

An Interview with Dr. Rodney Whatley  
Marley Reynolds

Sitting in Rodney Whatley's office on campus, you can tell it belongs to someone who loves theatre. From the posters on the walls to the scripts, it's a fitting room for an acting and directing teacher to reside in.

The Directing I class was created by Stan Dean in the 90s. Dr. Whatley took over the class in 2005 and has been teaching it ever since. The class being structured with the semester culminating with a festival of one-acts, stems from Whatley's own experience in directing classes.

"When I took directing, I was frustrated, in that we only did scenes and I wanted to do a complete one-act, so that's kinda what I modeled the class on," Whatley said.

Some students take the class for their major; others just for fun. Some non-major students have taken it to learn how to break down a story to its bare essentials.

That's ultimately what the class is about, how to tell a good story, and that's what Whatley wants the students to take away from the class.

He hasn't always been successful.

"Some people have such a strong opinion about how art should be that they insulate themselves and are unwilling to question their own positions," Whatley said. "Before you can rebel against the rules (of directing) you need to know what those rules are."

All the students have complete creative control of their shows. Unless it's breaking the standards of PSC, the students can do whatever they want, aside from full nudity. Whatley never tries to tell a student no on their show vision because that's considered censorship.

"Ideas are not violations," Whatley said.

This doesn't mean he never wants to say no, or pitch his own idea from time to time.

"It's one of the reasons I don't sit in a lot of their rehearsals because I'm the producer and they're the director, but technically I'm their supervisor. It's very hard for me to keep my mouth shut," Whatley said.

Having seen over 100 of these student shows, he can't pick a favorite, but some of the best moments in any production are hearing the audience laugh watching a comedy or having a strong emotional response to a serious play.

“When the director gets what they want from the audience, those are the moments I’m the happiest,” Whatley said.

There have been strong and weak shows over the years, but you can learn from both he believes. “You learn more from failure than you do from success,” Whatley said.

You can audition for the upcoming one-acts March 8th and 9th, 7:30 p.m. Room 851 in the Ashmore building.