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An approach to design in an academic setting.

When I design for any theatrical productions in an academic setting, I always think how the students can be involved in the process and how I can support their learning experience from success.

Before the first concept meeting, I research about the play, playwright, period, art movement, a brief history of the country around the time. It helps me to understand what the playwright's intention of the play and also analyze the play with multiple perspectives. I make a scene breakdown and a props list to analyze the detail of the play and to share with others, especially the students. I also check if there are any challenging props in the show. If I have a student assistant designer or a props manager, I always ask them to research and make a scene breakdown and a props list to analyze the play by themselves because it is their opportunity to practice before they design or they have a full responsibility after graduation. We usually compare that information with my research and discuss it.

During the concept meeting, I listen what the idea of the director and other production members, carefully. Every director and every production have a different approach, so I always make sure we are on the same page. I also share my ideas or response to the play for creating a strong production because I believe a good collaboration process is like bouncing a ball between walls which the production members share their bold ideas and passing the ideas to another and the production can make a great decision. Most student designers hesitate to speak in the meeting, so if I realize a student designer who is not talking, I always ask some questions.

After the concept meeting, I start visual research with the concept. Find an art movement that fits the production, and collect inspirational images and practical images for the production. It depends on the schedule and the production, but I tend to start sketching and make a rough ground plan at the time. If I have a student assistant designer and a props manager, I ask them to research and discuss their research, and then I share my research and ideas.

At the second production meeting, I share my visual research, sketch and the rough ground plan. Showing my ideas with visual images is the best way to communicate with others, and I would love to hear others' feedbacks. I am also happy to change my idea with suggestions to make the production better.

After the second meeting, I start editing the ground plan, creating a virtual color rendering and making a white 3D model based on the conversation at the meeting. I usually use SketchUp or Adobe Photoshop for the sketch, so I develop my sketch to a virtual rendering. If a 3D printer is available to use, I use that for making a 3D model. When I have a student assistant designer, I assign some part of the task that depends on the student's skill level. If a student needs to develop the skill of building a 3D model, I ask the student to make some parts of the model. If a student needs to improve the ability of drafting, I ask to edit the ground plan. I also start discussing with Technical Director regularly about how to approach building the scenery and how to involve students in the process.

At the third production meeting, I bring the revised ground plan and 3D white model to discuss further. The 3D white model helps to explain further details about the design and make sure everyone is on the same page. After the third production meeting, I revise the ground plan, the 3D model and start painting the 3D model. I also begin drafting front elevations, section drawing and detail drawings. If I have a student assistant designer, I assign some parts of the task.

At the fourth production meeting, I bring all the paperwork and the colored 3D model and discuss with others. After the fourth production meeting, I revise all the paperwork as needed, and I start sharing the design with the students who are involved in the production, such as Charge Scenic Artist, Scenic Painters, Props Artisan or any students who are interested. If there is no design presentation to the actors, I do to them. If I do not have a Charge Scenic Artist, I start making paint samples.

Before rehearsal begins, I always make sure all rehearsal props are ready and give a PDF file of the ground plan to the Stage Manager and make sure they do not have any troubles to tape on the floor because Stage Manager is usually a student.

Following production, meetings are for reporting the progress and we discuss some matters if there is anything needs to be discussed as a group.

During the building process, I go to the scene shop every day and talk with the Technical Director and other production members. If I do not have any student Charge Scenic Artist or Props Manager, I am acting as the positions in the scene shop.

At the Technical Rehearsal, I make sure all the scene changes and props changes work smoothly. I also check the painting of the scenery with the stage lights and if I realize any different look with my intention, discuss with the other production team members.

I always ask students who are involved in the production to come to one of the dress rehearsals. Even though the students is a props artisan or scenic painter, I believe it is important to see their work under the stage lights with actors in the costumes for their understanding of how their work supports the production. It also helps them to practice how to analyze the production and take notes.

After the opening night, I do not change anything with a professional manner and read the performance report to make sure there are any problematic repairs for scenery or props what I need to help. Most of the time, Technical Director and Props Manager take care of it, but at least I communicate with them about it.

Before the strike, I discuss with Technical Director and Master Electrician how they plan to strike the scenery and the lighting fixtures and negotiate how many students I can get for cleaning the paint buckets or return all the furniture and props to the storage area and organizing and cleaning the storage area. If I have a student assistant designer or props manager, I make sure they have enough people to help them and let them lead other students.

In conclusion, as a designer in an academic setting, my job is to show a good role model who utilizes the people skill through the production process and also giving students opportunities to learn from successful experience. That is why I am working with the students very closely to mentor every step of the process. I believe it is an excellent way to lead them to find the best approach to design for them after graduation.

Figure: A summarized table of my design process

Week #	Production	Tasks
	Before the 1st Concept Meeting	Research about the play, playwright, period, art movement, brief history of the country around the time
Week 1	1st Concept Meeting	Listen and share ideas

Week #	Production	Tasks
Week 2	2nd Production Meeting	Share my visual research, sometimes share a sketch and a rough ground plan and discuss.
Week 3	3rd Production Meeting	Share a revised ground plan, a virtual color rendering, a 3D white model and discuss.
Week 4	4th Production Meeting	Share a 3D color model, draftings, and finalize the design.
Week5-9	5th-9th Production Meeting	Progress report
Tech Week	Tech/Dress rehearsal	Quality check
Opening	Performance	Read the performance report carefully, and make sure no one has any issues of scenery and props.
Closing	Strike	Clean paint buckets, and return all the furniture and props.