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STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

I am a documentary filmmaker and a teacher. I have worked in the documentary field for over three decades. Since 2009, I have been teaching at Haverford College.

At the core of my teaching philosophy are the following elements:

- a commitment to sharing with students with my own passion for film, and for the documentary genre in particular;
- a belief that film is a unique and ever-evolving way to engage with the world around us, one that complements the work students are doing as budding scholars and developing citizens;
- an understanding that rigorous media training is crucial to the civil sphere, in fomenting informed artistry, creative scholarship, and responsible citizenship.
- a commitment to developing extracurricular and co-curricular production opportunities for students, since mediamaking is most deeply learned through practicing it in the field.

My teaching draws upon three decades as a practicing filmmaker. I incorporate documentary theory and history into my teaching, but I approach teaching as a practitioner first, theorist second. I help students see the connections between practice and theory, and I strive to develop students' understandings of how media practices interact with, grow out of, and in turn affect history and culture.

Artists, documentary filmmakers among them, try to say something true about the world. Documentary film bridges art, journalism, ethnography, entertainment, infotainment, news, social engagement, political action, and more. Because of both this interdisciplinarity and because of its link to "the real," the documentary form faces a particular challenge: it's an artform that consists of subjective representations of reality, but is often treated as – and expected to somehow *be* – unmediated reality. The space between reality itself and filmic representations of reality is the space where documentary enacts its enigma, the space that makes it an exciting genre, one where our public history can be constructed and contested. The documentary is a living form, and both the making and the teaching of the form must continue to evolve and to be reinvented – in conjunction with, in construction of, and in response to the social and political realities of our time. My ambition for my work – whether as maker, teacher, or programmer – is to expand the documentary form, to incite dialogue, to move people, and to take what actions I can in a complex power struggle over how we are going to see the past and the present, and therefore over what future we are going to build together.

This makes teaching documentary both immensely exciting and quite difficult. First, its interdisciplinarity can confound students and complicate lesson plans, but it also gives students a broad field within which to experiment with creative ideas. Second, one must always be breaking one's own and one's students' expectations of the "truth-telling" capacities of the form, helping to build new expectations, and then breaking those as well, all in the project of building more complex and open ideas of what documentaries can and cannot do, and of what is possible with this form.

I strive to help students question the complex process by which meaning is constructed, including their role in that process as makers, as viewers, and as scholars. I encourage students not to limit themselves to any particular generic approach but to experiment with the form. I believe students' primary focus should be on a deep engagement with their chosen themes and on developing a serious understanding of documentary practices, conventions, and problems.

That said, I also believe that a strong foundation in craft and technique allows for the greatest unleashing of creativity. As with any language, one must master grammar and vocabulary, idioms and slang, in order to be truly articulate and to find which sentences are tasty, which words bring delight when rolling off the tongue. Students must learn rules, techniques, craft, history, and theory, all as part of the process of remaking and expanding the language of film.

I do not believe that one size fits all. Different students require distinct types of guidance and encouragement. One student may need to be unmoored from over-reliance on language, while another may need help linking an intuitive flood of images into a language-based logic. One student may have trouble thinking analytically, while another can't think in any other way – each needs a different kind of support in expressing one's perspective while also learning the discipline to communicate effectively through the documentary form.

Finally, I spend a great deal of time developing programs at the College, including extracurricular and co-curricular opportunities for students to make films and to engage with filmmakers. This program-building work is inextricable from my teaching, since it extends and builds upon what I can offer my students. Only by practicing in the field can a student fully grasp what it means to make a film, and only in the field does a maker actually engage with the challenges and joys that arise in trying to represent people and their realities. The programs I develop always have the goal of expanding upon what can be achieved in the context of a small liberal arts college, while acknowledging the inherent limitations of scale and budget at such an institution. Among the programs I have designed or co-designed at the College are the Summer DocuLab Program, Hurford Center Flaherty Seminar Scholars Program, Community Media Workshops, Interdisciplinary Documentary Media Fellowship, Tri-Co Film Festival, and Strange Truth Film Series.