

DESIGN IS A TRANSFORMATIVE TOOL THAT BECOMES EVEN MORE POWERFUL AND EFFECTIVE WHEN IT IS COMBINED UPON A RICH AND SOLID FOUNDATION

This sentence summarizes what I believe as a designer and instructor within a design school.

I believe that my role in the classroom is not only to teach students the foundations of design such as Gestalt, the grid, color, function and form, but to further develop individuals who are well equipped to be productive citizens and tomorrow's designers. I feel it is necessary to create a classroom space that is open to critical thinking, debate and discussion. This type of learning environment begins to build a diverse background of experience, exploration and understanding which will provide the students and future designers with a broader view of the modern world.

This broad lens becomes extremely important when we examine the way in which design, and those who design, are impacting our society. In today's market, beyond beautiful layouts or very functional products, designers are leading companies, managing teams, building their own business, influencing political campaigns, and developing some of the most valuable and forward-thinking brands. Design is transforming the built environment and the way in which we interact with it every day.

"Design does not happen in a vacuum." Current topics of human-centered design, sustainability, entrepreneurship, environment, social and political movements affect everyday life and are relevant topics for students to explore as they relate to current and future design challenges.

As an international instructor, with professional experiences with a variety of project sizes and clients from multiple industries, I often use real cases in the classroom to demonstrate design solutions. I find that the real-world context allows me to show students what was effective, and what didn't work as well, or how the same problem can have multiple viable solutions. Additionally, I frequently encourage students to bring issues they connect with into the classroom. During the Fall of 2017, I was teaching a branding course at the University of Kansas. Following a shooting in downtown Lawrence, I proposed a project with a theme of non-violence, but gave students the latitude to choose a story that related to their own personal beliefs and values. The result was a broad range of projects from gun regulation to Transgender Rights, that exposed all of us to the personal realities and stories that are outside of our immediate social bubbles.

In the project cited above, and in all of the assignments I give my students, I position myself as a facilitator through which they can solve their own problems. I believe it is my role to foster the tools such as collaboration, teamwork as well as individualism, openness to feedback, and the ability to dialog with people about divergent ideas in order to be prepared, successful professionals. My goal is to prepare them to think as designers – outside of their chosen specialization – because design is design.

The most rewarding facet of education is seeing my students grow and succeed. I've worked with standout students, and I've worked with students who just struggle. Both have gone on to graduate and receive awards. For that reason, I reiterate that design is a transformative tool. Design allows individuals to see possibilities, it encourages them to pivot and adjusts until they find the right solution and design has the power to impact our lives on a daily basis.

Design transforms my life every day. Design transforms my students' lives.

And I know that my students will use design to transform and impact other people's lives.