

**M E R E D I T H M A G O U N**

**COSTUME DESIGNER & EDUCATOR**

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## **TEACHING PHILOSOPHY & DIVERSITY STATEMENT**

### **Teaching Philosophy**

Creative problem-solving, innovation, and forward-thinking are the foundation of my design practice and inform and shape my teaching and pedagogy. Teaching design to students is about more than the product. It is about the process. While a beautiful costume is always a lovely thing, and having an end product creates a sense of accomplishment--the process of getting there is equally, if not more, necessary in an academic setting. As a teacher, I am interested in helping my students become not just doers but thinkers as well. They should have practical skills as well as strong and innovative theoretical ones. Utilizing self-reflection assessment in my Introduction to Production Design course creates cognitive links between theory and practice, with a focus on process over product. In all my classes, I aim to connect theoretical and practical skills to synthesize and apply their knowledge across disciplines. Combining theory and practice across disciplines is a vital component of successful theater making, and this teaching methodology has allowed me to create a costume design curriculum that includes many aspects of a Liberal Arts education.

Every element on stage must be thoughtfully designed and backed up with research. Therefore, there is a heavy research component added to many of the courses and projects my students complete. In Introduction to Production Design, students design all show aspects—from scenic elements to sound design. I require them to research one or several periods and become fluent in the history of that era. To successfully build the world of the play, one must also understand the psychology, sociology, political, and economic histories of the period in which the show is set, with students doing extensive research using the library and multimedia resources. The learning outcomes of the research segment of this course include students being able to find, analyze, and synthesize diverse sources of scholarly information during their assigned period. In this way, students understand that design is about scholarship and creativity.

I am always looking for ways to expand my skill set as an Educator and Designer. I chaired a session at the United States Technical Theater Institute's National Conference in March 2023 called "Pedagogy Speed Dating: Innovation in the Classroom." I presented on using self assessment as a grading practice, and other presenters covered such topics as flipped learning, non-traditional grading practices, and unique technology in the classroom. Continuing my education not only expands my skillset but also expands how and what I teach. Striving to learn new practices and skills is always at the forefront of my mind. I look at every design as a research and development opportunity. In ODU Rep's production of MacBeth, I researched how to create a silicon life cast of an actor's head. I then added a class in life-casting to my Introduction to Stage Make-up. I always look for ways to innovate, create, and learn new skills

as a designer, which I aim to convey to my students, integrating production research and development into my courses.

The final step in any of my design-related assignments is self-reflection. It may be a paragraph in an ePortfolio in Introduction to Stage Make-up or a presentation in Introduction to Production Design. The purpose of presenting their work, either in class or online, is so that students can have the opportunity to reflect, refine, connect, and take ownership of their work. I ask each student to reflect on their work and connect it to other class projects, other theories learned, and other disciplines outside of the class. They can discuss any changes they would have made and how they would refine their discoveries. Finally, we talk about the successes found through the completion of the project, allowing them to take ownership of their work. Furthermore, students are encouraged to comment on each other's work because theater is a collaborative art form, and we are not creating in a vacuum. By critiquing each other's work, we hold each other accountable; we focus on creative problem-solving and how we can refine, reflect, and own our work.

Through my teaching, I aim to convey my passion and constant curiosity for the world around me. Theater is an ever-changing art form that constantly challenges not only the audience but those who are creating theater as well. It is a living, moving art that has historically held a role in encouraging us to examine and explore our human condition. It is through this thoughtful exploration of the lived experience that the theater arts help us to become better members of society. Theater allows us to see ourselves better, whether the beauty in the mundane or the sublime in the absurd. I am committed to being an engaging, forward-thinking, and energetic teacher. By conveying my passion and enthusiasm for the arts to my students, I can help kindle and support theirs. This aspect of my teaching philosophy is based on my belief that it is crucial to create lifelong lovers of theater and the arts, not just to train and develop tomorrow's designers. I hope that my students, whether they continue as theater artists or not, become more aware of the connections between disciplines that they study, that they walk away from my class with a thirst for more knowledge, and become active citizens within the communities they inhabit.

-Meredith Magoun

## Diversity Statement

My Costume Design and Educator practice is built on a foundation of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Theater is best when it reflects the rich and varied tapestry of human experience. Costume Design is pivotal to bringing these stories to life, and it is my charge as a designer and educator to support this process.

Theater is critical to creating **empathy and understanding**. Through my lived experiences, pedagogy, and design practice, I am dedicated to celebrating human diversity in storytelling. I focus on decolonizing my syllabi by utilizing a variety of scripts and stories from a wide group of playwrights beyond the traditional canon, which enables students to experience a vast breadth of the human experience. I prioritize productions focused on topics such as social justice, race, and immigration, centering on perspectives of the global majority. My curriculum utilizes the dramaturgical research necessary to support and uplift all voices through costume design.

I strive to make my classroom and Costume Shop **equitable** by providing accommodations and support as necessary. My courses are structured to leverage a variety of learning methodologies, from hands-on activities to reading and discussions, to enable multiple paths to success in my courses. Equity in my classrooms also means that all my students have a voice, creating a wider discourse using multiple voices and perspectives. For example, I use an anonymous midterm survey to solicit feedback from my students, with the findings driving the course moving forward. All course supplies and textbooks are cost-conscious or free. Office and lab hours accommodate a variety of schedules, and I help on assignments as needed. In my Costume Shop, I balance the production needs with desired learning outcomes for my students. Ultimately, I see students as active participants in their education while I act as a guide in their experience.

My goal is to be **inclusive** in all my designs and teachings. My research is oriented to increasing representation for all types of bodies as well as rejecting harmful stereotypes. My renderings accurately represent the cast's bodies, using actual photos of the performers, so that my designs represent them—because representation matters. My fittings are conducted with inclusive and consent-based methods. I presented at USITT's National Conference on "How to Integrate Fat Activism into Your Costume Practice." Theater programs can often be breeding grounds for fatphobia, and body-negative practices and I am striving to eradicate these harmful practices from our profession. I extend this to the classroom as all of my lectures and coursework content are as diverse and inclusive as possible, reinforcing my stalwart commitment to inclusivity.

I believe that Inclusivity also means accessibility. **Accessibility** in the classroom can take many forms—from ensuring that all my images have Alternative text tags and color palettes with high contrast for the visually impaired to creating rubrics focusing on growth and skill development. Recognizing that traditional teaching methods are often rooted in Eurocentric colonist pedagogy; I have used various "non-traditional" teaching practices in my courses by initiating a flipped learning structure of my Introduction to Stage Makeup Course to utilize self-reflection as a critical learning tool. This enables students to make connections across projects, skill acquisition and to think beyond assignment. I have also shifted to un-grading my Intro to Production Design courses so that students play an active role in the assessment of their work. By being active participants in their grading, they are asked to reflect on their work and therefore have a deeper understanding of the learning outcomes. I actively strive to ensure that all students can feel both comfortable and challenged in their learning experiences, my classrooms, and in my Costume Shop.

My dedication to Diversity and Inclusion is an **ongoing journey**. I regularly assess my practices,

policies, and designs to identify areas where I can improve and further advance the cause of diversity. I do this by regularly participating in diversity-focused professional development, learning about inclusion through non-traditional teaching methodologies , and finally redesigning my coursework and practices based on these findings. My commitment to diversity and inclusion in costume design and theater is not just a statement but a living value. I believe that by creating an inclusive environment, we can—myself and my students—produce art that is more vibrant, authentic, and resonant with our diverse world.

-Meredith Magoun