

Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy centers on each individual student and focuses on meeting, collaborating, and listening to the specific needs of the student to best enhance their learning experience. It is the job of the professor to facilitate learning for each moment and lesson and that pedagogies need constant reexamination and analysis to present the truths in history and the current moment. Education is, at its core, three things: necessary, evolving, and empowering. Within that construct, the role of the teacher is a facilitator - fostering education and highlighting its crucial place in personal and societal advancement through critical thought and experience.

Education is necessary because through it we gain knowledge and understanding. While success is not measured by degree type, I do feel success and the opportunity for it are greatly connected to the education offered to us. As an educator I strive to ensure my students receive the most balanced and cohesive education possible. By referencing my own positive experience with liberal arts education, I encourage students to combine their many different life experiences into any project and attempt to view a situation or obstacle through as many lenses as possible. I challenge and invite challenges to my pedagogy and process to increase the voices, truths, and cultures being presented to my students. By creating an environment that exposes the importance of learning and encourages students to explore different avenues of thought and problem solving, the results are artists who not only have become more connected with themselves, but with the world around.

Through the discovery of that connection and what opportunity can come from education, the potential for success is greater. As an educator, it is my job not to just teach, but to cultivate a hunger and excitement for learning within students. I feel a successful student is one that does not stop learning. I myself have a passion for all forms of learning and want to help others find that within themselves too. Society and all industries are constantly evolving which means there are new techniques, discoveries, and ideas that we must continue to learn and examine outside the umbrella of academia. The importance of continuing education beyond school will be promoted and encouraged to create the most well-rounded artist. I recognize this task is not always successful and can require different techniques and methods to communicate with each student most effectively, but I will continue to nurture the importance of pursuing education as it evolves.

The evolution of education is also a response to the evolving society and institutions that have an influence on the stories and histories being taught and explored in the classroom. As an educator, I will work toward ending systemic, overt racism and microaggressions in my own life: my teaching, professional efforts, and the institutions to which I belong through proactively incorporating anti-racism into my teaching and research and working with my students and colleagues to monitor and assess institutions and classrooms. I recognize that racism perpetuates systematic oppression of Black, Indigenous, and Peoples of Color through enduring structures and institutions of power and hold those truths at the center of this work. I resolve to actively pursue anti-racism, anti-bias, and anti-colonial structures in my pedagogy and work to dismantle any existing harmful systems and techniques.

Finally, and most importantly, education is empowering. While pursuing my own liberal arts degree, I studied classical thought and philosophy – focusing on Ancient Rome and Latin. Plato's Allegory of the cave has driven me ever since. Education, formal or not, is a basic human gateway to critically think about the world around them – to ask why? This desire to question and learn is the basis for innovation and development in any field. I am an advocate for my students and want them to have the most success in their futures, so not only is it my job to provide techniques and strategies for them to utilize, but also encourage feelings of self-empowerment and confidence as students explore their process and aesthetic. I actively encourage students to find their own agency and their own creativity – inside and outside of the classroom.

It is my job as an educator to provide tools and nurture learning within each student and their various intersections of identity and artistry, so that when they leave the classroom they will always be equipped with their experiences and education.



Brandon Bagwell

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Theatrical Lighting Specific Philosophy

The requirement of clear and collaborative communication is critical to all areas of theatrical design, but in a medium that is intangible, such as lighting, developing these skills is imperative. To have accurate conversations with directors, choreographers, fellow designers, and other elements of the production, lighting designers must learn to bring a tangibility to their media while being able to translate the needs and requests of other areas. The irony in the field is that designs from all disciplines are commonly generated at different points in the production process but making sure that all elements are not being created in a vacuum yields a stronger and more cohesive product. Knowing the importance of having designers establish trust and clear communication between collaborators, I see it as my role as a professor to both provide students with the basic tools needed to be a lighting designer while also providing them opportunities to refine those tools and make them their own.

The duality of the lighting designer is something I have always been interested in and can be incredibly stressful. Accurate communication is key at all points of the process, and with theatrical design being amorphous, things can change quickly. Strong communication is crucial for the production, and a stable foundation for a successful project. The lighting designer spends the first and final portions of the design process with the entire team, but a span of pre-production time is spent communicating to assistants and electricians. That balance of being able to juggle working with the macro of the production, then immediately jump to having conversations pertaining to the micro of the specifics of lighting, becomes critical to a smooth process. A lighting designer needs to work as a collaborative cog in the machine, but they also need the focus and discipline to work and communicate while other elements are at different stages of the process. I feel the best way for designers to remain flexible in meeting these needs is to analyze the design process and necessary tools to be successful at each milestone.

I approach the design process in four main sections: design development, actualization of design, implementation of design and finally, adjudication of design.

A. Design Development

The lighting designer's process begins long before stepping into the theatre. Establishing a strong, dramaturgically backed understanding of the text is fundamental. Script analysis is crucial to ensure the design choices being made support the source material – the text. This analysis informs the historical setting, plot structure, and technical obstacles for the production to creatively solve. Through initial conversations with the director, the lighting designer can gain an understanding of the lens and approach the director is looking to take with the production – this knowledge can then be taken to fellow design team members to find creative solutions to costumes, sets, lighting, and all other elements of the production. These solutions all have the same goal of serving both the director's vision and the playwright's text – this can be a difficult line to walk, but a collaborative answer can be achieved. The basic tools necessary for a lighting designer here are an understanding of the different design elements, a foundation in dramaturgy, and collaborative, communicative skills to share their ideas and inspiration in different ways and media.

B. Actualization of Design

After the initial conversations and design process are complete, the lighting designer must flex their duality and move to a more individualized approach to design. The large team conversations are not over, but now the emphasis must be placed on the individual design process and element. The lighting designer will take away and respond to the other design elements. Each designer's unique process will ultimately lead to the creation of the plot – this being the technical drawing that depicts where all the lighting instruments and positions will be in a production. Not only is the drawing important, there are additional materials (i.e. channel hook-ups, instrument schedules, focus charts, magic sheets, etc...) that must also be generated to ensure proper interdepartmental communication. Designers must stay alert and communicative in this process to ensure the precious time in the theatre is used to its full potential.

I also feel it is the job of the lighting designer to have an advanced understanding of the lighting system and technical needs of the production. There is the need for some autonomy between designers and lead electricians, but a strong lighting designer will be able to exercise the combination of being both a designer and technician to help keep the process moving forward. The ability for a designer to remain engaged, flexible, and passionate through the production process can result in a more fulfilling and collaborative design process.

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C. Implementation of Design

Once a production has moved past the load-in and focus process, it is time for all the designers and creative teams to meet back in the theatre to put the puzzle of the production together. Pulling from those initial conversations, choices can be made to support the production's story as well as the lens the audience will see the story through. It is during tech week that the lighting designer is put in the 'hot seat' and has a condensed amount of time to create, test new ideas, fail/succeed, and craft their portion of the design. While this process can be incredibly taxing both mentally and physically – maintaining clear, positive communication skills through the long hours of tech is essential. Clear communication allows for ideas and notes to be passed internally or externally to serve the show. While in the theatre, the lighting designer will manage the needs of their fellow collaborators while leading the lighting team. As previously discussed, designers need to have the technical expertise to understand the lighting console and its language to achieve their design. They will constantly be communicating with a console programmer, but without knowing what the tools in their tool kit can do and how they function a designer will not be able to utilize them to their full capabilities. This process can be strenuous when keeping up with software and technologies, however instilling and maintaining self-motivation in young designers is important, especially as they begin their careers. Again, focusing on the importance of a well-rounded education not just in the micro of lighting design but the macro of the theatrical industry.

Lighting Design Courses

My approach to lighting design and education is that inspiration can come from anywhere and the best learning is done when people get their hands dirty and experience. Lighting design courses should help strengthen script analysis and basic design research skills while allowing for personal aesthetic growth. Classes should help strengthen the collaborative vocabulary and allow students to see different points of view in the theatre. Students will be required to create and present their work (designs or electrical projects) to their peers – they will then defend these choices in an organized, cohesive manner.

Some example classes and brief structure:

- **Intro to Design:** Basics of design and composition. Starting at basic ideas such as line and shape and expanding that knowledge to include other fundamental design elements. The class does not focus on theatrical design specifically, but rather the ideas and tools to use to create effective compositions for different applications. Weekly design projects with class-room wide reflection and analysis will also start to strengthen communication skills as students describe, defend, and critique peers' work in a productive and supportive environment.
- **Lighting Design 1:** Basics of lighting design and plot creation. Strengthening the text analysis to support design. Working on basic paperwork generation and hands on light lab projects. This course will focus on introducing a wide range of students with a base to have conversations focused on lighting as a medium and actualizing those conversations.
- **Lighting Design 2:** Advanced lighting design techniques. Expanding the conversation to avenues outside of theatrical lighting design (architectural, event, opera, etc...). This course will focus on a more in-depth exploration of lighting design and development of personal process and aesthetic.
- **Basics of Assistant/Associate Lighting Design:** The skills of a good assistant carry directly over to the skills of a good designer. The attention to detail and technical knowledge required of an assistant can promote good habits and stronger communication in a designer's own process. The course will focus on the lighting assistant's role inside and outside of the theatre at the different stages of production.
- **Drafting/Software:** Classes that specifically look at bettering the students' understanding of software in the industry. Vectorworks (2D/3D), Google Sketchup, Adobe Photoshop, Microsoft Suite (focus on Excel), FileMaker Pro. Outside of drafting skills, the software list will expand and develop as the industry does.
- **Director/Designer Collaboration:** It is easy for collaborators to tunnel-vision and focus on their element of design. A class in collaboration allows for a wide variety of students (from different design disciplines) to take on different roles in a production team: director, scenic, lighting, costumes, sound, projections. Through a healthy rotation of scripts and productions, groups will be tasked with creating unique takes and approaches to productions. This course will focus on the importance of collaborative communication and working with other design elements.
- **Intro Theatrical Electrics:** A basic introduction to the base electrician, rigging, and productions' needs of someone in lighting. Learning to circuit, hang, focus, and program lights will be a focus of the course.
- **Advanced Theatrical Electrics:** Moving into skills that could be utilized by production/master electricians and programmers. From more advanced wiring and practical work, to full network and system creation, these classes will be focused on advanced electrical knowledge and plot planning.

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- **The Personal Business of Theatre:** Introductory level class to the business of the theatre industry. This course will cover the basics of unions, agents, and other professional associations, along with exploring contract negotiation, and tax prep/personal finance. While in a creative field, the industry is a business and gathering these skills will help protect students, their projects, and investments.
- **Lighting Practicum:** Hands-on experience, critical for young designers and technicians. By learning the technical aspects thoroughly, solving problems on-the-job, and working in a crew setting, students will learn to work effectively and efficiently together. Every school production should have a full crew staffed by students. An Assistant, Master Electrician, and programmer will be assigned to each production as needed. It is important for young designers to experience different aspects of lighting.

D. Analysis/Adjudication of Design

As their mentor, I will schedule regular design conversations with the student to address any questions at any point in the process. The goal of these meetings being that the students find their own design aesthetic and process. While the tools used by many artists are the same, the process of creation and implementation of the tools is unique. I will direct my mentoring to foster these unique approaches while providing guidance from my own experience and that of my peers.

While actively in the production process, I will require that student designers complete the full arc of the design process. From the initial play read and research through the completion of archivable final files. I will designate specific check in points through the process to ensure that work is being completed in a timely manner to not only serve the designing student but the entire production. Most importantly, before any technical decisions or paperwork is generated, I'll nurture the students to create a clear, personal design approach to the production. Once the student has created their approach, I will guide them through creating all the necessary paperwork for a production. I will then have regular check ins with the designer at focus and in tech to mostly observe and offer guidance as they discover their process.

Production Supervision

Through the design process and tech week, I will encourage the student to have collaborative conversations with the director and team. I will not obstruct or interfere with that process because every artist needs a nurturing space to grow and find that unique path. In tech I am a resource for the designer and will make myself available in the room, but only bring suggestions up in the direst of circumstances. I will watch the first run in its entirety and provide observations following – these are not notes that must be implemented, but rather observations of the production and the student's process. I will also act as a faculty liaison to ensure that the lighting department is collaborating and working to serve the greater good of the production.

Postmortem

Once a production has closed, there will be a postmortem to critique the production, lighting design, and students' approach. The postmortem is a way to come together as a creative community and look back on a production to praise success and analyze missteps or failures. The first two points will be addressed in a large group setting of fellow students. This group discussion will allow the students on the production to gain experience talking about their work and process while giving an insight to peers and students who may be coming into those roles in the future.