

**Ohio University  
Division of Theater  
Professional Director  
Training Program**

**Unofficial Handbook  
and Guidelines**

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The following guidelines, rules-of-thumb, and helpful hints have been compiled to facilitate your three-year journey through the Professional Director Training Program (hereafter referred to as PDTP). My experience in the Program (and in the Division of Theater) is that we tend to run into the same problems year after year and, inevitably, discover new ones along the way with each passing year. Therefore I thought it might be useful to codify the way things tend to work around here into a single, useful list of “Do’s,” “Don’ts,” and “Probably Shouldn’ts” in order to make your passage as painless and as joyful as I can.

## **Rehearsals & Production**

- Scheduling of auditions, callbacks, rehearsals and other PDTP needs that require a room are done through Drew Surovjak on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. Please see him about ensuring that you have a space when you truly need one. It is also your responsibility to ensure that that room is unlocked if it is required at an unusual time (weekend mornings, for example). You will either need to get a key to the room, or ensure that someone else (i.e. your stage manager) will be there to unlock the door early enough to allow you to prepare the space for your use.
- Rehearsals are normally scheduled to begin promptly at 7:00 pm and to end promptly at 11:00 pm, Monday through Friday, and for 4-5 hours in the late morning/early afternoon on Saturdays, making for a total of 25 hours of rehearsal per week. (I usually do Noon to 4:00 or 5:00 pm on Saturdays, but you can start as early as 10:00 am if you really feel you can get good work from your cast that early after a Friday night – hint, hint). I recommend that you use this time efficiently, and that you use every minute of it that you can. I’ve seen directors in the past make the mistake of ending rehearsals an hour early on a regular basis for the first week or two, only to find themselves in a time crunch towards the end of the rehearsal process, all because they wanted to be liked or perceived as a nice guy/gal. Believe me, you need all the time you’re given. There are certainly times when you should give an exhausted cast a break or let actors go early for a very specific reason. But be careful not to let a habit turn into a hindrance.
- Rehearsals are to be conducted under the principles of an Equity rehearsal. That is, a “deputy” will be elected on the first day of rehearsal to act as a liaison among the actors, stage managers and Theater Division administration, and will be expected to report any non-compliance with the rules of rehearsal as laid out in the Actor’s Handbook. You and your stage manager will be expected to give periodic breaks, as per AEA procedure, and to produce a rehearsal report each night, detailing the ever changing production needs relevant to the various departments within the Theater Division (costumes, sets, lights, props, etc.). You will instruct your stage manager on Day One to copy me on all rehearsal reports.

- Under no circumstances should there be any “private rehearsing” after hours. There can be no consumption of cigarettes, alcohol or drugs as part of a Theater Division rehearsal. Also, special care must be taken in rehearsing scenes of a sexual nature, as well as material that might bring about physical or psychological harm to an actor. A stage manager must be present at all rehearsals, and any intention to rehearse scenes involving nudity or overt sexual material must be thoroughly discussed with me first, and a contract must be signed wherein the actor agrees to the conditions of these rehearsals.
- The rehearsal rooms also function as classrooms during the school day. Therefore, it is imperative that you leave the room in a condition that will allow instructors to conduct their morning and afternoon classes in a regular fashion. The chairs need to be returned to their normal classroom positions, any props, costumes and set pieces must be stored in such a way that they are not an encumbrance for the classes, trash and garbage must be picked up and thrown out, and blackboards and mirrors must be accessible if they are normally a functioning part of the room. In other words, restore the room to its rightful classroom set-up so that the instructor should not have to make any adjustments to conduct class.
- The same is true for the period that encompasses tech and performances. Any blacks that are used, or furniture or set pieces or lighting/sound equipment must be designed in such a way that *it can be stored entirely out of the way of the classrooms that need to function in that space*.
- Keep in mind that when you are rehearsing or performing in the Virginia Hahne Theater, you will need to abide by the schedule of whatever main stage production might be rehearsing simultaneously on the Baker Stage, as well as the schedule for Midnight Madness on Friday evenings (which will normally need to access the space at 10:00 pm on Fridays). This includes tech week and performance week, and all potential conflicts need to be worked out with Charles Smith and/or the Director of the Division of Theater before rehearsals begin.
- Productions that rehearse in Kantner 308 must also be aware that on Monday evenings (and in the Spring semester, Wednesday evenings) the playwrights use that space until around 7:30 pm, and that you may not be able to begin rehearsal on those days until close to 8:00 pm. Again, any exceptions to this normal schedule must be worked out with Charles Smith and/or the Director of the Division of Theater.
- Directors are responsible for arranging with Daniel Winters for the taking of production photos. This needs to be coordinated a week or two before technical rehearsals so that the photographers can schedule their visits to run-throughs, tech, etc. All of our shows should be photographed, so please be sure to make this part of your regular routine.
- Work with your stage management team to ensure that when you transition from a rehearsal space to a performance space that all rehearsal props and costumes that are no longer needed are *returned to the*

- Costume and Props Shops* and not left in the rehearsal room or closet. Also, all spike tape needs to be taken up from the floor after the final rehearsal.
- Strike for all student-directed productions should happen along the same principles as a mainstage production. That is, the strike needs to be coordinated with the individual heads of each department (sets, lights, costumes and sound), and approved by Dan Denhart so that any available students requiring practicum credit can be properly assigned for strike and receive credit for their work. This is also important so that representatives from each department participate in strike and are equally responsible (along with the director and stage manager) for the removal of all lighting equipment, set materials, costumes and properties from the classrooms, rehearsal spaces and performance spaces. *It is imperative that strike be scheduled in a timely and organized fashion and that all rehearsal and performance spaces be returned to their original condition.*
  - A production journal will be required for all PDTP productions. The journal must be typewritten and reflect a serious effort to analyze the challenges, strategies, little victories and crushing defeats of each individual production. It should not be overly informal (“my stage manager sucks!!”), and should be a viable, illuminating record of that production as seen from the director’s perspective, from pre-production and casting to closing night. Each journal will be due 5 days after closing and will constitute 25% of your final grade for Production Practicum.
  - A second reminder: please copy me on all production-related e-mails (rehearsal reports, production meeting reports, relevant communications between director and support staff, etc.) Better to include me as a “cc” than to have me hear some disturbing anecdote through some third-party gossip (that may or may not be accurate).
  - A new wrinkle has made itself felt in recent years, and I feel it should be addressed – it is imperative that you do not use social networking websites (Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc.) or personal Blogs in either an official or unofficial capacity in relation to the Division of Theater and its activities. It is particularly important that you do not use these internet outlets to vent about your rehearsals, your actors, or the Division of Theater. It is extremely unprofessional and will reflect badly on you and our program.
  - Another new wrinkle related to our information overload mentalities – please make it clear to stage managers, assistant directors, designers and actors (and, by the way, yourself) that when individuals are in the rehearsal room to rehearse or to observe/participate in rehearsal, no one should be logged onto the internet (i.e. Facebook, etc.) unless it is specifically related to a question that arises in rehearsal. This is particularly important for stage managers and assistant stage managers.
  - Directors should not ask stage managers to buy props, food items, or anything else for Division of Theater productions. It is not the stage managers' responsibility to pay for items out of pocket for these shows.

- The Realism Projects have very small budgets that can be applied to needed props/consumables, and the mainstage shows also have their established props budgets. But *lab shows* are not financially supported through the Division of Theater and the director/designers/cast will have to fend for their selves when it comes to making this happen. Again, please do not ask the Stage Managers to shell out their hard-earned lunch money for props, costumes, or any other production items. Please clarify this policy with actors and designers connected with your productions.
- And please remember – your fellow collaborators are all students in a professional training program just like you. Sometimes they will surprise you with their professionalism, artistry and imagination. But at other times they might disappoint you with their laziness, ineptitude and disorganization. Patience is crucial, now and forever. Part of your job will be teaching as well as directing – instructing a young, inexperienced stage manager when he falters at a technical rehearsal, encouraging a novice actress when she bursts into tears after failing in an emotional scene, or supporting and inspiring a frustrated designer after the third go-round with a challenging floor plan. Don't hesitate to come to me when problems arise, or to consult with other faculty members who are more familiar with the student's work. But above all have faith in your fellow artists, and don't betray their trust.

### **Design & Production Meetings**

- As Head of PDTP, I will attempt to be at as many design and production meetings as possible. For those meetings that I cannot attend, you, the director, are responsible for getting me caught up on all new developments and changes that affect the production in any substantial manner. I prefer not to be in a position whereby I discover that you and the designers have totally reconceived the production three weeks beforehand and I'm just finding out about it at the first read-through. Always keep me up to speed on changes with the design, and in particular any changes of time or date for upcoming design or production meetings.
- There will be challenges in your interactions with designers, actors, stage managers, and faculty, myself included. The best way to handle those challenges is to be honest, and not to complain about them in private or to your classmates. When the going gets rough, talk to me. Talk to your collaborators. Talk to the other faculty members. Don't shut off, and don't smother your impulse to question why something is being done in a particular way. You may be the person who finally helps fix something that's been broken for years. I also firmly believe that the design faculty have more respect for students who stand up for their ideas than they do for those who cringe and cower before them. Listen to their advice and respect their point of view, but don't allow yourself to be bullied into a

design that you, and only you, will have to live with for six weeks of rehearsal.

## **Publicity**

- All publicity materials need to be approved by me before going to print. That would include poster images and photographs, final poster design, press releases, viral marketing campaigns, and final programs. I no longer want to be surprised by seeing the posters for the first time when they're hung in the hallway for the rest of the world to see. Publicity is a key component of your production and your thinking about it should begin as soon as the script is chosen.
- A director's note is required for all PDTP productions. It needs to be approved by me one week before the program goes to print.
- You need to create a directing biography in a common word processing software (Microsoft Word or Word for Mac) that can be easily updated with each new production. Do this now, not later.
- You should also ensure that your cast, designers and stage managers submit their bios for the program after the first day of rehearsal, and not wait until the last minute like everyone always does. Make a game out of it if you have to (bio-less actors must provide snacks at table work the next evening), but do it! If you ever have to do publicity, you will understand what a pain in the backside it is to badger everyone about their bio's up until the final moment. Let's fix this problem now and make it a requirement in the first week of rehearsal.
- You are also responsible for the creation of the programs for both the Realism Project and the Style Project you direct. Keep this in mind as you rehearse, and give yourself enough time to complete this during the final week of your rehearsals as the pressure builds during tech.

## **Classes/Academic Matters**

- Take excruciatingly thorough notes. If that sounds like a rather obvious thing to say to a graduate student, I will begin by informing you that a certain student that I inherited in my first year sat through two years of classes without taking a single note. Whether he/she felt it unnecessary because of a photographic memory or because the information was redundant is irrelevant. The fact is you will undoubtedly have the opportunity at some time in the future to teach a course in directing. And trust me on this – having these notes recorded in a logical, sequential and comprehensive fashion will serve you, both as a teacher and as a director. So even when you're hearing something for what feels like the fourth of fifth time that week, WRITE IT DOWN!
- You are responsible for your own registration and advising schedule. When you wait until the last minute, you risk being shut out of a class that

you might really want (or need) to take. Schedule your advising session with me as early as you possibly can, then register immediately rather than waiting weeks to do so.

- Being late to class, mine or anyone else's, is inexcusable. It's as bad as showing up late for rehearsal or work (or your wedding). If there is an emergency, you must call me or a classmate and let me know that you are late but on your way.
- Being in tech week or burdened by work in other classes is not a legitimate excuse for not being prepared in your directing classes. And vice versa. I'll say it as plainly as I can – this is graduate school and it's not supposed to be easy. Remember that you were chosen over a lot of other candidates who were eager to tackle this work – so buckle down and deal with it.
- Depending on Wikipedia, Google or other Web-based sources for all your research is pure and simple laziness. We have a world-class library here on campus and you need to get to know it. Lorraine Wochna, the Fine Arts librarian, is eager to assist you, and will go out of her way to show you all the resources at your command. Get to know her and get to know just how much deeper your research can go.

### **Teaching/Graduate Assistantships**

- Under no circumstances should you be canceling classes that you are scheduled to teach. Hospitalization is a viable excuse, but feeling a little under the weather is not a legitimate reason for cancellation. The students have shown up and so must you. Repeated canceling of classes could result in the loss of your assistantship.
- The same goes for all other non-teaching graduate assistantships. You should be crystal clear on what your work obligations are, what your work schedule is, and how often you should meet with your supervisor. I don't want to hear about the underperformance of directors in G.A. positions. We need to raise the bar if we expect to get the kind of respect we all crave as artists and professionals. If I hear about a director who is slacking in his or her position, I will have to consider the possibility of replacing you in that position and revoking the assistantship. Money is very tight in the Division of Theater at this time and we have to be very careful about how our work ethic is perceived by individuals in other areas of the School, all of whom are covetous of our G.A. money. Again, I'll put it very simply – with full tuition waiver and 2/3 stipend/assistantship for all three years, you're being paid the equivalent of more than \$65,000 for the time you're here. In return, you are expected to perform in a professional manner as a graduate assistant/teacher. End of lecture.

## **General/Miscellaneous**

- Familiarize yourself with *The Actor's Handbook* and the *Graduate Student Handbook*. I will be distributing these on the first day of classes, but if misplaced, you can find them on the Theater Division website.
- Also, familiarize yourself with the Rules of Etiquette posted outside my office. I will go over these in class, but you can't remind yourself about them often enough. They are the bedrock of civil behavior and I do expect you to live by them as best you can (and ensure that the actors and production team live by them as well).
- Keep a copy of the PDTP Contact Sheet and the Theater Division Contact Sheet that I will give you the first week of Fall semester in your daily schedule book or journal, and make sure that important contact numbers are entered in your cell phone. You will need them on a regular basis and will not want to be stranded without them. It may mean the difference between getting a rehearsal room door unlocked on a Saturday morning on time or waiting an hour for someone to show up because you or your stage manager forgot to arrange for it to be opened.
- Get to know the faculty and staff on a first name basis. They are not only the key to your survival over the next three years, they are genuinely gifted and compelling professional theater artists with great stories to tell and important lessons to pass onto you. They are the individuals who will be sharing with me the responsibility of mentoring you through graduation. You will depend on them, and should be learning from them: Tom Focchi, Dan Denhart, Lowell Jacobs, Erik Ramsey, David Haugen, Shelley Delaney, Matthew Cornish, David Russell, Rebecca VerNooy, Brian Evans, Dan Dennis, Charles Smith, Michael Lincoln, Helene Siebrits, and Bill Condee all possess an incredible wealth of knowledge – take advantage of it in the brief time you're here.

This handbook is a new development and will be an ongoing project. Second and third year directors: if you have items you'd like to contribute or feel that there are important issues that have been overlooked, please feel free to speak to me or e-mail me. I'd love to be as thorough in my coverage of the challenges and mysteries of life here at the Division of Theater as I can be, and I'm sure I've missed some things. Let me know your thoughts.

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