

Pulling From Inside; Assignment and Experience Driven Learning, emphasizing the value of sharing personal narratives.

I treasure my experience as a professor at KCC. Where else would I come in contact with people from 142 countries, speaking 73 languages, of all ages and experiences? The wealth of diverse backgrounds can be shared in the classroom when assignments encourage students to incorporate their knowledge, history and opinions into their work.

I feel this attitude is related to feminist pedagogy in the way it values the experience of those often overlooked by society in the same way that the work in women's lives was overlooked for centuries. It is unnecessary to enumerate the ways that this went on for this audience. I think we all know that we are richer as a society now that we recognize the importance of women's lives in driving history even when many individual's names were never recorded. As artists and artisans the divide between the work of women remaining anonymous compared with men is easy to recognize. Even though now there are more women enrolled in art schools than men the percentage of well recognized female artists compared to men is staggeringly small. ("Over 50 percent of art school graduates are women but far less than 50 percent of monographic exhibition subjects are women." Naomi Beckwith, Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. The Guerrilla Girls puts the number at 13%.

These facts are here to connect my pedagogical precepts to the themes of this conference. Going forward from here I plan to share the assignments that give voice to my students as a political act on my part for it backs up my humanistic and democratic philosophy.

In meeting with my students for the first time, I sometimes bring in articles about attacks on art or artists to emphasize the power of visual images. This approach was done in my first art history lesson at RISD, in 1976, where the professors began with a slide show that featured the destruction of the Pieta and The Night Watch. I began teaching at KCC in the spring of 2001,

I xeroxed a small article from the New Yorker about the destruction of the Buddhas in Afghanistan. The next fall was the attack on the WTC, I wondered if any students I had in the spring thought of that article and made the connection. A few years later The occupy Wall Street protesters carried a poster by Luba Lukova that I had shown in class. I find her series of posters titled, *Social Justice* to be a valuable teaching tool to show how blending 2 images together can get an important idea across in an elegantly simplified manner. Growing up with a political cartoonist for a father has been helpful also in explaining how one's frustration with power or hypocrisy can be channeled into creative work often with humor.

As Victor Navasky said in the documentary, *Nice Work If You Can Get It*, about Edward Sorel's work,

“I consider to this day, satire as a form of argument that goes way beyond illustration and may be more powerful than conventional editorial language. There is something that is more threatening about the visualization of some of these points that are out there than

words.” Victor Navasky was the publisher and editorial director of *The Nation*, through 2005, and author of, *The Art of Controversy: Political Cartoons and Their Enduring Power*, published in 2013.

I feel strongly that to get students to make an effort in their work, it is crucial for them to feel that their work is important. Emphasizing the influence their work can have on others is a great motivation. In addition to assignments where they can express their personalities and political points of view having them produce posters for campus wide events that are linked to social issues such as our college-wide reading program of the year which is called *KCC Reads*, or *Eco- Festival* which centers on issues of Climate Change are other empowering assignments, that students can find a sense of usefulness and importance in doing.

A few of the assignments that get students to delve into themselves are, *A Sense of Place*, *Personal Maps*, *The Metaphorical Me*, and *Political Posters*.

### **Will Show Examples**

Posters for college wide events: *KCC Reads*, *Eco Festival* and *Major Day*.

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Under the *Jeannette Solomon NORC-SSP Cultural Arts Grant* for the past 4 springs a few of my students and I participate in the community through an art program at a local Senior Center. Students have come to see working with seniors as a mentoring program working in both directions. Students have been guided by the more artistically advanced Seniors and are guides themselves to those with less abilities. In the years that I have led these workshops a great proportion of the students who have participated have gone on to get paying jobs at the college or elsewhere. Having this experience on their resume has been beneficial as well as having me as a reference not only as a professor but as an “employer”. It is reassuring to potential employers that I've had experience with these students in an environment that calls for responsibility and caring. Not only is this program intergenerational but it is intercultural as well which I believe is another benefit. The students and seniors both learn about people from other backgrounds that they may have never come in contact with otherwise which is great in alleviating any preconceived notions about what another group might be like.

Lately there has been a trend towards valuing wider experiences in people that I think is long overdue. Lani Guinier's *The Tyranny of the Meritocracy: Democratizing Higher Education in America* and David Brook's article, *The Moral Bucket List*, published last Sunday in *The New York Times*, both speak to importance of recognizing the good in people over the importance of people. There is more to life than getting ahead. Although our educational system is based on a tiered system of evaluations and promotions and functions perhaps correctly in some ways like that, I believe it is important to present a holistic approach in guiding young adults towards their futures. Life is like a gem with

many facets. It is important to look at it from various angles and present various perspectives to our students. An advantage to becoming a professor after a career in another field or more is that one has experienced a life with many twists and turns. Our various experiences add richness and wisdom to our personalities. Many of our students are the first in their families to go to college and it is important to respect their varied backgrounds and demonstrate the value of a wide range of experiences.

I'm not saying that everyone should get a pat on the back so that they feel good, but it is important to acknowledge where a student is coming from and the perseverance it takes to make the decision to enroll in college and then to come to class and then to do the work. When students are put down by professors or their work is deemed unsatisfactory, I hear the complaint that the professor has no idea what is going on in their life. I believe that a little compassion can go a long way. Students have made a commitment by enrolling and it is our responsibility to hold them accountable while acknowledging their difficulties and praising them for their efforts. I guess this point of view comes from my over-arching philosophy of striving for happiness over success. School promises success through achievement. Conquer the courses and move forward. I believe in rewarding merit but I also believe in recognizing effort, understanding and individuality. Success in a career that can provide an income is an apt goal. From *Maslow's hierarchy of needs*, our basic creature comforts must be taken care of before we can achieve self-actualization which is at the top of the pyramid he designed; keeping this in mind, I believe it is necessary to find inner peace and satisfaction to weather the unpredictable nature of employment of these times. This is why I am open about the ups and downs in my own

career. Having a few part time jobs that I enjoy is satisfying in terms of thinking about making each day be the best it can be. I want the time in my classroom to be part of a good day for my students. I feel pretty confident that it is for most of them because they are expressing themselves, being creative and making work that is meaningful.

“Finding happiness by facing the worst in the world with the best in ourselves.”