



**THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA**

**Department of Theatre and Film Studies  
Department of English**

26 August 2016

Dear David,

Earlier this term I observed a class that Julie Ray taught, and wanted to tell you about that experience. Julie had asked me if I would like to sit in on her graduate design class or her undergraduate class, but in the event, I chose to sit in on both. (Let me add that I had already seen Julie teach. In her first year here she came in to the Theatre 2000 course and gave the students an overview of set design, which they loved, particularly since she showed them both materials about stage and movie set designs, which got them talking about the design process. As a result, I knew that I was going to enjoy her classes.)

In the graduate class, Julie and her students were discussing an assignment: how to create the set for Tom Stoppard's play *Arcadia*. Sitting with the students, Julie began by asking each of them to present what they had done to prepare for the assignment and to show their initial rough sketches for three approaches to the play. The students then talked about the images and issues that they had found in the script as well as the research they had carried out (principally on the period, 1809-12, when the play is set in England). Next they talked about how they would shape their research into designs and showed the sketches that they had done.

After each student presentation, Julie then went through and provided a short critique. Now I have no sense of how a presentation or critique ought to go in design. But I do know good teaching when I see it. Julie did not sit in judgment on either student's work. She asked them questions, gently pushed them to justify choices, and turned the "critique" into a group discussion of the play's strengths and weaknesses for a designer. The conversation was friendly, punctuated with laughter, but she did not hesitate to talk about the particular issues of the play (the need for space to waltz, the central table, the view of the garden outside).

Each student talked for about twenty minutes, Julie's comments disguised as conversation ran about twenty minutes, and at the end of the class, she went through the next assignment and made sure both understood what they were going to do. What I principally took away was her practicality in training students. At the end of the class, they knew more about how to present a design, the aesthetics of doing a period production, and the dramaturgical issues that affect performance. It also struck me that Julie's respect for her students did not

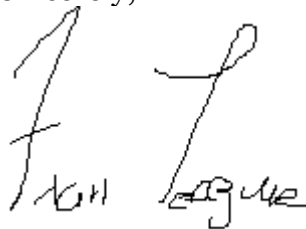
preclude her pointing out problems in their initial sketches or suggesting alternatives.

Next the undergraduates came in for an introduction to drafting. This class was a completely different kind of teaching. Julie had asked them to do some preparation, and she began with a few questions. Most of the class had thought they understood the prepwork, but when asked specifically about it, they were soon baffled. Their chief concern was whether they would draft with a computer or by hand. (Julie assured them at least three times that they could choose the method.)

Julie then led them, slowly and systematically, through the conventions of drafting. Once again, I have no experience of this material, but I figured I would take notes and see if they still made sense to me after some time had passed. The good news is that my notes make perfect sense: I doubt that I could draft anything, but I have a much clearer idea of what the squiggles mean and why they matter. The bad news is that only one of the students was taking notes as I was. The others would occasionally jot a note down, but mostly watched with deep engagement. Thinking that they might have a textbook that explained everything, I asked Julie after class whether they could retain enough to do the assignment without notes. She laughed and assured me that they would do dreadful work in their first attempt at drafting, but that they would learn from that failure and get better. Again, I was struck by her ability to teach them without judging or to admit alternatives to what she was telling them. She was far more patient than I would have been when they repeated questions and she explained everything clearly enough that even I could follow.

These were good classes. The students were treated with friendly respect, but they left knowing they had much to learn. (And so did I.) The class stayed on track, and the students learn by doing. If only all of us were so organized!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Frances Teague". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

Frances Teague  
Josiah Meigs Professor  
University Professor  
University of Georgia