and customarily include a combination of verbal instructions, visual demonstrations, guided hands-on practice and written or visual information resources. Over the years I have created numerous technical instruction sheets, diagrams, signage and safe operating procedures for equipment [p. 7]. I have found that this approach helps with in-class attention and information retention.

Art is constantly adopting new methods and I must do the same in order to provide students with experiences that are relevant to their interests and contemporary practice. I am constantly revising workshop procedures and acquiring new technical knowledge to suit the evolving needs of students and their instructors and to take advantage of the opportunities new technology provides [p. 9]. I strive to make our facilities a welcoming, collaborative and creative space and to empower students who may have shied away from unfamiliar processes and ideas. The most rewarding part of my role as a technician is my ability to facilitate students’ work by opening access to techniques and technologies – teaching them how to “do it themselves.” Instructor Rob Furr has noted: “Problem-solving is one of the major concepts he teaches; no sculptural idea is too weird, no plan is too out there for Mr. Nunoda to deal with. While he does bow to the limitations of the physical world, he refuses to let a student walk out without an idea of how to move forward.”