Teaching Design and Art through the Pandemic

It was a challenge to adapt a curriculum designed to teach students how to draw to fit the safety guidelines meant to flatten the curve of the Covid 19 virus. For me, as an instructor who is used to giving direct, in-person feedback both verbally and with a stroke of my pencil it was particularly challenging! But the practice of 'design thinking' is based on seeing challenges as opportunities to find creative solutions. By teaching students about 'design thinking' and how to incorporate the process of design thinking into their own studio practice, I think they were able to build the skills necessary for them to learn through the pandemic but also a foundation for their future professional practice.

One of the earliest adaptations was to split in-person classes in to three sections. We had around 30 students enrolled in the Graphic Design program but the guidelines for social distancing allowed for only nine students in the classroom. We were fortunate to have access to two classrooms that were neighbors in the LINK, so we used one space for lecture where I would teach 9 students at a time and the other classroom space was open to students as a 'workshop' or 'studio' environment. I was able to check in with the students in the extra classroom after delivering primary instruction. In the first week of the semester, students were able to opt into attending class on Tuesday, Thursday, or completely online by filling out a Google Form. Effectively, we ended up with three cohorts of approximately 9 students each.


I was also able to utilize videos to communicate with students according to their preferred method of delivery and their schedule. One of the first videos students saw was delivered via an email attachment and it depicted me entering the BEC building. The intent was to show students how to get to class by following the safety guidelines such as mask wearing and screening procedures. My hope was that students would feel a little less stress about coming to class by watching me navigate the process. By posting the video on Youtube, students had easy access to it and I was able to see that it had been viewed 18 times.

I made name tents for each of the in-person students and designated seats for each the students according to distancing guidelines. I also posted a seating chart on the screens in the classroom so students could find their assigned desk. Again, these small actions were designed to decrease stress among the students so that we could get into the topic of the day. The stickiest point of in-person teaching came at lunch. I hadn't considered how students should eat lunch which caused some consternation in the first few weeks of the semester.

Welcome to Drawing and Illustration Concepts!
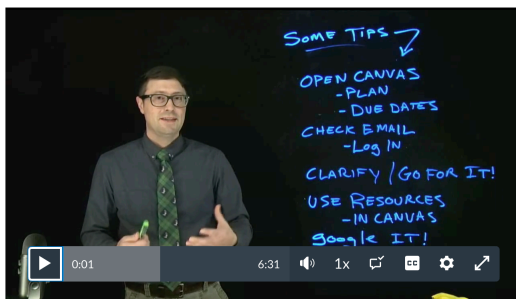
The LMS (Canvas) component of each of the courses I taught in the first semester was as vital for the in-person students as it was for the online students. It really was the backbone of all of the learning by acting as a virtual classroom space where student could access course material according to their own schedules. Producing video content was vital to connect students with the curriculum online. I wanted students to see me navigate the course much as they would. I also wanted to personalize the LMS by becoming the human face of the online class.
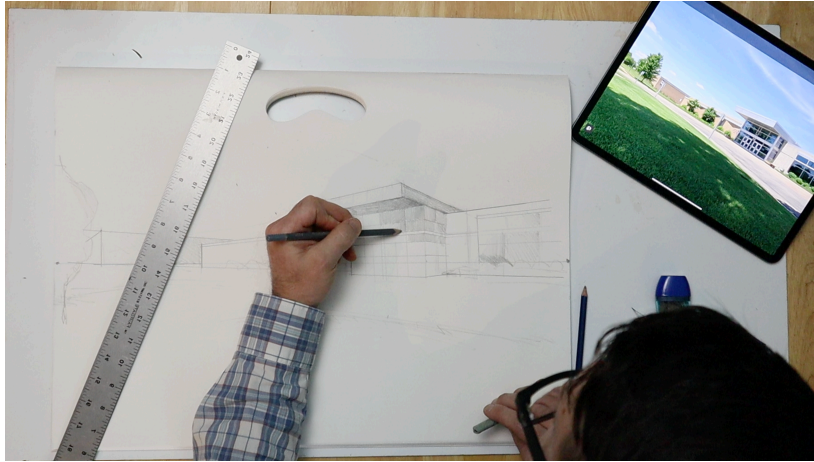
In addition to introducing the class via video, I also produced tutorials, screencasts, presentations/lectures, weekly overviews, and reflections to supplement the videos available on LinkedIn Learning. My intent was to make online students feel like they knew their teacher well enough to build trust. I hoped that they would feel like was with them as they made drawings or designs as a part of a project. Bu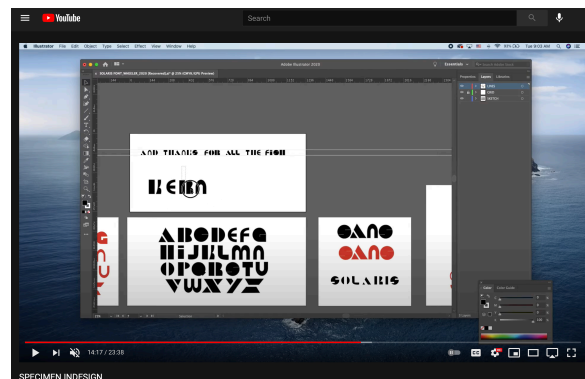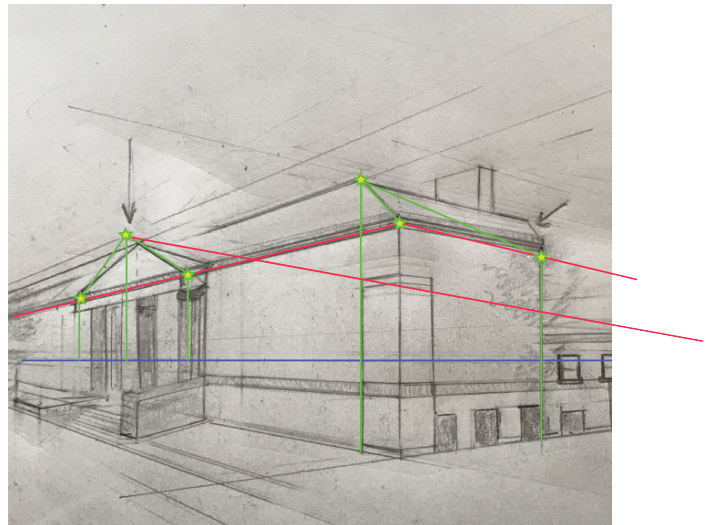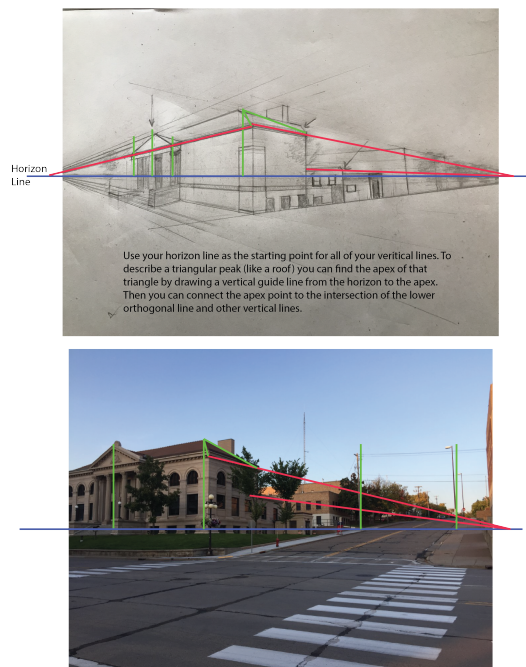ilding that relationship is essential to effective design teaching because in asking students to make and share creative works, I'm asking them to take a risk. They show me a drawing (or other design project) and I will offer feedback in the form of critique. Critique is the cornerstone of design education but it can feel

uncomfortable for many students for a myriad of reasons. Building trust and positive relationships in earnest is crucial to the effectiveness of critique to build design skills. By watching me make drawings, present design topics, and even navigate the Canvas LMS, students can feel that I'm working to make them successful as learners.

How does an online critique work? It starts by understanding what a critique is and why it's important. Students read about the Feldman Method of critique to help them understand that the process is more objective than they may have thought. The Feldman Method gives them a framework to give and receive feedback. They also watch two videos (one that I produce and one produced by Yale SOA) that describes the purpose of critique. It's a tool that designers can use to improve their work. It's also a tool that professional artists and designers use throughout their careers. The goal for the CVTC Graphic Design department is to get students accustomed to critique and comfortable with offering and receiving feedback in regard to their visual work. I model critique through written comments in Canvas before asking students to engage in a peer-to-peer critique.

Horizon Line

Use your horizon line as the starting point for all of your veritical lines. To describe a triangular peak (like a roof) you can find the apex of that triangle by drawing a vertical guide line from the horizon to the apex. Then you can connect the apex point to the intersection of the lower orthogonal line and other vertical lines.

Students post drawings on Canvas discussion boards where they are asked to follow the Feldman Method to comment on the work of at least two peers. Over the course of the semester, students can expect to show they're drawings in each stage of the design process.
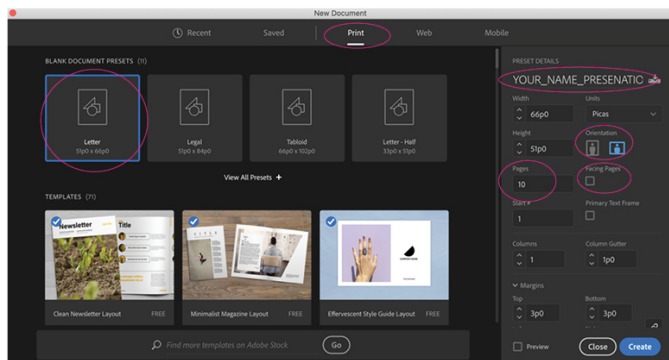
I'm able to use the announcements in Canvas to review the critiques from the previous week. I highlight some the exemplary work in these announcements to show peer generated examples. I also encourage students to incorporate feedback into their work by pointing specific instances where students changed in-progress drawings according to comments from critiques. The culmination of practice and critique is a final student presentation of selected drawing from the semester. Students reflect on the work that they've produced in the form of a video they produce in much they same way that I've been producing videos. They can use my videos as examples for their own presentations. Such presentations will become more and more important to them as they move into their careers.
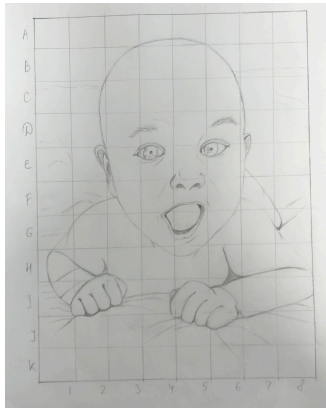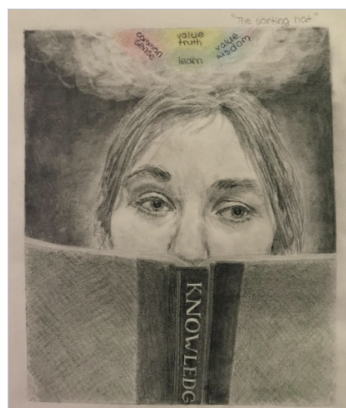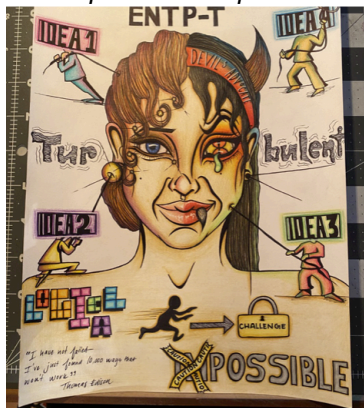
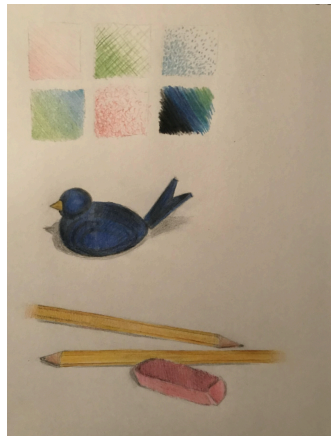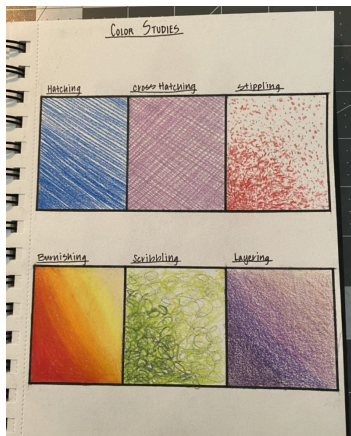*Photorealism (In-progress & Final)*

Atmospheric Perspective

The Sorting Hat

Tonal Studies

Figure Drawings

Color Studies (Sketches)