

**Tara Maginnis, Ph.D. ----- Statement of Teaching Philosophy:**

In teaching Theatre I think it is extremely important to do two, seemingly contradictory, things: Firstly, you need to teach and lead through example, and the shared experience with your students, of putting on shows. You need to fully integrate the work you do in Theatre Department stage productions with the teaching in your classes, and vice versa. So that as an instructor you bring in examples drawn from your own experiences of working on each play into each class that is taught simultaneously. You should discuss the characters in each play in Drama Lit, you will demonstrate the kind of makeup actors will need as those characters in their makeup class, you can show them your costume renderings in your costume class, and have actors who are working on a show's scenes in rehearsals also come in and do them in acting class to get feedback from their peers. Department productions, including student productions, films, etc. exist as a teaching tool, and it is important to connect the dots for students between their classes and the shows with which they are involved.

Secondly, however you need to remember that a Theatre department is not just a repertory theatre or a drama conservatory, and that student class work, grades, and graduation are not in any way second to those play or films. Too often technical classes like costume construction, stagecraft and lighting get turned by desperately understaffed theatre departments into nothing more than free unskilled work crews for putting up productions, entirely divorced from any sort of formal learning process. Actors in shows can be pressured by irresponsible directors into letting class work slide, or are openly told to skip a class to make an added rehearsal. Professors during tech week will sometimes even cancel their own classes, pretty well announcing to their students and the college at large that they think the show is more important than formalized education. This really has no place in an academic theatre. Stage plays are central to the teaching and running of any theatre department at any college, but they are not a

replacement for classroom teaching. The classroom instruction and play production are equally important parts of teaching a single lesson: How to keep your life, sanity and finances in order while engaged in the theatrical arts.

In a theatre department you also have an unusual relation with your students because in the process of doing plays or films you will have the same students that you teach during classes, working with you as colleagues in production meetings, rehearsals and performances. You need to have a far more friendly, equal, intimate relation with them as a co-worker on the shows, yet maintain enough respectful distance that they don't feel inclined to cross lines that make teaching relations awkward, or which make students feel uncomfortable with you. Usually, it is best to view a theatre department as a sort of familial relationship, where the professors are parental, or older-brother or sisterly, so they can know you like they know family, and come to you with personal problems, without you losing authority.

On a practical teaching level, you need to do as much as you can to keep students amused, awake, and interested in your classroom teaching. Doing theatre is fun, and so there is no excuse for any part of your teaching in theatre to be boring. It is simple common sense to chop up the semester into short digestible lessons and projects, instead of long meandering drags. And obvious that you will keep students more interested if you bounce between lectures, touchy-feely how-to, discussions, videos, and not to rely on just one method of instruction for every class meeting. It certainly doesn't hurt to make your lectures and demos a "performance" as well, with jokes or funny stories that make a point about something you are teaching, animated facial expression, audience eye contact, physical gesture, and even dressing yourself in a way that makes you visually stimulating to see. Entertaining your students makes them listen and remember what you say.

Professors in general also need to continuously look for new ways to teach their subject so they themselves do not get burnt-out with teaching it year after year, and so transfer their boredom to new students. I myself have twiddled the way I teach in my own classes multiple ways, trying out class projects as strange as making edible hats, or having students run around campus in groups doing Dada performances, yet the greatest thing to stop ennui during my 17 years of teaching is to make myself reinvent my classes using “Instructional Technology”. I’m not talking about the cookie-cutter approach where you are told by some bureaucratic bean counter to stuff a perfectly good face-to-face class into a Blackboard or Canvas environment for the convenience of people who are too “busy” to show up even one night a week to finish a requirement. I’m talking about working out fun ways to use the free technology every 20-year-old uses anyway, like YouTube, camera phones and apps to make your classes have more ways to help them and reach them when they are out of class. You can also use your own camera to document their work and build class pages that they tune into even when you don’t force them to; you can make your own instructional videos with PowerPoint (or Screencast-O-Matic) your own not-a-cookie-cutter online classes with Canvas or Wordpress, your own free student text books with Word. I know. I’ve done it. You don’t need a bunch of college grants to get fancy technology; you likely own what you really need already. The trick is writing the book, planning, writing and filming the videos, writing the online class, making pictures you can post on your site or stick in your book, etc. This sucks time, but for that very reason it helps you. You can go through an entire teaching career working on these projects, tweaking them, testing them on students, adding new ones as new ideas form in your head, and thus have a reason to keep your teaching never so easy for you that it gets dull.