

Sarah Jo Monaghan - Teaching Philosophy

Building Professional Skills for Real World Expectations:

As a first priority, theatre educators are responsible for providing knowledge and hands-on skill-building experiences for students, both technically and artistically, to prepare them for the professional world. However, not all students will pursue theatrical work professionally, so it is key to create a curriculum that is simultaneously professionally focused yet centered around widely applicable critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills.

Working collaboratively with students in the classroom is the foundation of my teaching practice. My priority is to create a classroom setting that prioritizes collaboration, delight in discovery, student growth, and a commitment to continued learning. In this environment, it is my goal to share with students the practical, technical, and creative skills I have built during my years of working in the theatre industry. My approach to teaching costume technology and design has overwhelmingly been informed by my professional experience as a technician, designer, collaborator and colleague.

As I progressed through my professional career and tackled different kinds of work in theatre, I began mentally compiling a list of skills necessary to any costumer entering the professional market. These are the skills around which I have based my technical curriculum. I broke down my own technical process, observed and learned from other professionals, and developed a series of hands-on projects for garment construction, cutting & draping, and costume crafts. My coursework builds on previous skills in two ways: 1.) while students are using and thus reinforcing what they have already learned, they are also 2.) using those skills to problem-solve and discover new, more advanced tools that expand their learning and technical abilities.

Similarly, my approach to teaching Costume Design derives largely from my own experiences as both a designer and technician. Research and renderings are key, but curating and delivering both in an artistically accessible and visually narrative format facilitates greater understanding of the designer's motivation for all members of the creative team, from the director to the draper. Renderings are a tool for communication. My priority is helping students to build drawing skills that preserve the designer's voice while clearly communicating the designer's intentions, both practically and emotionally. I encourage students to experiment with a variety of mediums, both traditional and digital, so they can discover the best tools for their own practice.

My experience has demonstrated the necessity of teaching costume design and costume technology in tandem. One informs the other. As a draper, I know from experience that

common technical language is necessary in realizing a designer's vision. When basic principles of construction are not understood by a designer, collaboration with their technical support team will suffer. Similarly, a draper's responsibility is to understand the emotional objectives of the designer and have the tools to propose solutions that will work for everyone to realize a complete design. I build a curriculum that places equal value on both technical skills and design skills, training students to be equally fluent in both the practical and artistic language of costuming.

Beyond the concrete skills of technology and design, I also endeavor to bring the greater lessons of my professional experience into my classroom. Everyone has different strengths and limitations. Learning what those are and how to articulate them is a skill that can be learned, if it is an expectation that is taught. I encourage students to understand where their strengths lie, what they bring to the table, what their limitations are, and how to articulate both proactively. I believe in saying "I know what I *can* do," and sometimes this comes with the caveat of, "and I know what I *can't* do." I believe it is necessary for educators to encourage collaboration while simultaneously demonstrating consistent boundaries and expectations. By this example, students are able to develop an understanding of how to best serve the work, what to ask for in order to make it happen, and when to ask for help. Making my classroom a safe space for this kind of learning is possibly my most important core value as an educator.

Forward Thinking Artistic Practice:

Theatre has historically weathered natural disasters, wars, and plagues. Audiences always return to the seats. However, theatre also evolves, changing its form to serve the stories of the audiences who need them. As theatre practitioners and educators, our particular work at this time of transition is to create a curriculum that honors our past while serving our future. As an educator, I place a high priority on finding innovative ways of teaching foundational artistic principles, tools for analysis, and practical skills that can easily serve traditional theatrical narratives and effectively translate to new media such as film, television, devised work, other unscripted genres, and the emerging fields of animation and interactive game design. The heart of all of these disciplines is storytelling, and I prepare students to become good storytellers in a variety of modern mediums.

Digital relevance is key to professional success. While traditional skills create a firm foundation, students entering the professional world today need to be equipped with, at minimum, basic digital tools such as familiarity with photo editing software and digital drawing tools. Incorporating website design and website maintenance into coursework as common practice should be the expectation, particularly in response to the on going shift to primarily digital professional recruitment formats. In order to continue to serve students, educators are responsible for continuing to educate themselves, and often it is the students who know best how

they need their teachers to shift and grow. The challenge as an educator is to stay relevant, pay attention and, when it becomes clear that the iPod shuffle isn't going to cut it anymore, ask a student what to replace it with.

Research/Publishing Work:

Costume History Text Update: I am currently working with former mentor, now colleague Professor Gregory Pulver to edit and update the classic costume history textbook, *Historic Costume for the Stage* by Lucy Barton. One of the key texts used in academic costume practice, this book was originally published in 1935, updated in 1975 and is currently out of print. The text has passed into common domain and we have begun the process to secure the editing rights to update the outdated language of the text as well as write and illustrate several new chapters. We intend to pursue republishing the book so it can continue to be used as a valuable reference for future students and designers.

Art Education & Learning Disabilities: As a person who navigates both my education and my professional life with a learning disability, I am deeply interested in pursuing my own research into arts and education and the role both can play in the development of neurodiverse people.

Anti Racism & Colonial Deconstruction in the Arts: Integrating antiracist work and active colonial deconstruction into academic practice requires constant and persistent engagement on the part of educators as a primary aspect of both classroom and research pursuits.

Wage Equality & the Gender Gap in Theatre: Professional theatre, like the majority of other professional occupations suffers from a consistent problem with wage inequality. This predominantly occurs in historically gendered disciplines, specifically costuming. I am interested in pursuing research into how this inequitable practice is perpetuated in both academic and professional settings. One of the primary ways I have already begun this work is by requiring all student designers and assistants to track their time from the first script read through to the last load of dry cleaning that gets dropped off. This might seem obvious, but historically, because design work is usually paid by contract with a flat fee or fixed salary for company designers, time and labor often go under-compensated or uncompensated. We have to know what is actually going into work before we can reimagine how to transform the way we approach and value work.

Costuming & Gender Identity: As society progresses, concepts, social behaviors and expectations about gender continue to shift. Developing new language, design and technical practices to serve this shift is a necessary area of research, understanding, and reeducation.

Translating Narrative Tools of Analysis for Costumers: Many of the tools used for literary and theatrical analysis have only been used, researched, and discussed in broad academic contexts. I am interested in deconstructing the common vocabulary of theatrical analysis with specific application to costumers and costume design. Research questions include: How might the narrative and analytical tool, the traditional text/script analysis be applied to inform costume choices? How are costumers responsible for translating the nuances of character archetype as visual narratives?

Continuing Education & Technical Skill Building: Maintaining and building technical skills in new areas as a technician and educator is a consistent and continuous responsibility. As a costume technician and designer first, active self-improvement is a necessary research pursuit. Research and continuous education areas that I intend to pursue include furthering my fluency in theatrical makeup and prosthetics design and application, wig construction and styling, puppetry construction and performance practices, theatrical fabric dyeing practices and methods, and sewing machine and serger maintenance and well and continued investment in digital tool literacy.

Service Focus:

Racial Equity Training & Diversity: I am committed to the necessary work of equity, both inside and outside the classroom. As a member of an academic community, I am committed to service in aid of building a more equitable and accessible academic landscape.

Curriculum Development: Making sure that my own curriculum is in keeping with the needs of my students, my colleagues and my peers requires that I be an active participant in the larger curricular choices that shape my department as well as the larger academic community.

Season Selection: A successful academic season is one in which everyone learns something AND the box office breaks even or turns a profit. Choosing a season that provides opportunities for students to learn and puts butts in seats is a tricky business. Having the right voices onstage and offstage requires that all disciplines are represented in the season selection committee room.

Union Representation: Union participation has always been one of my professional priorities and will continue to be work that I actively participate in throughout my career.

KCACTF, URTA & USITT: Making and maintaining connections with leading professional resources within the theatrical community is a necessary responsibility of educators. I am particularly interested in developing common language and practices with the resources that build bridges between academic and professional practice, such as developing a communal standard of skill expectations for entry-level theatrical practitioners and guidelines for industry standard arts and technical education.

Student Comments:

“Sarah Jo is a fantastic teacher who truly cares about her students. Her caring nature and ability to be multifaceted have allowed me to grow more confident as a designer.”

- Costume Design, Ohio University 2022

"Sarah Jo is an amazing instructor who facilitates a warm, open, and inclusive learning environment. Sarah Jo excels at taking complex (and thus daunting) concepts and simplifying them into easy-to-grasp steps. I'll never forget her 5 rules of draping: seams, darts, pleats, gathers, and bias. I would happily take any class taught by her.”

- Draping, Ohio University 2022

“Sarah was able to break down challenging and practical draping problems in a way that was easily digestible for stitchers of a variety of skill levels, while encouraging creativity and healthy communication.”

- Draping, Ohio University 2022

“Sarah’s hands-on approach and willingness to help us solve problems [contributed most to my learning.] She always tries to word things in a way each individual can understand.”

- Draping, University of Montana, 2016

“The organization, teaching style, assignments, instructor support/knowledge and great use of class time [contributed the most to my learning]. I felt respected and welcome - a wonderful learning environment.”

- Flat Patterning, University of Montana 2015