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## Professor nurtures students' creative expression

For the past 23 years, Jane Alden Stevens has been coaching photography students who must look within to ask -- and answer -- difficult questions about themselves and how they fit into the world. She is pleased when the answers inspire the work they create in the [DAAP](#) fine arts program at the University of Cincinnati.

"The best teachers ask good questions, hard and probing questions," Stevens believes. "Teachers such as these are also excellent at getting students to ask probing questions."

"If there is a climate of freely asking and answering questions in a classroom, then students can't help but be engaged. It doesn't always matter if you can come up with an answer. I find those discussions incredibly exciting."

Professor Stevens, a 2002 winner of the [Cohen Award](#), enjoys the creative thinking and the intellectual give-and-take that flows from conversations with students in the fine arts program. "These are dialogues about what interests one most as a teacher," she says.

"They cause you to make a leap in some way in your own thinking. You begin thinking differently about projects you are working on."

"When what they say inspires me, I let them know. It's great when that happens. The intellectual stimulation is part of what makes me glad I am teaching."



Professor Jane Stevens (at right) critiques a student's work. "Sometimes, this is very difficult for students," she admits. "We do practice the dialog of being professional here, not only in what we say, but how we take what is said."

When her students are troubled about something related to their work or events in the outside world, Stevens gives them an opportunity to speak up. She also sets some ground rules.

"Students feel safe to express their feelings in my class," the professor agrees. "I tell them on the first day that they can say anything, as long as what is said is said in a respectful way, and they must be able to tell me why they said it."

Stevens admits that, along with some of her students, she is still quite nervous on the first day of class, even after all these years. "It's a sense of anticipation and excitement," she explains. "There's a curiosity: What is this new class going to be like? Who will the students be?"

"I've always claimed that if I'm not nervous on the first day of class, that's a sign I shouldn't be teaching any more," she laughs.

**Links:**

[2002 Cohen Award](#)

[Stevens' Web site](#)

[Story about Jane's book](#)

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