

## Heather McCune Bruhn's Teaching Philosophy

My dual loves of teaching and art are inherited from my mother, a former high school art teacher. As a child, I visited her classroom, and helped her more and more as I grew up. My father is a retired university finance officer, so I also grew up discussing university administration and visiting college campuses whenever we traveled. In my teens I felt a call to teach, and I decided to pursue an academic career by the time I finished high school. I still find the energy level in the classroom exciting and addictive. The wealth of possibilities available to undergraduates soon convinced me that I wanted to work with that age group. I began college intending to be a painter, fell in love with both printmaking and Art History, and then followed the latter here to Penn State.

I sometimes struggle with the popular notion that Art History is impractical and unlikely to lead to a career. That struggle has led to a fundamental principal: I am teaching **Visual Literacy**. Given the number of images that bombard us every day, it is crucial that students learn to critically interrogate those images, rather than being passive (and persuadable) viewers. Students often remark that my courses have changed the way they see the world: suddenly they recognize the Classical elements in their local bank, for example, and are able to posit reasons to connect that style with a financial institution.

I see **Education as Empowerment**. I believe in challenging my students, but I want to set them up to succeed, not fail. When appropriate, I give second chances, opportunities to catch up, and flexible scheduling. Most of my students are in World Campus, and they face myriad challenges, from full-time employment or being active military to caring for toddlers or aging parents at home. Key to this empowerment is **Providing Students with Tools for Success**. In Art History, we use a lot of analytical tools simultaneously when evaluating a given work. Students, therefore, need to learn to use many tools at once. This is challenging, and results in some student panic at the start of term. I provide visual note-taking guides to help the students prioritize content, downloadable glossaries and diagrams for key concepts, and low-stakes quizzes to help them test their knowledge. The end result is that students feel confident that they can encounter and evaluate new and unfamiliar works, and I love reading emails about their first-time visits to museums and archaeological sites.

I firmly believe that **One Size Does Not Fit All** in education. Some students learn by reading, others by watching demonstrations, and still others by performing activities. I mix modalities between asynchronous videos with low-stakes quizzes and live discussion. I make both video tutorials and downloadable visual PDF tutorials available. I am constantly testing new ways of communicating more effectively with my diverse student audience, both online and in the classroom. Early in my teaching career, I realized that **Materials and Techniques** were the way to particularly connect to engineering and science students. Prior to Covid I frequently brought in materials and 3D printed models for students to handle, and in several cases when teaching Medieval art, I have brought in incense for students to smell. In October 2018, I set up a one-week materials and techniques showcase that allowed visitors to see and interact with several materials that I researched for a new course: they could mix ochre pigment into watercolor paint, try using a chisel on alabaster, marble and porphyry, shine a light through alabaster and garnet, and so on. I brought all of the students in my Art History 111 class to the showcase during their discussion sections, and set up a two-day showcase in Fall 2019, just for students in Art History 111. During Covid, my demos have shifted to short home-made video presentations.

Finally, it is crucial to **Turn Mistakes into Learning Opportunities** rather than reasons to fail. When a student makes a mistake on an exam or project that could have major consequences for their final class grade, I give them the opportunity to rewrite and recover the lost points. The chance for redemption comes with the invitation to meet in person or by zoom to discuss what went wrong and how to fix it. Education should be redemptive. It should challenge students appropriately based on their capabilities and the level of the material, but it should ultimately give them the opportunity to succeed.