

Teaching Statement

by Greg Senn

I love teaching. Teaching is why I'm here, and what I consider to be the most important part of my job. As I see it, the students come first. Students are paying for my time, advice, and assistance and they deserve the best that I can give. I am here to guide their explorations in the area of their interests in a way that enables them to learn how to do it and to come to an understanding of why it is done that way. I tend to stress reasons more than techniques or methods in my classes as I try to encourage students to think and make connections. I believe that if the students understand the reasons, they can usually figure out a method to accomplish their goals. This creative problem solving encourages students to explore alternatives and make discoveries and decisions after some kind of evaluation process. I see teaching in terms of encouraging students to think.

I believe that the conceptual aspect of art is a very important part of our students' education. However, lately I have been teaching mostly lower division and introductory classes. In our current curriculum, these courses are very heavily technically based as we are turn teaching these classes with the focus of giving as many skills to the students as rapidly as possible. Within the constraints of focusing on technical skills, I think I am doing a very good job of combining aesthetics and conceptual art within the technical parameters.

I've always been interested in improving my teaching and over the years have taken a number of workshops to help me evaluate, improve, and modify my teaching techniques. I'm actively involved in assessment, and have been using a number of the standard Classroom Assessment Techniques since I started at ENMU 17 years ago. I'm also a long-time believer in the importance of cross-curricular learning, and the art classes I teach for majors always require written work as well as art work.

In addition to my regular full course load, each semester I have usually 4-6 (up to 12) additional students in both undergraduate and graduate directed study courses or internships (which means I'm actually teaching an unpaid overload). In recent semesters I've worked with students on a wide variety of projects including: advanced metal-working, fabric art, figure sculpture, art education, and enameling. I've supervised students on gallery and graphic design internships. Currently, I'm on the thesis committee of and have been working with a graduate student in the Department of Anthropology on his thesis project: "Differential Heat Treatment of Chert".

Since I'm in the 3D lab for several hours each week day, I regularly also work with and assist students from other art classes who need to use the equipment and materials in that room. Three times recently I've spent approximately an hour a week for a full semester working with Interdisciplinary Art students who were working in 3D media.

While most of the students I teach are Art majors, my Jewelry class has always been very popular with non-majors as well. The variety of backgrounds and goals these students bring to the class make teaching it both challenging and exciting. In addition, last year I was invited to teach a figure casting workshop at Mesalands Community College in Tucumcari, to augment their very active 3D art program.

I'm very interested in interdisciplinary teaching. In 1998 I team-taught a course in Machine Tool Technology with a faculty member in the Industrial Technology Department. I was in the process of developing a Religious Iconography course to be team-taught with a member of the Religion Department as part of the NEH upper-division general education requirements. Unfortunately, the other faculty member left ENMU before we were able to finish plans and offer the course. I'm currently working with the Department of Anthropology and Applied Archaeology on grant writing for equipment to be used by both Anthropology and Art students, as well a serving on the thesis committee for an Anthropology graduate student.

Although my courses are challenging and I make my students work for their grades, for the past 17 years I've consistently earned very good student evaluation scores. The only slightly lower (though still respectably high) numbers I received were when I was assigned at the last minute to teach the Demonstration of Conceptual Development

course which all art majors must take every semester. The lack of adequate preparation time affected my student evaluations the first semester, but there was a noticeable improvement in my evaluation numbers the second semester. (I understand that this less-popular course traditionally results in lower evaluation numbers for the faculty member.)

A comparison can be made between my overall average teaching evaluation scores and those of my peers. For example, in the Spring of 2001 (the first semester for which I have composite data information) my overall average of 4.51 compares to an ENMU average of 4.21, a College of Fine Arts average of 4.29, and an Art Department average of 4.05. The two semesters when my score dropped due to DCD evaluations, my scores were still slightly higher than the Art Department averages - 3.98 to 3.94 in the Fall of 2001 and 4.11 to 4.09 in the Spring of 2002.

Of course, numbers are only one way of evaluating teaching effectiveness. Student comments are very important in evaluating course material and teaching methods. Here are a few representational comments from recent student evaluations:

- Senn is a lighthouse and an example of a great professor. He inspired the students (including me) to creatively design and propose projects that would stimulate thinking.
- When I'm in a class taught by Greg Senn I always learn so many new things. He is the kind of teacher that his students are his life and what he cares most about. He challenges, yet makes you feel comfortable as you endeavor to travel into the unchartered waters of new methods and mediums. I wish Eastern had more teachers like him who are caring and willing to share their selves and their vast knowledge.
- Greg Senn is a great instructor! He is a hands-on type of teacher that encourages his students to learn & do!
- Greg encourages students to try to do different things with their work. He tries to get the students to go one step further with creativity, to experiment.
- I really like the way Greg gives us an overall outline but basically lets us create our own ideas and enjoy the freedom we have to be creative.
- He's one of the best teachers I've ever had. He is very helpful, thoughtful, usually available when needed and is very accessible.
- I really appreciated the opportunity to work independently & at my own pace. I learned a lot - not just about terms & definitions, but about myself & my art.
- Greg encourages you to think and it creates a very positive learning environment.
- I feel Greg is a little strict in his grading for a nonmajor course, but I agree if he were more lenient he would lose the attendance throughout the semester to skipping.
- Greg does have a passion for his career and shows it during class.
- He seems to love to teach the course, which makes it easier for students to learn from him.
- His knowledge is astounding in all fields!
- He encourages creativity and conceptualization in his students.
- He's really good about making students extend their imaginations by getting out of their comfort zone. He also encourages students to go further with their mind, imaginations, & projects.
- He's the main one that spends time with the "why" in art.