

Proposed
Standards, Guidelines, Competencies,
and Experiences
for a
BFA in Stage Management

*Unanimously Approved by
Education Commission and Management Commission
United States Institute for Theatre Technology
Houston, Texas 2008*

*And Under Consideration by
National Association of Schools of Theatre
Pittsburgh, PA 2008*

As more institutions add Stage Management to their curricula, the absence of standard expectations and competencies as well as suggested General Education Requirements opens the door for programs to grant degrees to Stage Managers who have not received sufficient training to prepare them for a basic entry-level position in professional presenting or producing organizations.

In May 2007 the leadership of the National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST) was asked if they would be willing to speak about developing a set of standards for the BFA Stage Management degree as none existed to that point. They agreed and that was the beginning of this project. As BFA degrees are specific, it was decided that schools offering the BA degree could look to the BFA for guidance pending future advisories on that degree path. Furthermore this makes a starting point from which all schools can add even a basic course in Stage Management if not a full degree program. With the support of the leadership of NAST, the Education and Management Commissions of USITT as well as USITT President Sylvia Pannell, a committee of ten was assembled. The membership was divided equally between Stage Managers who, while maintaining an active career in the field, are primarily educators, as well as Stage Managers from organizations that hire young Stage Managers or persons with a keen interest in developing young Stage Managers for the professional world.

After several months of conference calls, two documents were developed. The first document is a set of standards and guidelines; the second a set of suggested general education courses. We used NAST's terms of STANDARD and GUIDELINE. A Standard must be met in order to have an accredited degree. A Guideline gives direction as to how to achieve a standard. Each of these was crafted after reviewing the expectations of all BFA degrees. In addition, the standards and guidelines were designed to be broad so as not to hamper an institution from maintaining its own unique training style and experience, but at the same time offering guidance as to what should be expected from a graduate of one of these programs.

There was much discussion as to what should be required, and many things, like reading music, while important to many fields of stage management were not required as a person could just as likely go their entire career without needing that skill. Once the documents were developed, they were sent to a set of "outside readers," led by Assistant Professor Michael Gros of Kansas State University. We owe a great debt to Michael for assembling and leading this important group of people. They were asked to review the documents and submit questions and concerns about wording and rationale for the group to consider and use to revise the documents for clarity and greater understanding.

In addition to the outside readers, minutes from each conference call were sent to the leadership of the Management and Education Commissions, the Executive Director of NAST Sam Hope, USITT President Sylvia Pannell, President-Elect Carl Lefko, Vice-President for Commissions Kim Williamson, and other interested parties with the desire to keep an open process that people could comment upon at any time. I would like to thank each of these people for their support. Without their backing, we would not have been able to move with speed and confidence.

The document is being presented first to USITT for their approval before being presented to NAST for that membership to being its approval and adoption process.

It is the intention of the committee that the Curricular Structure section of the BFA Design requirements is adopted whole as part 1 of the BFA Stage Management guidelines. As such, it has been included as well.

We hope you will see the work put forward as a balanced approach to the education of Stage Managers in the United States. Whether your institution offers a BFA Stage Management degree or is developing a single course on the topic, the membership of the committee sincerely hopes these standard expectations and competencies will make a sensible and well thought out approach usable by all.

Sincerely,
David Grindle
Vice-Commissioner for Stage Management, USITT
Chair of the Committee

Bachelor of Fine Arts in Stage Management

1. Curricular Structure. Curricular structure, content, and time requirements shall enable students to develop the range of knowledge, skills, and competencies expected of those holding a professional baccalaureate degree in stage management. Curricula to accomplish this purpose normally adhere to the following guidelines: studies in the major area, including basic stage management and/or technical training, should comprise 30% to 40% of the total program; supportive courses in theatre, 20% to 30%; general studies, 25% to 35%; and elective areas of study, 10% to 15%. Elective courses should remain the free choice of the student. Studies in the major area and supportive courses in theatre normally total at least 65% of the curriculum.

Standards and Guidelines

STANDARD: Basic exposure to/experience in all theatrical production areas.

GUIDELINE: Theatre Production areas include but are not limited to scenic design and construction; properties design and construction; costume design and construction; lighting design, hang and focus; sound design and mixing; running crews in all areas; acting; and directing.

STANDARD: Thorough familiarity with the life-cycle of a production, from preproduction through closing, and the part a Stage Manager plays at each stage.

GUIDELINE: The “life-cycle” of a production includes the design and rehearsal process as well as the run, close, and strike. Interaction with all non-production areas including house management, marketing, PR, and development are a part of this and the Stage Manager should understand their role in communication and collaboration with production and non-production oriented departments in day to day and emergency situations.

STANDARD: Understanding of the structure of cue calling including dramatic, rhythmic and musical beats and pauses, and have experience calling a show in performance.

GUIDELINE: It is strongly encouraged that Stage Managers learn to read and follow music at a basic level and that they experience either vocal or instrumental performance to develop a strong sense of rhythm.

STANDARD: Knowledge of a typical professional production hierarchy, including the participants at each level and each relationship to the Stage Manager.

GUIDELINE: While individual organizations define and combine jobs differently, students should be familiar with job titles and general responsibilities that each implies.

STANDARD: Ability to read and analyze a work for production.

GUIDELINE: Performance works come in various genres that are text, music, or movement based among others. Students should be exposed to multiple genres of performance work and be familiar with how to read and understand them.

STANDARD: Experience with the Stage Manager/Assistant Stage Manager relationship, by working both as an ASM and as a SM with an ASM.

STANDARD: Develop multiple organizational and communication skills and including the ability to write competently and legibly along with knowledge of basic grammar and spelling.

GUIDELINE: Communication and organizational skills include oral and written skills. Topics covered may include personnel management, inter-personal relations, and public speaking.

STANDARD: Knowledge of Computer skills including Microsoft Office Word and Excel.

GUIDELINE: Students should be encouraged to be comfortable with database and presentation software such as Access and PowerPoint, scheduling and calendaring software, CAD/Vectorworks, and Web Design.

STANDARD: Students should be exposed to live performance.

GUIDELINE: Young Stage Managers should be encouraged to observe as audience members, crew members, or through shadowing a variety of live performance forms including but not limited to plays, operas, musicals, and dance. Observation of professional organizations and Stage Managers either resident or touring is to be highly encouraged. Professional internships strongly encouraged.

STANDARD: Knowledge of theatre history and important periods/writers/styles.

GUIDELINE: Students should take at least a one-semester course on theatre history, but should be encouraged to learn about theatre from other parts of the world beyond the typical Greeks-Shakespeare survey.

STANDARD: Basic knowledge of performing arts unions.

GUIDELINE: An understanding of the unions that govern the performing arts includes but is not limited to Actors Equity Association, International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees/ United Scenic Artists, American Guild of Musical Artists, American Federation of Musicians, and the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers.

STANDARD: Ability to read and interpret production paperwork and drawings.

GUIDELINE: Production paperwork and drawings include but are not limited to schedules; scenic ground plans, sections, elevations, and construction drawings; light plots, hook-ups, and magic sheets; costume renderings and plots; and sound plots.

STANDARD: Knowledge of rehearsal preparation and management.

GUIDELINE: Students should learn skills including but not limited to floor taping, reading scale rules, room set up, blocking notation, and development of stage management “kits.”

STANDARD: Written Department/faculty review and student self-review at least annually.

General Education Guidelines:

General Education courses are encouraged to be filled with studies in the following areas:

Psychology; Foreign Languages (Modern Romance languages or German are especially useful); Accounting/ Personal Finance; History; Management; First Aid/ Wellness/ Safety

Committee Members

David Grindle, Lecturer in Stage Management, Indiana University, Committee Chair
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