

Shared Resources to Achieve the Mindful Student and Balanced Professional

Brigid O’Kane, University of Cincinnati

Introduction

Technology has brought advancements to academia, enabling instructors to operate faster on numerous platforms to deliver course content. With virtually infinite online resources, professors develop curricula for beginning design students from a well-informed perspective. However, technology and information have limits in helping educators make better decisions about preparing students to deal with the day-to-day challenges that compromise their educational experience. Often, moving faster and using more technology is exactly the opposite of what is needed to improve the learning environment.

The pace of society, driven largely by technology, exceeds the natural human capacity to sustain and adapt to such change. Eventually, a threshold is crossed, which defines a breaking point. Shared resources, insightful programmatic philosophy, and a supportive community of peers can provide the balancing agents needed to keep life, work, and progress in a harmonious array. But what is the antidote to provide such balance and harmony?

Drawing is a fundamental skill in the design disciplines. As part of the foundation experience for many creative fields, this ability continues to develop and advance throughout a career or even a lifetime. For some disciplines, the drawing experience is changed by technologies to accelerate the design process through easier, faster, and more effective ways to communicate and visualize. Regardless of the use of technology, design students are expected to demonstrate confident drawing skills, which reveal their design capabilities, thinking process, and creative visualization skills.

This paper aims to highlight the importance of maintaining a creative practice, such as drawing, within the discipline of design and beyond.

Sustaining a creative outlet is becoming increasingly important as technology continues to dominate society, education, and culture, which is shaping the minds of young people in a way that is detrimental to the future. Upholding a drawing practice can assist individuals in finding balance in a world dominated by technology.

Endless Platforms for Sharing Resources

Professors are given many resources that assist with educating students. For beginning design students, these multiple platforms can become confusing because there are so many combinations that professors may use; students are now challenged to keep all this straight. One professor may use a combination of communication platforms like Microsoft Teams, another is on Canvas/Blackboard and OneDrive/Dropbox. At the same time, another has shared resources through Cisco WebEx, websites, and email. All of this is delivered to students in the first week of class, some of whom are moving from other states or countries while trying to find places to eat. This can be very perplexing for students. Professors often need to be made aware of these inconsistencies with the various platforms used in different classes and the challenges this presents, especially for beginning students. Furthermore, many of these technologies are not set up to accommodate the needs of courses that use visuals, which makes sharing course content related to design clunky and unprofessional.

Beginning design students are also taught to use various 2D and 3D software needed for the profession. They start with the basic Adobe Suite and Sketchbook Pro, then expand into 3D software, including Fusion 360, AutoCAD, Rhino, Solidworks, and Catia. This continues to evolve throughout their career. Now that Artificial Intelligence (AI) is demanding a presence within the arena of design,

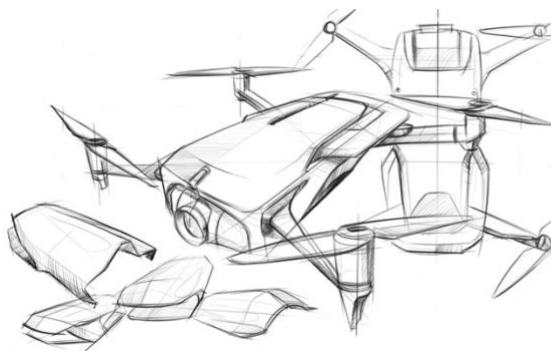
students are now learning Vizcom AI, Stable Diffusion, and ChatGPT that generate ideas.

Professor Yinying Sun from the University of Cincinnati has conducted research on the feasibility of AI programs and how this may impact the design curriculum relating to drawing for students and professors. AI programs have a 'text to image' command that will generate information without the need for drawings. When this is possible, we must consider what students are contributing to the design process and how they are developing their design skills. Professor Sun states,

Within the academic context, students (or humans) must take the lead. Everything through AI already exists, and therefore, the designers' contributions to the design process are based on things that are not new. It is important to scrutinize and question everything as designers.

Through her research, Professor Sun demonstrates that when inputs to an AI program include strong drawings, the results are better and demonstrate students' abilities to lead the AI design process. Weak drawings generate poor results through AI programs. (Fig. 1)

Drawing is an essential skill for visually communicating concepts and translating our understanding of these ideas. Student drawings demonstrate how they comprehend challenges, generate ideas, and solve problems, which are necessary skills for educators to teach design



students. Professor Sun elaborates on this by saying,

Designers must lead the conversation as it relates to AI. The design process is more than the visuals. It is also about the human experience. The quality of the drawings matters to achieve elegant solutions. Also, AI cannot make decisions about manufacturing, materiality, user experience, and functionality. Humans must make these deliberate choices to use visual language and communicate these choices through their drawings. This is increasingly important within the academic environment as we prepare designers for the future.

After more than three decades of teaching and working in the design field, I see how professors and students are being dragged behind the onslaught of various changes with platforms, new software, software updates, and other tools that infiltrate academia and industry. Basic conversations among professors and instructors about how the software works, such as where basic functions are and what changes are made with updates, are overshadowing important conversations relative to how and if these technologies enhance the educational experience.

Of course, technologies have advantages. However, it is important to keep in mind that these technologies (including AI) are just tools. They do not develop in-depth thinking on their own or for our students. Often, students will rely on



Fig. 1 An example of Professor Yinying Sun's research into how artificial intelligence (AI) impacts the educational experience and influences the curriculum within the design disciplines. Stronger drawing skills are required to achieve better results when using AI.

technology to do the work for them instead of developing drawing abilities. Drawing is a unique way of communicating ideas and gives students a competitive advantage. Learning to draw requires practice, and proficient drawing skills develop over time. How technology is utilized in developing drawing skills and the minds of young design students is important to consider.

Diverse Studio Environments and Learning

I am one of the co-founders of the Manifest Creative Research Gallery and Drawing Center, a non-profit arts organization located in Cincinnati, Ohio, where like-minded people come to slow down and engage in creative problem-solving activities. Established twenty years ago, Manifest provides shared educational resources in ways that overlap with academic institutions, which build resilient, creative communities. This is achieved by providing active learning spaces where students and faculty evolve creative ideas and skills outside the university. Manifest's Galleries are accessible for viewing exhibitions of contemporary art.

The Drawing Center, the educational branch of Manifest, is an antidote to the hurried pace that can interfere with quality learning experiences. The Drawing Center's motto is 'Learning to draw is learning to see.' Open Labs are free for individual or group activities that support the creative process. Scholarships are available for students to participate in instructed courses and workshops.

Creatives are uniquely poised to articulate solutions since they can see and notice intrinsic detail. Creative expression involves paying attention, observing, and translating what is happening. It involves seeing and then finding meaning in the process. The process of drawing teaches students to see nuance in an unprecedented way.

After ten years of industry experience as a creative designer and over twenty years as a professor teaching drawing and design, I've witnessed countless ah-ha moments when students cross a threshold to an elevated state of awareness and see

their world from new perspectives. While drawing, students visualize a two-dimensional picture plane as a three-dimensional form. Individuals who fully engage in this active learning process develop an energetic imagination and ability to visualize form in truly unique ways. This is best achieved in the studio environment, where students and professors share knowledge and resources through informal discussions and formal critiques.

Studios are active learning environments that encourage students to develop critical thinking skills and solutions. Individuals and teams actively participate in conceiving solutions to complex challenges by making individual decisions, proposing options, and articulating their unique ideas visually and verbally. Passive learning involves attending lecture courses and then processing the material through analyzing notes and large amounts of information typically presented in auditoriums and now more commonly online. Passive learning environments are useful for many subjects, including art history or philosophy. However, this hands-off approach is less effective when teaching topics such as drawing fundamentals, principles of visual organization, and design theory.

Like many instructors, I learned to teach online courses during COVID, and this is possible. However, students who are *actively* applying fundamentals, principles, and theories directly to a project are more likely to absorb this knowledge. Also, professors can instantly see student progress and interject input during the drawing process. This direct sharing of knowledge enhances learning, compared to online and passive learning environments.

Beyond the studio, students often report noticing things within their surrounding environment that they never saw before, in spaces they live in or walk by every day. They spontaneously find themselves stopping on a typical walk to school, completely captivated by colors, textures, and other visual allures that would never have sparked their interest before. They attribute this new vision to their

dedicated practice of drawing, which has heightened their awareness and ability to see. These insights are often shared within the studio environment.

Students can also extend this active learning outside of the studio by acquiring additional resources and experience. Manifest Drawing Center allows for these opportunities, which facilitates learning at a deeper level. This experience involves students, professionals, and professors who are all actively engaged in their creative pursuits.

Shared Resources Between Manifest and UC

An example of a workshop held at Manifest Drawing Center was by Bobby Rebholz, a former student of mine. Bobby is a freelance video game and film concept artist based in West Hartford,

Connecticut. He has recently worked with Netflix, Method Studios, SyFy, 3D Total, and Brightrock Games. He received a Bachelor of Science in Industrial Design from the University of Cincinnati (UC) in 2007 and has taught fundamental and industrial design drawing since 2014. (Fig. 2) He conducted a workshop at Manifest Drawing Center in 2016 and was invited back in 2023. His recent workshop was titled 'From Life to Fantasy, Animal Anatomy and Creative Drawing.' This three-day intensive workshop kicked off with a live artist's demonstration open to the public on a Friday evening. The workshop continued on Saturday and Sunday with limited seating. Students from the School of Design at the University of Cincinnati attended this workshop with other students and professionals. This experience improved their drawing skills and expanded their educational experiences.



Fig. 2 An example of a drawing by Bobby Rebholz titled 'Brotherhood.' Manifest Drawing Center invited Bobby to host a workshop titled 'From Life to Fantasy, Animal Anatomy and Creative Drawing.'

Manifest Drawing Center is a rich, creative environment where like-minded people mingle and share ideas. (Fig. 3) Students will work alongside other students, professionals, and professors.



Fig. 3 At Manifest Drawing Center, professionals, students, and professors work side by side. In this image, Alexandra Franz, a student from the University of Cincinnati, is working between Emil Robinson, Professor at the University of Cincinnati (left), and Janelle Kelpo, architect/owner of Chroma Architecture + Design (right) during an Open Figure session.

Atousa Hajhosseini is from Iran and is a Master of Design student at the University of Cincinnati. She actively participates in Open Studio and Open Figure sessions at Manifest Drawing Center. Atousa states,

Participating in Manifest's drawing sessions has transformed my drawing skills in ways I could've never imagined. There is something about the spirit of the place and the admiration that everyone there has for art, regardless of its form or purpose, that is so inspiring for me. I have always loved drawing since childhood. It has always been a way for me to find peace when life gets chaotic. I think Manifest perfectly captures this aspect of drawing by providing a place for everyone, from amateur to professional, to share a few hours every week, doing what gives them peace. I started going there to brush up on my skills after a long time, but my fast progress and the compliments received from other Manifest participants have boosted my confidence, keeping me more focused on the details of my work, aspiring to get better at it every week. There, I experiment with new ways of drawing that I never dared to test because I was afraid of the result not being

good enough! To me, Manifest is where my introverted inner artist reveals itself, feeling that it is supported and challenged in the best way.

Another example of shared resources between the School of Design at the University of Cincinnati and the Manifest Drawing Center was on May 1, 2023, for a School of Design Faculty Retreat. Twenty-three faculty and staff attended, including the School Director, Wei Wang, and the Dean of the College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning, Tim Jachna. Associate Professor Emil Robinson and I led drawing activities. One drawing activity was for participants to draw a blind contour line drawing.

Blind Contour Drawing

Blind contour drawing is the practice of drawing the contours of a subject in one unbroken line without looking at the drawing. There are three distinct benefits we receive from these types of drawings. First, we lose any attachment to an outcome. Often, when we draw, we feel the need to produce a final work that is well done. When we focus on the result, we become distracted because our attention is more on the outcome and less on the process of creating. We are not 'in the moment.' Blind contour drawings open a sense of freedom as we experience a gentle detachment from any expectation, allowing us to be completely present while drawing. (Fig. 4)

Second, 'blind' drawings allow the mind to focus, giving us the ability to genuinely observe what we see and experience. Focused attention eliminates distractions so we can see what is there and experience 'deep seeing.' This is critical. Most people have difficulty drawing realistically because they have not been trained to look and see. Through this act of intense observation, details and nuances that were never noticed before are observed. This is necessary when drawing from observation. The physical act of drawing strengthens our hand-eye coordination. Blind contour drawings are exceptional in developing this connection.

Lastly, this exercise strengthens our ability to see with our eyes, interpret from within, and translate through drawing with the hand. The eye, mind, heart, and hand connect in the timeless act of deep seeing and authentic interpretation.

Blind contour drawings must be drawn slowly and produce unpredictable results. As Robert Kaupelis states in his book 'Experimental Drawing,' *"...the distortions, exaggerations, and omissions in blind contour drawing tend to give them an expressive quality other drawings may not have."*



Fig. 4 Example of a blind contour drawing by Brigid O'Kane that took nine minutes to draw. These drawings are completed with one continuous line while looking only at the subject being drawn. It is called 'blind' because the person creating the drawing does not look at the drawing while they are making it.

During the Faculty Retreat, colleagues created blind contour drawings of each other; they were asked to look and observe in a deeper way, which we don't often do in the work environment. When drawing another person in this way, a profound connection can be made, even between strangers. For this retreat, the activity was exciting and entertaining.

Drawing, Seeing, and Thinking

When explaining an idea to someone, we may ask, "Do you see what I mean?" or "Can you look at it this way?" We also refer to looking at things from a

different perspective or from a unique point of view. When our ideas are understood, we may call them insightful or clear. Descriptions like this link the thinking process to visual experiences, suggesting a close correspondence between how we think and see the world we live in. The ability to see mental constructs requires foresight, imagination, optical sensitivity, and being in tune with the mind's eye.

A person may say, "I draw on experience," "I have drawn a conclusion," or "I draw nearer to a solution." Such metaphors that relate to drawing hint at coming closer or approaching. We do this during the drawing process, especially when drawing from observation. As we observe the subject we are drawing, we see intricate detail, notice subtle nuances, and make comparative relationships. These visual observations are interpreted through the mind to the hand and are made visible with marks on paper. Therefore, learning to draw is learning to see. Training our minds to see engages our cognition so we can more accurately translate the world around us. To decipher these images and ideas, creatives need to be visually literate.

For professors of beginning design students, the process of teaching drawing cannot be rushed. At the University of Cincinnati, students are admitted into design programs by their academic performance or portfolio review. While some students can demonstrate core drawing competencies, others cannot. This mixture of drawing abilities presents both challenges and opportunities. For drawing critiques, students can be put into teams for peer reviews. This, and other informal conversations, elevates the sharing of knowledge. Less experienced students learn from others with more developed skills. Active learning environments encourage this in many different forms, including demonstrations, presentations, mini-lectures, one-on-one conversations, and open discussions.

The slow process of learning to draw is critical, especially for students who have never drawn

before. A measured or paced approach to learning is novel to almost all first-year students since they are attached to their technological devices with instantaneous access to infinite information. Carl Honoré, author of the book titled 'The Slow Fix, Solve Problems, Work Smarter, and Live Better in a World Addicted to Speed' states, *"Surrounded by gadgets that perform minor miracles at the click of a mouse or the tap of a screen, we come to expect everything to happen at the speed of software."* Because of the familiar speed of technology, the experience of a slower pace is sometimes uncomfortable for students but is critical for their overall development.

Drawing is both an internal and external experience. We observe external elements in such a way that we can internally see, translate, and reinterpret them. Creatives internalize these inspirations and elucidate novel concepts and images, making visible what has never been seen before. Advanced drawers often say that drawing is like meditation, which is how I also experience drawing. In 'Drawing from Observation, An Introduction to Perceptual Drawing' Brian Curtis states, *"Drawing, like Zen, is active, engaged, and purposeful awareness."* During the drawing process, we concentrate on the present moment. This focused attention links to mindfulness and meditation.

To achieve this unhurried approach, students must first notice what is happening inside. Self-awareness brings to light how to objectively see ourselves, build on our strengths, or allow weaknesses to influence results. Professors who are aware of what students are experiencing can encourage introspection by simply asking them to notice and perceive what they are experiencing inside without critical judgment.

Students who are distracted by life events outside of the classroom have trouble focusing. During drawing exercises, some students become more concerned about their drawing results and less focused on what they are doing. They are not present with what they are working on and,

therefore, compromise the quality of their drawing. If they are in a mindset of defeat, they are not likely to produce good drawings. Some students believe they cannot draw. With this mindset, they are not likely to succeed or make incremental improvements needed to keep up in class. Who we are being and what we are thinking during the drawing process is just as important as the physical results we produce.

Drawing as Mindfulness

One course offered at the Manifest Drawing Center is Drawing as Mindfulness, which blends these two practices in unique ways. I designed the course and have taught it weekly since 2017. My expertise in this area spills over and influences how I teach at the University of Cincinnati. Therefore, the university benefits from my ongoing efforts in teaching this course. When integrating these practices into the active learning environment, students slow down, which enhances their ability to thoughtfully engage in the creative process. It also prepares them to be centered, healthy, thoughtful professionals and citizens living full and balanced lives.

Drawing, mindfulness, and meditative practices calm the racing mind. It also helps to develop a keen sense of awareness. In her book 'Launching the Imagination, A Comprehensive Guide to Basic Design' Mary Stewart states, *"Drawing helps us develop a heightened awareness of the visual world and gives us many ways to translate our observations into images."* This wakefulness or responsiveness to drawing is vital. It can also be applied to our environment, other people, and ourselves, which is essential in finding balance in all aspects of life.

When I work on a drawing in the right mindset, my mind feels like it expands into the blue sky. The entire experience can be peaceful. However, the opposite can happen when experiencing anxiety or when caught up in negative thought patterns. When this happens, the drawing experience can be frustrating. This, too, has been experienced in

mindfulness and meditation. During a good meditative session, my brain feels like it has been washed in cool, clean water. It's not very often that my meditation experiences are discouraging, but this can happen to anyone who cannot sit still.

When offered the chance to develop Drawing as Mindfulness, I said, "Yes!" As part of this drawing course, I create a unique weekly agenda with an overarching theme that weaves together drawings, poems, quotes, and one of the Principles of Visual Organization and their opposites. These agendas are rich in content, and participants are invited to pick up any aspect that sparks their interest and then contemplate this further during the upcoming week. For example, they can choose to focus on a mindfulness lesson or a drawing lesson. These agendas are created in a unique way. When constructing them, I feel as if I am a conduit for creative flow.

After we review the agenda, the evening session continues with drawing from observation. We begin the practice with a blind contour drawing and exercises for deep seeing. Then, we draw for a more extended period. We observe what is there to be seen and translate it into a drawing to the best of our ability. But the real lesson doesn't come from creating a drawing. The most valuable aspect is observing the experience of drawing.

Every Monday evening during Drawing as Mindfulness sessions, these agendas and drawing exercises guide participants in a way that leads them on their own path of inquiry from week to week. This has proven to be a catalyst for transformation for many of them. The mindfulness lessons applied to the drawing experience often spill over into all areas of life. This can have profound effects. One participant reported on her experience with Drawing as Mindfulness:

It wasn't about drawing for me anymore, because I can't draw to save my life, but it was about me learning to be mindful, peaceful and have a sense of calm. Drawing as Mindfulness changed my life in ways I never thought possible.

Three weeks into the class, I decided to take all that I learned and apply it to my everyday life. Six weeks later, I spend every morning meditating, journaling, and spending quiet time. My family noticed a change in my attitude and a general calm to my being, and that was good for everyone! Being mindful has even helped me handle everyday stress and the occasional road rage driver.

Repeatedly, students report to me that they see their surroundings differently because of their participation in Drawing as Mindfulness. They notice things they haven't observed before. They look at their life circumstances in new ways that help them grow. They have breakthroughs in clarity as they mindfully observe their reactions to situations. Another participant comments:

To me, it connects the strands of principles of opposites, poetry, drawing, thought, people, and pieces of myself I forgot existed. Listening to the insights of other members of this class is germinal and awe-inspiring at the same time.

Because this course has profoundly affected so many of my students, both at Manifest Drawing Center and the University of Cincinnati, I want to share these experiences with as many people as possible.

The Experience of Drawing

Currently, I am working on a book titled 'The Experience of Drawing,' which goes beyond questions relating to how to draw. It focuses on the experience of drawing from the deepest sources of our creative endeavors. Throughout one year, it teaches readers, week by week, to connect their mind and heart with the process of drawing so they are more likely to sustain a creative practice. This book is essentially a year-long class with an art instructor to establish a practice of mindful drawing to maintain throughout a lifetime.

While drawing on a regular basis, readers and students learn how to sustain a practice that builds momentum. It is my hope that through repeated

engagement with 'The Experience of Drawing,' readers deepen their connection to their creative pursuits in meaningful and spirited ways as they evolve into competent drawers.

Ideally, readers will feel liberated from the shackles of doubt and uncertainty when it comes to their creative pursuits. It gives them an organized structure to help sustain a consistent drawing practice over a long period. The overall arrangement of the book gives it a powerful, utilitarian function that encourages the required discipline it takes to maintain a creative practice. Still, it also has another purpose: it connects the reader to their creative practice through intimate and enduring approaches.

Drawing is a practice. It is like playing a musical instrument. Anyone who wants to become adept at it must work daily for years. For some, it is a lifelong pursuit. Many novice and professional creatives cannot maintain the discipline to draw regularly. With a bit of luck, this book will provide these people with a yearlong schedule that aids them in maintaining a drawing practice.

If we do not pursue our creative passions, we wonder, for our entire life, 'What if I would have...?' If we are not engaging our imaginative energies, we may be missing the mark on what could be our greatest work. Over the years, this becomes an unattended void from within that haunts us and stunts our evolution.

The only way to alleviate such cravings is to engage in creative activities so we become immersed in the creative flow. Only then will we be fulfilled.

Conclusion

Technology has many benefits that enhance the design process. However, when teaching design students, professors must encourage young learners to intentionally take the lead in developing their own ideas and skills. If students depend too much on technology to do the work for them, they will be unable to imagine ideas for themselves, which stunts their creative development.

AI is an exceptional tool for developing ideas and analyzing information. However, within the design arena, it borrows from a world that already exists. As Deborah Rockman states in her book *Drawing Essentials, A Guide to Drawing from Observation*, "*Imagination reveals what the world could be rather than what it is. Imagination is the capacity to see the unseen.*" Designers need to have this foresight. Otherwise, they are just creating more of the same. The proper use of technology during the design process is crucial to encourage students to develop their minds in ways that ignite imaginative play.

Furthermore, as Professor Yingying Sun proves with her research on AI and how it can be integrated into the design curriculum, excellent drawing skills are essential when using AI. Better drawings generate enhanced results when AI is used during the design process. This makes it necessary for students to develop their drawing skills and not rely on technology to hide the fact that they are poor drawers.

Shared resources between the Manifest Drawing Center and the University of Cincinnati greatly enhance learning for students, especially when it comes to drawing. Active learning environments at the university are engaging and stimulating, with professors leading students. The studios at Manifest are also active but provide an alternative novel arrangement. Students, professionals, professors, and members of the public are all immersed in their individual projects, working to advance their skills, and giving each other feedback. This generates a supportive community. It is a scenario where everyone has an equal chance to succeed. In this environment, students experience something very different. This level playing field structure at Manifest and the off-campus location offers an exceptional experience for students.

Furthermore, professors who engage in these two organizations benefit as they develop their creative pursuits. The value of exchanging imaginative ideas, concepts, and philosophies cannot be measured. As an external entity from the university, Manifest elevates this exchange for professors, the public,

and students. The evidence of this value can be measured by witnessing how individuals and communities gather to experience the magic of creative activities, including drawing.

Merging mindfulness practices with drawing influences the learning process and other aspects of living life in unpredictable ways. These exceptional, transformative experiences that develop mindful students and balanced professors are achievable, as explained in this publication. Drawing as Mindfulness, as taught at Manifest Drawing Center, is an example of how to teach students to develop a heightened sense of awareness to improve how they experience drawing, work, and life. It is worth considering that this might also be achieved in other areas of academic pursuit, including music, dance, athletic sports, or science. This greatly depends on how these topics are taught. However, the experience of drawing is conducive to strengthening the minds of beginning design students. When taught thoughtfully by people who care, the possibilities are inspiring.

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