

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

To be a successful costume designer you must wear many hats. You must be a sociologist, a dramaturg, a mathematician, an historian, an artist, an analyst, a psychologist, an MBA, and perhaps sometimes, even a magician. I believe, however, that the most important part of being a good designer is that you are a Creative Problem Solver and that you use all of your skills--be they technical (such as dying, draping, and millenary) or theoretical (such as character analysis, social context, and historical research)--to create a multi-faceted, unique design often under heavy time and resource constraints. Because of these dynamic and variegated requirements, I apply the same renaissance principles to my teaching in this field.

Teaching Costume Design to students is not about the end product. While a beautiful costume is always a lovely thing and I believe that having an end-product creates a sense of accomplishment--the process of getting there is equally, if not more, important in an academic setting. As a teacher, I am interested in helping my students become not just doers, but thinkers as well. I believe that they should have practical skills as well as strong and innovative theoretical ones. In all of my courses, my aim is to connect theoretical and practical skills to synthesize and apply their knowledge cross disciplines. This teaching methodology has allowed me to create a costume design curriculum which includes many aspects of a Liberal Arts education.

My main teaching objective is that the students will be able to create a thoughtful design, communicate that design, and implement the design into a realized finished product. Through a variety of lab/lecture/practicum style courses I've created a series of exercises that are designed to help students achieve these goals through challenging tasks requiring critical thinking as well as new and thoughtful approaches to industry skills. In TH261 Costume Technology students must design, pattern, and construct a lined bag with several types of pockets and closures. This allows them to experience the complete design process on a small scale, while practicing technical sewing skills to industry standards. They also then participate in laboratory hours in the Costume Shop, where the theoretical skills learned in class are applied to "real world" practical application—ie working on the actual costumes for a show.

By having a "mixed media" structure of practical and theoretical application, my pedagogy enables all learning types to be successful in my classroom. Many of my courses draw on content from other courses. For example: In TH362 Costume Crafts, I teach color theory through a silk painting project. Color theory is first taught in TH140 Intro to Theatrical Design and then reinforced in my course. The students use basic color theory while learning creating a beautiful silk painting. This project allows visual learners to literally see color theory in action, while kinesthetic learners physically experience color theory through mixing and application of dyes. Their color mixing skills are then reinforced through a color matching fabric dying assignments. I believe that in an educational setting, that it is imperative that I connect theory with practical application.

Connecting theory and practice across disciplines is a vital component to successful theater making. While having a strong background in technical skills is very important to becoming a

successful Costume Designer, I also believe that it is important that all design decisions are supported by thorough research. Therefore, there is a heavy research component added to many of my courses and projects my students complete. This is because I am interested in thoughtful design, which I define as "every element put on stage has been thoughtfully designed and backed up with research." In TH461 Costume Design, students are assigned to design a show which requires them to research one or several time periods and become fluent in the fashion history of that era. In order to be fluent in fashion history, one must also understand the psychology, sociology, political, and economic histories of a period. Research is a mainstay to any good design and my students must do extensive research using the library and multimedia resources. The learning outcomes the research segment of this course includes students be able to find, analyze, and synthesize diverse sources of scholarly information on their assigned time period(s). In this way, students begin to grasp that design is about both scholarship and creativity. Having a strong scholarly "thesis" for their design choices, which has been backed up by research and textual analysis, are the foundations to good design.

Once students have completed a project, I always have them present their concepts in front of their peers. The purpose of presenting their work 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 to other disciplines outside of the class. They have the opportunity discuss changes in process and how they would refine their discoveries. Finally, we talk about the successes found through 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 the many ways we can refine, reflect, and own our work.

I hope to convey through my teaching, my passion and constant curiosity for the world around me. Theater is an ever-changing art form, which constantly challenges not only the audience but those who are creating theater as well. It is a living, moving art, which has historically held a role in encouraging us to examine and explore our human condition. It is through this kind of thoughtful exploration of the lived experience that I believe the theater arts help us to become better members of society. This is because theater gives the ability to better see ourselves, whether it be the beauty in the mundane or the sublime in the absurd. I am committed to being an engaging 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 in 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.

Thank you.
-Meredith Magoun