



San José State
UNIVERSITY

**College of Humanities
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School of Art & Design
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Foundations
Art Education
Art History

Fine Arts
Animation/Illustration
Digital Media Arts

Photography
Spatial Arts
Glass
Ceramics

Design Studies
Graphic Design
Industrial Design

Interior Design
Organizations:
Artpath

Baycap
CADRE
IDSA

NEO
Shrunkenheadman
SWITCH
World Art Database

The California State University:
Chancellor's Office
Bakersfield, Channel Islands, Chico,
Dominguez Hills, East Bay, Fresno,
Fullerton, Humboldt, Long Beach,
Los Angeles, Maritime Academy,
Monterey Bay, Northridge, Pomona,
Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego,
San Francisco, San José, San Luis Obispo,
San Marcos, Sonoma, Stanislaus

March 17, 2008

To whom it May Concern:

I am writing this letter as a summary of my observations of Professor Cook-Contreras during her two years as a lecturer at San Jose State University. As chair of the School of Art & Design's Spatial Arts area, and Co-director of the Fine Arts Department, I hired Ms. Cook-Contreras to teach a two-year, full-time temporary appointment. Professor Cook-Contreras' academic assignment included teaching upper and lower division courses and included Foundation classes in Drawing, 3-Dimensional Concepts; as well as combined level classes in Beginning Sculpture; and Cross-Media that explored Video, Performance. Installation and other time-based mediums. In a peer evaluation of Professor Cook-Contreras' Beginning Sculpture class, Professor Tony May commented, "They were all attempting big things and being quite successful... and were rightly pleased with themselves and their projects." The work produced in her classes was often presented in praiseworthy exhibits throughout the Art buildings. She inspired an arresting blend of intellectual and emotional intensity in her students' works.

Shelley is definitely knowledgeable about both art and human culture. Our peer evaluations of her as a lecturer show that she creates an atmosphere of dialogue between class members and herself, guiding them into discussions of what contemporary artist do and why. She teaches her students to have an original voice, encouraging them to make uncensored comments of their observations, and to be open about how the work presented in class effects them. Her approach is challenging, and requires her students to consider new options beyond their preconceived ideas of what art is. Overall, people seemed to love the challenge in the classes I visited, and participated enthusiastically. But best of all, she seemed to have a very trusting, nurturing rapport with her class. She is quick to point out when a student is doing well in class, or when someone makes a good point in discussion, generally keeping a buoyant, positive feel to the group dynamic. Many of her students wrote enthusiastic letters regarding her teaching and critique methods She is a very bright and refreshing instructor.

From the technical standpoint, she extended the range of resources available to her students, organizing access to video production equipment, shop time, and exhibition spaces. She is very clear and organized in her requirements for class projects. Students are asked to present their work in various stages, receiving input with each step, i.e. written proposals, drawings, models, and completed works. Her handout materials were packed with excellent technical resources, as well as readings on the working philosophies of well-known artists. To counter the declining manual skill levels we observed in new students, Cook-Contreras taught shop-shy

students to relax and enjoy aspects of “making things” with non-threatening materials such as wire and cardboard, later introducing the wood, wax, and clay. This situation required Cook-Contreras to adjust her expectations and teaching methods to better fit our schools’ particular demographics

Professor Cook-Contreras is particularly committed to bringing an awareness of contemporary art practices to beginning students. To that end her students were required to research and present the work of notable artists and designers working in forms that involve current spatial and time-based concerns. As reported in student evaluations, this integrative study was particularly inspiring to students who held a limited view of traditional materials utilized in sculpture, such as Digital Media and Graphics students who were required to take 3D Design

From the start, she was very adept at working with students from diverse backgrounds. Through assignments requiring self-reflection, such as the “Talisman Project”, Cook-Contreras inspired confidence in those students who were struggling with language and cultural barriers. Because of her interdisciplinary background, she was popular with a wide range of students. Although her professional focus is installation and performance art, she is also an accomplished painter and draftsman, and video artist. She is able to speak in the different visual languages with her students.

Professor Cook-Contreras was a productive, and accomplished addition to our faculty. Beyond her teaching assignments, she served on several Graduate Committees each term. She was also the Undergraduate Student advisor for Spatial Arts, a member of the School Graduate Committee, the College Educational Equity Committee, the Instructional Improvement Committee, and volunteered as a faculty mentor.

At the close of her contract, faculty reviews, peer evaluations, and signed letters from students reported that the overall effect of Professor Cook-Contreras’ teaching had been truly invigorating. I believe that Cook-Contreras is offering a unique and valuable perspective in her area of teaching and contemporary art making, and enthusiastically recommend her work in the future. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me at 408-354-2442.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Middlebrook", written in a cursive style.

David Middlebrook

Associate Director of Fine Arts
School of Art & Design

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David Middlebrook

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