My role as a teacher is to create a culture for discovery and inquiry. Culture is what happens in the space when students feel trusted and valued. I model leadership by intentionally creating a classroom that creates trust and openness. It’s a collective product of the group’s experience. This is what excites me about teaching!

Assessing each student’s interest and abilities is vital to the effectiveness of a course. Each student brings a diversity of thought and applying different methodologies is key to achieving student learning outcomes. Knowledge and skills are realized when a student can connect the dots between understanding and then practical application in class and during Production. In my Advisor role, I accompany the students through their journey as Stage Manager during pre-production, room rehearsals, techs and performances as a mentor and guide making observations and asking questions: “Did you notice that? What would you do differently next time? What is your gut telling you to do?” Often times it’s simply to remind them that they actually know the answer to the question they ask. So much of leadership training is teaching students how to successfully develop collaborative relationships with their peers and to help students connect their values with the responsibilities of their job.

**Communication.** Everything a stage manager does relates back to communication. Whether it’s verbal or non-verbal, a skillful leader knows how to interpret tone or read a room and to be intentional about how they communicate – both in sending and receiving information. Beginning with their first year, stage managers develop their communication skills learning to differentiate between healthy and unhealthy styles and basic conflict resolution. During their second year, they learn how attention to the details during a shop check or creating a run sheet or a quick-change plot can communicate competence and build team trust. The goal is to build a vernacular and intentionality in the students so their healthy communication patterns become second nature in their stage management work and positively impact their relationships. In SM II class during their third year, students take a “deep-dive” spending 9 weeks studying communication topics that include: how to recognize and apply different styles of communication, how to respond empathetically, how feelings and interests affect conflict, learning how to be an active listener and ask open ended questions to encourage understanding. By their final year, students are more confident and better able to recognize their own communication patterns and how to adapt to others’ styles. Class leadership topics become robust discussions incorporating their production experience when assumptions are challenged by peers. This kind of dialogue is only possible when an appreciation and understanding of communication skills exist.

Finally, I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the wellness curriculum that I introduced to our Stage Management program a number of years ago. UNCSA is a rigorous training program. Our students have chosen a field that puts them in high pressure and high stress roles. What’s the point of spending four years preparing them for a career if they burn out? Stage Management students learn not only the job skills but also how to manage stress, employ methods of mindfulness and to value the importance of seeking balance between their personal and professional life.