

Crux Argument

I think students in visual arts should take Strategic Communications. If you want to have a successful career as an artist, you better know how to talk to dealers and gallery owners. In my experience, if you can't make a connection, you can't make it as an artist. To make a connection you need to build trust, and you can't do that unless you can communicate effectively with a wide range of people whose support you need to make it in the art world.

Opening

I've heard art majors are notoriously difficult to persuade...I don't know if I can do it, but I'd like to share with you some of my experiences...

I, too, am an artist—a musical artist. We could argue for hours about how different visual and musical arts are—we're not going to do that (but I'd love to discuss it over some coffee if anyone is interested.) I'm here to talk about what it takes to succeed as an artist—any kind of artist.

I am a musical artist who has played all around the country. I have played dance parties; I have played emotional listening sessions; I have played sit-down concerts; I have played to thousands and I have played to tens. I have played main stages, basements, and theaters...and, believe it or not, I have even played shows where no one was there (sad times)...

I am musical artist who collaborates with others in the music industry every week. I've worked with producers, engineers, managers, and agents in-studio and through email. I've learned how important it is to communicate with a wide variety of people who are all a part of making music happen—and making artists' careers happen.

I am a musical artist that had to work for respect. People don't automatically think of me as the coolest human to walk the earth. It's hard to get people to appreciate me as a person, let alone my art! I'm sure some of you know how disheartening a professor can be...

Most importantly, though, I am a musical artist who has learned that if the audience doesn't trust me, it won't trust my music. I've learned that when you build relationships of trust, you build the infrastructure for a successful career.

Narration

And that's where communication comes in: You can't build trust if you can't communicate.

How many of you have ever sold a piece of your own art? How many of you have ever attempted to sell a piece of your own art? I'm guessing many more. Unfortunately, for artists creating is only 50% of the work. Creative expression is one thing; creative communication is another. Expression requires that you know what you want to create; communication requires that you connect with other human beings.

Division

Whether you communicate on stage in front of thousands or just in an email to a potential business partner, successful communication is the lifeblood of a successful career. And while all of us communicate all of the time, we often don't do it very well.

My strategic communications class at UW taught me how to fix that.

Proof

It taught me how to win over the people on the business side and to connect with my listeners.

It taught me how to convey my core message without the clutter and to create a bond of trust between my audience and me.

It taught me how to confidently convey my message in the most intriguing ways.

It taught me how to break down clumsy, boring, and meaningless chatter and build messages up with backbone and integrity.

It taught me how to deliver the maximum effect with the minimum means.

You will learn how to be persuasive through a wide array of rhetorical techniques. The course uses Jay Heinrich's *Thank You for Arguing* to explain every method of persuasion known to man.

You will learn useful, efficient strategies for creating documents for all occasions, whether to tactfully turn down an invitation or to negotiate a higher fee.

You will learn how to do what I am doing right now—presenting live in front of an audience. The course employs Garr Reynold's *Presentation Zen*, which instructs readers how to deliver true presentations enlightenment.

Prolepsis

You may still be feeling a little shaky about taking a business class, though...Let me expel some of those fears.

Some art majors dismiss anything to do with business. They insist that making art is pure while making money is not. They say making art is a "calling" while other professions are not (oh really?) I heard an artist say that "selling art is not only irrelevant, but it debases the experience of being an artist."

But learning how to sell art does no diminish your credibility as an artist—it enhances it. Creating art is only 50% of the deal. Putting it out in the world is the other half, and you know you've succeeded when you've made a sale. It's not primarily about making money; it's about making connections.

Others insist that learning rhetorical techniques will lead you to become more manipulative. It will enable you to take advantage of the weak just to gain another dollar.

This is flat-out illogical. When you pick up a knife in the kitchen, does it make you want to stab someone? Strategic Communications teaches you to win people over, not to screw them over.

Close

So have I done it? Have I earned your trust? Have I won you over? Can you see how Strategic Communications might possibly enhance your artistic career rather than to spoil it? Strategic Communications isn't the most important thing—your art is. It's just tool, but it can be a very useful one if you care about increasing awareness of your work.

So if you want to labor away in misguided noble obscurity, don't take this course. If you think it's not important to connect with an audience, don't take this course. If you think it's not important to find ways to build trust and confidence in your ability to deal with the wide variety people who will be critical for your success, don't take this course.

But seriously consider it if you want to help people to discover what you care so passionately about. No one can be condemned for passionately advocating his work. No one can be condemned for wanting to connect with others who would feel passionately about it too.

If they only knew about it.