

Joseph Court

Statement of Design and Teaching Philosophy

My overarching philosophy as a sound designer is to tell the story. My work should serve the director's vision as well as be a collaborative effort to compliment and support both the other designs and the story being told. These beliefs are also at the heart of my teaching philosophy.

The vast majority of what I have learned about creating theatre I have learned through real world, hands on experience in professional settings. In my classroom I attempt to create an educational, collaborative environment that emphasizes hands-on learning, problem solving skills, and an in-depth understanding of the process of creating art.

Collaboration is an integral part of the learning process as it applies to theatre, so it is a key component to how I structure my classes. In the professional world a designer is expected to be able to collaborate with the entire design team to create the world of the play. In my Introduction to Theatre class students are assigned a group project that deals with the different aspects of theatrical design. The lecture portion deals with each of the different design areas and how they all work together to create of the world of the play. Students are broken into groups, and asked, as a group, to decide on the world of the play. They decide who will fill each designer role; then they design the play. They are assessed on how well the designs fit the world of the play and how they compliment each other. This project requires the students to collaborate with each other to make sure they create a cohesive world. I also use a more detailed and sound design focused version of this project in my Sound Design class.

Technical theatre requires a hands-on approach to learning. When students are out in the professional world early in their careers they will be required to set up their own sound systems and make sure they work in the way they have been designed to work. My Sound Design class teaches the basic aspects of sound and how they apply to theatrical productions, including the physics of sound, manipulation of sound, the design of sound systems for theatre, and the design process as it relates to plays and musicals. The class pedagogy blends both lecture and hands-on learning opportunities. The lectures provide a theoretical foundation – the hands-on exercises allow the students to apply those theories in real world applications. For example I have a lecture on sound systems and their functions. The lecture portion is based around the different parts of the sound system, what they do, and how they work together. I then lead the students through the setup and operation of a simple sound system. Finally students are broken into groups to set up and operate the sound system on their own. Students are assessed on identification of the different parts of the system and by correctly setting up and operating the system.

One of the most important aspects of the collaborative process is the ability to problem solve, as the above project demonstrates. Students are given specific goals (the design must be cohesive with the world of the play, and the designs should compliment each other). The students must then, as a group, figure out how to interpret the world they have decided upon with designs that compliment each other.

We have an incredible opportunity as teachers to influence future professional theatre practitioners. I believe providing real world situations in a classroom setting with lessons that afford the opportunity to absorb lectures and use those theories in hands-on situations is the most efficient way to educate students. The skills we teach them have the ability to influence not only the future of their careers but also the future of the arts.