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TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

I have been working professionally as a set designer, costume designer, lighting designer and theatrical technician for the last 19 years. Although I have had many professional opportunities in theatre, my real love lies in educational theatre. I believe that I thrive in a teaching environment and subsequently my students excel as well.

During my career as a theatrical designer I have worked in a number of academic environments, personally interacting with, supervising or teaching students in multiple areas of technical theatre. Having significant practical knowledge in various aspects of theatre production, from acting to carpentry, I have learned to appreciate and value collaboration. Consequently, I have a better understanding of what students need and how to better communicate with them. These characteristics have informed my teaching philosophy, which focuses on finding the ideal path for each of my students and helping them become well-integrated theatre artists.

I believe that the journey to this "ideal path" starts with a general knowledge of theater and a nurturing of creative ideas. For example, a student may come into a program thinking they will be a costume designer, but later discover that their true path lies in directing. By giving students an opportunity for creative growth—not just from a design aspect—they will not only be happier with their final career choice but also excel in their ultimate chosen vocation. This approach gives my students a comprehensive and varied theatrical education that prepares them for real world design opportunities. This approach also works well in a interdisciplinary environment as I use not only the lessons of theatre, but can incorporate knowledge from other academic areas.

This integrated theater approach starts by focusing the students on general, creative exercises in the first few class periods. Beginning level classes will participate in exercises designed to open up artistic centers, helping to develop their creative connections and communication with other areas of theatre while giving them a broad overview of design. I believe good collaboration is an important trait for all students to learn regardless of major, so I integrate collaboration exercises, readings and discussions in every one of my classes whether they be beginning or advanced. In addition, critical analysis and thinking is also crucial to a broader education. Because of this I want each student to develop a personal analysis of the play they will design. I assist in exploring a personal interpretation of a play's central theme through script analysis in order for each student to articulate an analysis and visceral response. I move my students from the "personal" to "the shared" by guiding them in group discussions and exercises that encourage the collaborative process. Their collaborative and personal approaches will facilitate a deeper understanding of each designer's own creative path and its relation to the needs of the entire production staff and service to the script.

Next, I transition into the research component of the production process. The Internet allows today's generation to conduct research at lighting speed. The old ways of library research are unfortunately fading into oblivion, but I believe students need to utilize new research methods while still embracing the old. Class time will focus on visual and written research, maximizing productively online as well as in the library. Research is crucial in developing the student's understanding and interpretation of their personal response to the text, so this becomes a major component in class projects, whatever the subject. With a firm base of collaboration, critical analysis and research I can move to more personal ways that each student might generate his/her own designs.

Since critiquing creative expression is subjective, I am flexible in my grading of "artistic material". On more quantifiable aspects of projects like research and script analysis, I give detailed rubrics showing what I expect for each component. When grading the more "artistic elements", like the design itself, I encourage my students to explain their process rather than critiquing my students' end results. I also assign drawing homework and in-class work, throughout the semester so that the students can watch their own progress and get excited about the artistic components, even if they do not consider themselves "artists". My teaching effectiveness is apparent when my students display confidence in their designs as well how much the students individually grow within the class time. They will demonstrate unique and

original ways of illustrating their designs and better articulating their ideas. When my students exhibit better understanding of and appreciation for their own creative process, I have excelled in my mission.

In addition to my "ideal path" approach, I emphasize in all my classes, the importance of sustainability in theatre. I make sure that "Triple Bottom Line" thinking is encouraged and explored for all areas of design and research. I am constantly striving to investigate and instigate sustainable values and ideas in my design classes while also developing courses to teach sustainability in the arts in more specific ways. I feel that incorporating sustainability into my designs and my teaching, I can bridge the gap between different academic areas as well as help my students live more productive, healthy and social conscious lives.

Ultimately, I want my students to thrive—not only in their design classes, but in other areas of the theatre arts: script analysis, stage movement, history, writing, research, directing and performance. They should understand how to integrate multiple elements into their design processes, helping them become well-rounded artists. In addition, I want my students to translate the collaboration, communication, sustainability and critical thinking skills fostered in my classes into all aspects of their studies. When this is achieved, my students will have found their "ideal path" to becoming well-rounded artists *and* well-rounded human beings.