

# Art and Technology: Student finds artistic success in online art course

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Therese Sullivan never thought she would take an online class, much less one in art.

But after enrolling in an online course in drawing, the Binghamton native found inspiration – and earned credits toward her degree at Marywood University in Scranton.

“You can see the improvement I’ve made,” she said during a recent visit to SUNY Broome, leafing through her portfolio with Art & Design Professor David Zeggert. “I kind of picked up my skill a little bit.”

Sullivan is what the college calls a “non-matriculated student,” one who takes individual courses rather than enrolls in a degree program. Their reasons are varied – to pursue an interest, hone a career skill or, in Sullivan’s case, to earn college credits while home on summer break.

The credits count toward Sullivan’s major: interior architecture, a demanding field with an otherwise heavy course load. An added plus: an online course allowed the Binghamton resident to work around her employment schedule and work on assignments in her own time.

How does an online art course work?

“The same as any other class,” Professor Zeggert explained.

Students have to set up their own work space with appropriate lighting. Sullivan, a junior at Marywood, constructed her studio next to a basement window and set a daily time to work, planning around the availability of light. Other students set up a modeling light to specific parameters, a necessity when it comes to working with shadow.

“Too many light sources and you obscure shadow and texture. The key goal is to achieve sculptural weight,” Zeggert said.

Students submitted their work electronically, sending over images to the instructor. They also submitted research and reflections, interacted with the instructor and took quizzes – “They definitely were challenging,” Therese said – in the online format.

Meeting with Zeggert in the college’s art studio for the first time, Sullivan leafed through her work: the gentle

drape of cloth, demonstrating shadow and texture. Still life scenes. The pointillist rendition of berries on a branch. Faces. And, the final assignment: a whimsical scene of a young boy flying on the back of a winged frog.

For that last, students were asked to play the role of a newspaper illustrator working on a section front. The imaginary reporter was still working on the story, but the would-be illustrators were given some details to work on: an obituary for a town hero, a local taxidermist for whom no job was too big or too small, from big game to a frog. While the obituary was fictitious, the assignment and workflow both derived from Zeggert's experience working as an illustrator for newspapers, including the Press & Sun-Bulletin.

During the course, Sullivan also learned some unscripted lessons – such as whether to share her work with her loved ones and subjects while it was in progress. Zeggert offered timely advice on those matters, as well as the balance of freedom and intellect that any artist must have.

“If you can engage the intellect, it's almost like a soulful experience,” he said. “If you overthink it, you will stymie your creativity.”

He found Sullivan to be a stand-out student, and wished her all the best in her future. For her part, Therese said she enjoyed the class and would consider taking online courses again in the future.

“It was convenient. You could get up whenever,” she said. “I was able to work and take class.”

## **Therese Sullivan**

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