

Diversity Statement

Jonathan M. Capps

I consider my classroom, the glass hot shop, as a micro-laboratory for pedagogies that focus on inclusivity and diversity whether on a university or college campus or in a foreign country where language, culture and local practices differ from my everyday life. My approach to teaching glass is to focus on building community in the classroom where trust, honesty and respect are overarching values and are foundational to the art of blowing glass. The actual process of blowing glass is dangerous and requires in a very real sense, the need to care for and trust others in the classroom.

I have been fortunate to teach at a research university where the student population is extremely diverse and this diversity contributes to the learning in class as well as presents challenges to ensure that differences are acknowledged and accepted. Students bring their varied backgrounds, identities and cultures to the classroom. I am committed to engaging all with dignity and respect. As a faculty member, I am also committed to learning about and understanding the diversity and inclusion issues in my various campus communities. Utilizing the strengths of a community to support, understand and engage in diversity issues requires me to recognize and utilize the campus expertise and resources available to faculty, students and staff.

My teaching philosophy addresses the many issues that arise in the classroom concerning inclusion and equity. Depending on individual student backgrounds, they may be fearful when they first encounter hot glass, but I try to focus on the needs of the individual and what they bring to the experience as well as any unique contributions. I consider this both a mentoring and role modeling opportunity as I provide students with the support they need to overcome fear. The bottom line is that I want all students to know that they can succeed, no matter where they come from, what their story is, or how they identify.

Critical distance is the space needed to recognize our bias, which is a key element in gaining perspective on *why* we see and understand a work of art the way we do, but this principle also applies outside the glass studio. Recognition of one's own assumptions leads to a greater understanding of other perspectives. Reflecting on our biases, we are able to create a respectful discourse that lends itself to opening oneself up for recognition and acceptance of differences.

Part of my plan for inclusion and student success takes the form of mini critiques—informal one-on-one conversations with individual students as they work through their project ideas. I've found that these conversations often become a platform for me to help my students tease out the specificities of their general concepts and identify the essence of their content. My aim is for students to take ownership of this content, which often comes from personal life-experiences. I encourage students to explore their own narratives and bring their stories into their art. This process validates their life story, instills confidence in their personal narrative and brings meaning to their art. Ultimately, this process provides the opportunity for a student to not only be proud of their art but proud of who they are.

Effective self-expression and mutual respect empower students to navigate cultural differences and value the sharing of experience and personal narratives with others. As an instructor, it is my goal to facilitate opportunities for this exchange, giving everyone that enters my classroom the tools for far-reaching partnerships and success.