

# Amanda Dawson, Ph.D.

Teaching Philosophy

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As a theatre educator, scholar, and practitioner I challenge students to take their classes as opportunities to ask their own questions, take risks, and push the limits of their expectations. My method of teaching is built on two major principles: application and collaboration. Similar to my rehearsal room, my classroom is a place of discipline and creativity. I motivate students to become positive participants in society through a cultivation of the skills they already possess in addition to the skills they will gain in my courses.

In my classes, I require students to continually examine the past as a tool to investigate the present. For example, when teaching theatre history I first connect how theatre history has shaped theatre currently, and emphasize how it will impact the future. Then, working in teams of two, students study a theatre from the past, specifically before 1900. They are instructed to find some element of the theatre (i.e. the building, the kind of plays, or the theoretical approach) and connect it to how theatre is carried out today and how it will be implemented in the future. After completing their research, each team presents their findings to the class. This activity both encourages collaboration skills and provides a medium for creativity. The success of this project is measured, in part, by evidence of the thread students are able to pull through the past, present, and future in their description of each element.

Theatre courses have an innate responsibility and ability to hone communication skills—verbal and nonverbal—through a variety of public speaking practices. In my Public Speaking (as performance) course, I ask students to perform various speech forms including introductions of a partner in class, an informative speech on a cultural event that they are unfamiliar with, Moth's, TED Talks, and interviews. Students are required to do research to examine a new cultural event. They must also be vulnerable when performing their Moth stories (based on the Moth Radio Hour). Students who have taken my Public Speaking course have improved the crafting of narratives and lowered their performance anxiety.

In each course, I link the course topics, whether it is diversity on the stage or theatre for social change to current events. In Acting, we analyze plays such as Dominique Morisseau's *Detroit '67* to show how theatre can begin conversations about police shootings across the country. Most recently, in all my courses, we have discussed the political climate and how the arts, and specifically theatre, respond to it. In Public Speaking, discuss and analyze public speaking "moments" – speeches by politicians and acceptance speeches at award shows. In Theatre Appreciation, we look at *Hamilton* and examine the influence it has had on the American theatre. These activities are evaluated by the students' active and thoughtful participation in class discussions. We explore how age, class, gender, race, and cultural background influence contemporary events and how theatrical performance responds. This allows us to contextualize the art we create. I build a foundation of creativity, which allows for the classroom to become a place of exploration.

Whether my students go on to practice the arts or not, I enable them to approach obstacles with creativity. Students in my courses learn to respond critically to the world by asking questions and working together to seek answers to their questions. In my classes, I require students to question what they can gain from the course and how they can apply these skills in their own career endeavors.