

IVC

IRVINE VALLEY COLLEGE

ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY & EDUCATION PARK
CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

15445 Lansdowne Road • Tustin, CA 92782-0223
www.ivc.edu/CareerEd • 949/451-5224

New Stage Management Program Advisory Meeting

Held online with the assistance of Google Groups
03.30.2018 - 10.04.2018

Welcome

Scott Grabau welcomed the group and introduced himself as well as Ross Jackson, Stage Management Faculty. Scott provided insight on the thoughts behind the changes made to the growing Stage Management program. During this discussion we will talk about the positive value of those changes, suggested amendments, will confirm students are receiving the necessary skills for stage managers leaving this program to have, along with hiring trends in the industry.

Industry Advisors:

Joel Veenstra- Freelance AEA Stage Manager, Associate Head of Stage Management for UCI's Graduate Stage Management program.

Jim Prodder- Production Manager at Laguna Playhouse, one of Orange County's premier Regional Theaters.

Jade Cagalawan- AEA Stage Manager, Production Manager and Stage Management Faculty at Cal Poly Pomona

Catherine Campbell- Production Manager at Mixed Blood Theatre in Minneapolis, MN, Company Manager at the Lincoln Center in New York City

Jack Morones - Production Manager at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts in Orange County, CA.

Discussion

Question from Scott - How do Stage Managers often get started in your organizations?

Jim- They usually get started as Production Assistants at Laguna Playhouse.

Ross - Same at the Geffen, though some other organizations like Center Theatre Group, South Coast Rep, and Oregon Shakespeare Festival have interns. We've also sent some interns to Laguna Playhouse.

Scott- That's true. Jim, how have the students we've sent from IVC performed as interns at your theater?

Jim - We've been very pleased with the interns that you've sent, as well as the adjustments you've made with your curriculum.

Question from Scott - We've made quite a few changes to the curriculum to try to better prepare our students to enter the workforce.

- Our Production Design course was retired, so TA40 Into to Design is now the only design course option.
- The three main stage management courses have new numbers and names to better convey their intended sequence and content.
 - TA51 is the ASM practicum course
 - TA52 is the introductory lecture course
 - TA53 is the course where students must manage their own show in our season.

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- **The Advanced Stage Management course has increased from 1 to 3 units to reflect the significant time commitment of managing a show.**
- **The required internship (Cooperative Work Experience) is now available in 1, 2, and 3 unit versions so that we can support longer internships with our industry partners. (Internships are approximately 50 hours per unit.)**
- **The one unit scenic and costume shop courses have been removed. Students must do at least 2 units of shop work.**
- **There is now a special topics class, TA54, which has been newly written and will specifically address stage managing shows where music is a major component. Students will learn to read and call cues from a musical score.**
- **These changes result in the overall unit requirement of the program increasing from 13-15 units to 19-22 units.**

Any stand out in particular as a positive adjustment?

Jim - I'm particularly impressed with the addition of our new Special Topics in Stage Management class. Considering for instance, the challenges of festival work where multiple performance companies collide to collaborate on a single show. The stage manager is called upon to integrate, not just multiple artistic works, but also provide leadership and organization to multiple production teams. Some would come with a stage manager, some won't. Some might come with a technical director, others won't. I'm thinking of dance companies specifically here. Skills in coordinating video content from multiple production teams were also needed on some of their shows. A class that provides that kind of framework and training prepares the students for a wide variety of professional responsibilities. With these kinds of changes, I'm certainly in favor of moving forward with our revised stage management certificate.

Scott - That's great to hear. Does anyone else have feedback on the certificate revisions?

Catherine - TA 52 in particular looks like a frightening amount of things to cover as some of these topics could be a whole individual class. I do admire that there is discussion about unions and other avenues beyond theatre though, as I find that very pertinent along with organizational structure. I think the timeline of assignments on this is a great progression. What is their presentation focused on?

Ross - Presentation is focused on presenting the management styles their group is assigned. Usually dealing with subsets of Democratic, Autocratic, and Laissez-Faire. The students present in groups sharing information and approaches informed by the management style they're covering and provide examples or exercises to demonstrate their style in a real-life situation.

Catherine - I'd also like to mention that TA 53 having mentors is excellent. I think this one is extremely valuable and one of the most important aspects of college is truly being hands-on in a production and taking that knowledge beyond. I think it was wise to put this beyond TA51 and TA52. Who will be specifically mentoring them?

Ross - In terms of mentoring, it's split between Richard, our PSM and me. I teach the classes but mentor the students that are working on the productions alongside Richard. So it all comes down to the professor of stage management and PSM. Used to be the director but we wanted to adjust that. Some students can go right to SMing and calling the show if they come in with previous experience, which happens a lot here. But they usually ASM and crew before SMing.

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Catherine- I think it is ALL great and covers a lot of topics that are not necessarily done in typical college practice. I admire that mentors are connected with students to guide them through the process. I adore that there is definitely an essence of allowing them to explore other realms of production and stage management beyond the theatrical approach.

Question from Jim–Ross mentioned that the SMs will crew shows as well as ASM. How much does crewing a show backstage play into the curriculum?

Scott - Currently, students get a deck crew experience as part of the ASM course and they certainly get the opportunity to lead crews as an SM. If they choose a three unit shop class (instead of a two unit one) they would get an additional crew experience. However, while we agreed that rotating through all the crews would be valuable for a student, the structure of the certificate means that adding additional crew requirements would be at the expense of something else.

Question from Scott–So, my question to the group is: in an “either/or” situation, would it be preferable for certificate students to have additional nighttime crew experiences instead of a daytime scenic or costume shop experience?

Ross - I personally think it's far more valuable, practice-wise, to gather additional nighttime crew experiences than daytime shop experience. As a Stage Manager, it's good to know what's going on in the shop and understand the weight of what's being done in order to make the show happen, meet rehearsal report requests, appreciate the process, etc. But in terms of what an SM or ASM is most immediately affected by or has the opportunity to affect, it's what's going on on deck.

I know many places that value backstage experience greatly when hiring a PA or non-eq ASM as it equips students with an expectation for what needs to be done backstage, a knowledge of the vocabulary necessary in order to execute set moves, transitions, changes, etc, and the ability to supervise with an educated eye in the case of ASMing.

I believe strongly that shop experience is valuable, but if I had to select in an either/or situation, I'm leaning backstage.

Joel - I 100% agree, Ross.

Jade - Crew experience is one of the biggest things I look for in young professionals as I'm staffing shows at Cal Poly or East/West.

Scott - I have been brainstorming on ways to add an additional crew experience. The challenge is that we only do two shows a term. For most students, adding a third show to the requirements will mean adding another term to the process. Right now, students ASM one show in the fall, SM one show in the spring, summer internship, done. It seems plausible that students could ASM one fall show and crew the other but this would require careful proactive planning by the student.

In the existing certificate our three unit shop courses are an option that would include work as wardrobe crew or as a deck hand. We could either eliminate the one and two unit ones which would force this choice. Or we could add the one unit crew courses into the certificate and require three units from that group. (So one three unit class or a two unit combined with a one unit.) Either way, this would add a crew experience while keeping the shop experience. We'll have to look carefully at how students are likely to schedule themselves.

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Question from Scott - I had a meeting with Jack Morones who is the production manager at the Segerstrom Center. We went over the new program together and discussed its appropriateness. Jack was pleased with the setup of the program and he offered his enthusiastic support as well as some feedback. One thing that stood out to him was that in the TA53 Advanced Stage Management course outline, learning objective 8 deals with the SM leading production meetings. Jack's comment was that it is more common for production managers to lead meetings. What is the consensus of the group on this? Does this make sense to include in the course? Or, how should production meetings be addressed in the advanced class?

Joel - It really depends on the company: I've seen both meetings led by the PM and the SM and I think it is an essential skill to teach SM students as they may likely have to lead a meeting at some point or they may also find themselves augment their careers into becoming PMs.

Ross - I agree with Joel that it's a good muscle to build for young SMs. This would provide them experience ahead of other academic programs that most often lean on their SM students to run the meetings and would also provide good preparation for students that may be interested in transferring to Production Management later on down the road. Smaller theater organizations (SPT, HAT, CAT, etc) will also sometimes contract their SMs as SM/PM in which case running a production meeting would fall under their scope of responsibilities. There's a lot of good reason to start to work on this skill.

Scott - Since our production manager (for reasons relating to our unique organizational structure) does not participate in production meetings, I am beginning to hand over the task of leading ours to the PSM and SM. We'll see how it goes. His second comment was that there didn't seem to be any light board/sound board operation basics for the SM students. He is right. We teach those things at IVC of course, but they don't show up in the SM program courses.

Joel - Light board/sound board operation basics for the SM students are important. It happens a lot, especially on small productions. I think it is a worthwhile addition to the program.

Ross - Knowing light boards and Qlab are essential for a stage manager at this point. My intent is to add these topics of study to TA52, our SM lecture course. As Joel said, running boards in smaller productions is very common and in addition, Qlab is becoming more and more integrated into rehearsal processes at all levels. So knowing how to run the program is important and so is knowing how to communicate with your designers and coordinators what adjustments you'll need as you move through the process. It also equates to a little extra in the honey pot for those that are members of Actors' Equity. We're required to negotiate a second contract on top of our SM salary when asked to operate boards or participate in set moves.

Question from Scott - Does joining the AEA put management of non-theatrical events off limits?

Ross - Joining the Union technically means that you agree not to take work outside of it, there's a consensus that it only becomes an issue when taking non-union work that could otherwise be governed by AEA. Meaning if you take work outside of AEA that is not acting or stage management, you're good.

I've come across some who disagree and feel that joining the Union means you work only as dictated by it. (Which is ironic because many of those people hold jobs as instructors, waiting tables, etc.) But the reality is that, in most markets, you have to be able to supplement with the occasional big-check industrial, film work, or otherwise.