

REVISING RELIEF (PRINTMAKING)

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BACKGROUND

PRNT 223 & 324 (Relief Printmaking I & II) is one of several printmaking courses available to Visual Arts students, both majors and minors. The class is typically small (12-18 students).

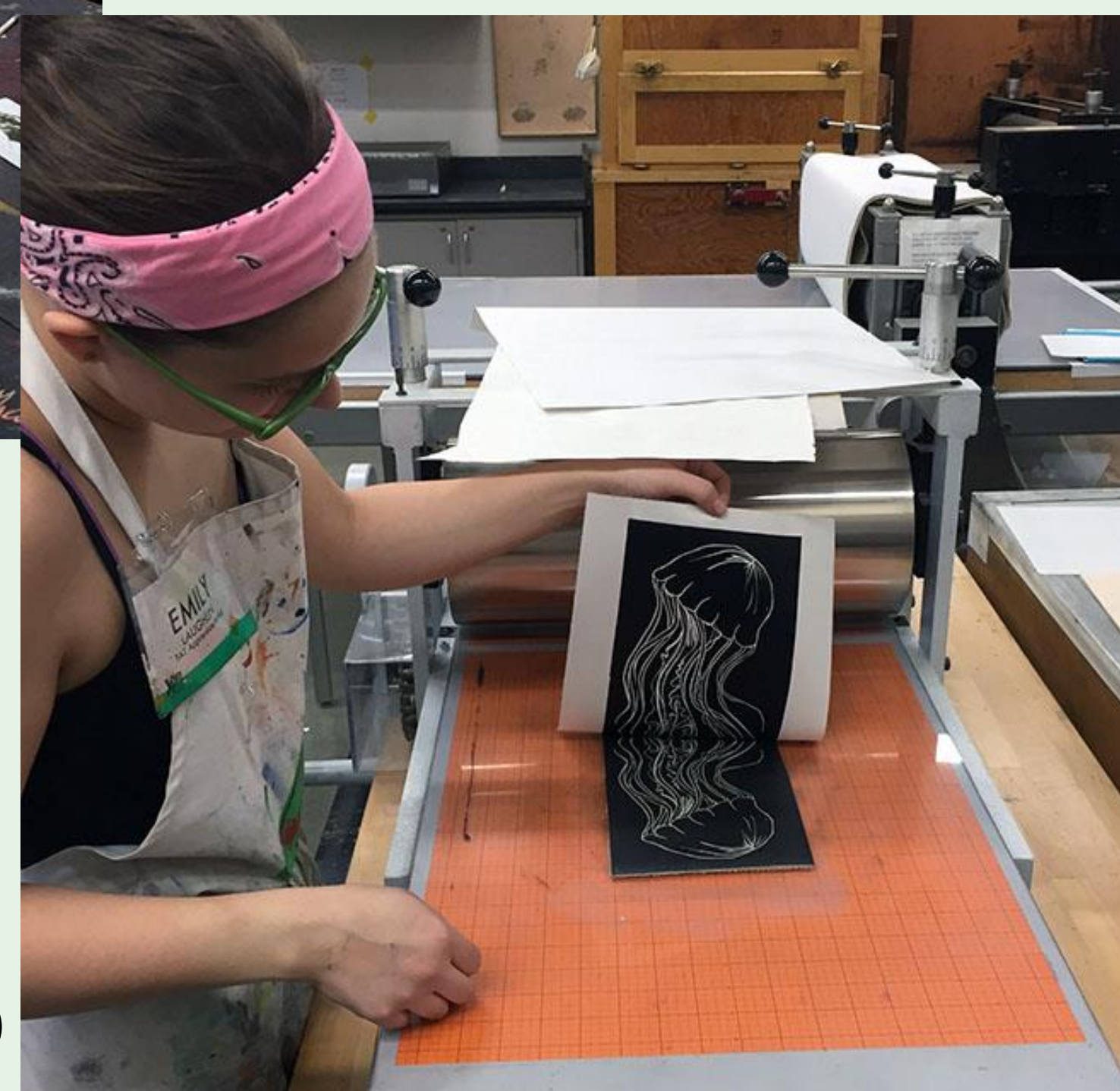
I have taught this course as part of my regular teaching load since 1995. Through the years, I have reinvented 223/324, including many technical upgrades. However, it had been a while since I seriously scrutinized the curriculum and approaches to teaching.

I had reached the point where I easily could walk into a class and teach. But, unsurprisingly, students have changed over the 20+ years I have taught. So while there is some benefit in teaching directly from an accumulated knowledge base, I questioned if there were elements I was missing by not taking the changes in students into consideration.

I decided to examine PRNT 223 & 324 during the Fall 2015 semester. The basic course structure largely remained the same: I introduced each project with a lecture, consisting of project details, history, and representative examples, and a demonstration of the technique in question. Students would then spend class time working on their projects, in a workshop-type atmosphere. While the structure remained unchanged, I did make three main changes to the course content.



1st day @ VanGo (above)



1st day @ KU (right)

COURSE CHANGE

Service Learning

In the past I have personally worked with VanGo, a local art initiative that helps at-risk populations. I felt working with this organization could enhance my students' learning. My students would learn a printmaking skill early in the semester; they would turn around and teach that skill to a group of VanGo participants. The resultant artwork would then be sold at a VanGo event, adding a level of entrepreneurship typically not included in a studio course.

Before going to VanGo, social workers from the initiative made a presentation to the class about the population they would be teaching. Following the student-taught workshop, we would debrief with those same social workers as well as through an in-class discussion and written evaluations.

Writing

PRNT 223 & 324 typically has included little to no writing. For this redesign, I added a written element to students' project critiques. I then included the grade for the written work in the larger project grade.

Syllabus

Finally, I completely overhauled the course syllabus, including a new rubric and detailed goals. As a class we revisited the syllabus at midterm.

STUDENT WORK

Due to the nature of service learning, student learning was, in part, connected to the completion of the creative project. All my students rose to the challenges of the project, working in teams with the VanGo students.

Following the project, my students completed reflection questions, a survey, and a lengthy group discussion. The student reflection survey provided some valuable insights regarding the learning objectives. One student wrote, *"Approaching the course content from an alternate perspective helped my understanding of the process, trial and error (in art making) and experimentation. Also, being in an instructor-role really showed me the importance of a schedule, and motivated me to explore how I should or could communicate with others about artwork."* Another stated, *"The project gave me a much broader sense of what it means to be a student, teacher, and artist."*

Photographs by Michael Krueger



VanGo Student Work (above)

1st day @ VanGo (below)



REFLECTIONS

The project was very successful in achieving the goals. My hope was that this experience would fortify my students' understanding of the creative process. Every student in the course indicated that this happened for them. I wanted to help them build problem-solving skills in real-situations; I have no doubt that this happened, albeit at varying degrees for individual students. For example, we had to make logistical changes on the fly, such as changing the location of one of the workshop sessions, changing from doing three workshops at VanGo and one at KU to two workshops at each location.

Finally, I wanted students to connect with the rewards of volunteerism and serving the community through the creative fields that they are studying. In talking to students and reading their comments, I was not at all surprised to hear that this last goal was the most relevant to them and that they did indeed reap those rewards. One student noted, *"I've had very limited experience with volunteerism in the arts, so I am glad to have had this experience. Because I am pursuing art at an academic institution, it was a good opportunity to get out of a 'comfortable environment' and engage with art and students in a different way."*