

Teaching Achievement

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Contextualizing My Teaching

Hired to create a costume emphasis for the MU Theatre Department, I have rewritten the costume specific courses to fall in line with my teaching philosophy. I continue to improve the courses each time they are taught, aiming to keep them current and engaging for the students. Progressing in my teaching skills, I have enjoyed learning how to pass on my extensive experience and knowledge to my costume design and production students.

Introducing undergraduate students to the many facets of costume production, I have created a universal costume course framework upon which skill specific projects are added. The framework is intended to provide a familiar system of operations that students who have taken other costume courses will be familiar with so that the topics and specifics of the projects are the new element being introduced to students. Classes then do several projects of increasing difficulty over the course of the semester pertaining to the topic of the course. Ideally, there will be projects of extraordinary craftsmanship that will be showcased at conferences, adjudicated events, and other venues.

Each semester I either teach one course and design two of the MU shows in our season or I teach two courses and design one show in our season. At times I have had to teach two classes and design two shows in a semester. Design is not the end of my show responsibilities. I also produce the work with the help of a part-time Shop Manager (they organize the physical stock, assign work to students, and supervise the activities in the shop), a Teacher's Assistant Cutter-Draper (they teach one section of Beginning Costume Construction, tutor students in that class, and oversee the sewing and assembly of the shows), and a variety of Practicum Students (any student taking a costume course). Note that my predecessor at MU and the faculty in my undergraduate and graduate costume programs were run by teams of three Costume MFA's hired at a full-time capacity. This means that though I have help, I am doing the work of three people during my tenure probation. The people we can hire have sewing knowledge but are not costume experts with MFAs in costuming and cannot put in the hours truly needed.

There is only so much you can learn during classes. All students who enroll in theatrical production courses participate in practicum. Practicum is practical, on the job training in an area of theatrical production. There are six areas of theatrical production; Scenic, Costumes, Properties, Projections, Lighting, and Sound. Each area takes a team of collaborators to make it happen. Like an internship, it provides students with experience that goes on their resumes.

During practicum, students help build the shows we produce by doing alterations, painting, crafting, organizing, styling, pulling garments, and building. We spend over 1000 hours over a four-week period producing one show in our season. Our activities include sourcing nearly 500 individual clothing items, coordinating them into aesthetically pleasing outfits, fitting them to actors' bodies (there have been as many as 25 actors with five outfits a piece), altering each garment to fit, and then rigging them so that actors may do complete outfit changes in 30 seconds or less. We also source supplies to build new custom garments (thread, fabric, zippers, sewing templates, etc.), produce several prototypes, and finally fit the new garment. This does not include maintaining and cleaning the costumes nor wardrobe crew who assist the actors during the performances.

Many undergraduate students are not majors or minors but are simply looking for a fun elective. We hope that through practicum, they learn that theatre can be fun but it is time consuming work and requires skill which we are glad to teach. Students gain an appreciation for the time and effort it takes to produce entertainment and many even become a Theatre Major or Minor.

Chronology of Courses Taught

Courses I have taught thus far include Introduction to Theatrical Design, Costume Design, Beginning Costume Construction, Advanced Costume Construction, Theatrical Pattern Making, Costume Crafts, and Stage Makeup. We are finally reviving Advanced Stage Makeup in the fall of 2024. Below are descriptions of each course in the order in which I first taught them.

In TH 2510: Introduction to Theatrical Design, students explore the five main design disciplines: Scenic, Costumes, Lighting, Sound, and Properties. (Projections, the sixth discipline, had not risen to its current prevalence and was not part of this course.) Students read the chapter in the book and then did a craft project based on that area of design. The final project was a puppet show using the story of *The Little Red Hen* as inspiration. Students were divided into teams and wrote their own script, designed and built their own puppets, crafted scenic elements, and performed for a small audience of invited guests.

TH 1340: Beginning Costume Construction is an introductory design course and is one of two options required to fulfill the Theatre degree. Offered every semester, it is a gateway into costume design. Students learn the basics of sewing by hand and machine sewing to create three projects over the course of the semester. Students incorporate a personal touch in each project choosing their fabrics and stitching details. The final project, a button-up shirt, is designed by the student and may vary from a traditional button-up shirt. This is their design project as the custom shirt is part of an ensemble look in which they gather clothing and two accessories to make a cohesive outfit. This class teaches students that costume design doesn't mean building everything from scratch but producing a wearable outfit by borrowing, renting, buying, and building.

TH 3330: Advanced Costume Construction introduces students to corsetry and beginning tailoring. They produce several technique samples informing them of their preferred techniques before designing their final project. They build a garment utilizing their preferred skills and coordinate an outfit to go with it. By their final presentations, students gain an appreciation for the time and effort it takes to build a complete costume and discover new techniques for achieving fitted and historical clothing.

TH 3320: Theatrical Pattern Making takes Costume Design and polishes their understanding between what they draw in a costume sketch and what it represents in cloth. They begin with draping a piece of cloth on a mannequin to find the right shapes to cut the fabric into. This allows them to understand why sewing patterns tend to use the same shapes repeatedly and what the core pattern shapes are and how to manipulate them. They go through experimentation, making a series of garment mock-ups or prototypes- refining each phase until the pattern is perfect and repeatable with clear instructions. The goal is for anyone to be able to make the garment without the student being present.

TH 1360: Stage Makeup is an introductory course where we emphasize character creation over aesthetic correction. Bodies are all different and beauty is subjective. The goal is for the students to learn how to use makeup products to transform their appearance into that of a character they have created. They learn the importance of historical research, beginning to see how social events change beauty standards and practices over time. They also discover the power of light and shadow to create illusions. Makeup, after all, is a living mirage.

TH 3540: Advanced Stage Makeup takes the illusions of Stage Makeup and adds three dimensional effects to enhance the look. Students learn about face casting, making prosthetics, how to paint prosthetics, and how to apply them safely. They design old age makeup, gore effects, and creature creations.

TH 4570: Costume Design focuses on the ability to communicate visually with students learning how to draw and paint using watercolor, create image boards, and giving presentations of their work. The class does three projects over the course of the semester, the first, introducing them to drawing from reference materials, the second, gaining an understanding of the flow of costume design, and the third, learning how to represent a character's journey using costumes. Students begin by reading the assigned script, doing character studies to create imageboards for each assigned outfit. After presenting these boards to the class, they produce watercolor renderings that should bring the character to life. The goal at the end of each project is for them to be ready to speak with a costume shop to begin the building of their costume designs.

TH 3310: Costume Crafts is a survey of skills that are not covered in the other classes. Students learn about wig styling, mask making, fabric manipulation, and how to use EVA foam for armor and millinery. Some students gear all their projects to produce one outfit while others create standalone pieces.

Instructional Technology

Grateful for modern cloud systems, I utilize Google Drive and Microsoft Teams daily. Our work is very collaborative and being able to share materials with the costume shop staff and the other departments is imperative. I can provide my design concept art, blueprints, references and more to one central hub accessible by phone or desktop. I can check on the progress in the costume shop live as things are being crossed off or as questions arise.

In my classes we utilize Canvas. It allows me to keep the prompts for assignments in an easy to access place for students and allows them to turn in their assignments that I can access from anywhere. It also eliminates the clutter from turning in physical projects that fill up my office or are never picked up.

I often utilize Microsoft office to create handouts, handbooks, and instructions for classes or my costume designs. I'm a big fan of written documentation for a team. It keeps everyone on the same page and provides procedures for various situations.

Krita is my go-to digital drawing platform for costume rendering. It is open source meaning that artists who also code are continually working to make the Krita product better for artists. I appreciate its simplicity and wide range of tools. It has replaced watercolor rendering as I can now paint digitally anywhere and have the advantage of being able to upload costume renderings without the need to color-correct them. In the past you would, have to make time to be in your painting studio, buy physical materials, keep them stocked, start over if you messed up a rendering, re-do a rendering if the director doesn't like it, and upload your physical renderings to digital platforms and then must color correct and crop them to look true to life. Digital rendering removes these problems.

In my classes and the costume shop we use domestic sewing machines and industrial irons to create new clothing. Whether class projects or costumes for our realized shows, we use these tools daily. We also have a dye vat and dye station in our basement which is a rarity among costume shops. We have two washing machines with attached dryers which have saved us money on professional cleaning services. Additionally, we use steamers, for removing the wrinkles from historical costumes and styling wigs.

Teaching Awards

In 2020, I was nominated and awarded the ATHE Innovative Teaching Award which brought with it a yearlong membership to ATHE (the Association for Theatre in Higher Education). This is a regional award from the nationally recognized organization, the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF).

Mentoring of Students

Mentoring 13 students, I guided them on projects for our departmental productions and prepared them for showcasing their final products. Below is a sampling of students and their projects. Please see my website for pictures of their work.

Alex Hejna, I mentored during our 2018-2019 season as a junior costume designer for *Songs for a New World* by Jason Robert Brown (a song cycle on various topics) and *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett (the absurdist tale of two men waiting for a man who never comes). He went on to showcase his costume designs for *Waiting for Godot* at the MU Visual Arts and Design Showcase (VADS) including a display board showing his design process and a mannequin dressed in one of the costumes.

I mentored Cody Grasher, who graduated in 2018 and now works at Phoenix Theatre Company, who designed and produced costumes for *Safe* by Georgia Douglas Johnson, a piece that tells the tragic story of newly emancipated black family and the lynching that causes the death of their newborn baby. He had worked with me for a year as one of our paid costume shop techs and proved to be a creative and reliable student. He showcased one of his costumes from *Safe* at the Visual Arts and Design Showcase (VADS).

From 2020-2022, I worked with Rose Shirkey. She began by taking my Costume Crafts class via Zoom. She did great work and went on to take the Stage Makeup course. She participated twice in VADS winning in 2021 for her makeup design *Birthday Toast(ed)*! She was hired to be a paid costume shop tech and designed makeup for our production of *Marisol*, which included special effects glow makeup.

In 2022, Eliza Brooks approached me with an HLBC (Honors Learning by Contract) project in which they researched the life, history, and cultural significance of Lady Curzon's infamous Peacock Dress. They produced an in-depth and artistically composed poster board detailing the events that lead to the garments creation and how it represented the pinnacle of societal defiance and British colonization in India. They presented their work at MU's 2022 Undergraduate Research Day.

In the spring of 2023, Ella Ilg was in my Theatrical Pattern Making class and created a Renaissance faire costume from scratch. Draping and refining a custom bodice to her measurements, she created a patch work fairy. The bodice was showcased on Poster Day during Show Me Research Week that spring.

In fall of 2023, Claire Johnson is a fashion student who was working with my colleague, Dr. David Crespy, as the costumer for his site-specific production of "The Threepenny Opera". She had never done costume design and production, so I consulted her on the differences between fashion and costume production highlighting pit falls to avoid and the must do guidelines to adhere to. We are seeking to have her work with us this summer in the Larry D. Clark Summer Rep. Program 2024.