THEATRE CAREER GUIDE

Fine Arts Career Services
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INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on taking the next step in thinking about your career in theatre! Whether you are a freshmen or nearing graduation, now is a good time to start thinking about your future. This career guide is meant to give you broad information to think about as you picture yourself working in different environments. As a theatre professional, you may work as an actor, educator, production staff, or administrator, or likely a combination of all four. We hope reading through this will spark your own curiosity, and that you will come meet with Fine Arts Career Services for an appointment. We are highly skilled in helping you to find the perfect job, internship, or just to brainstorm different career paths.

ACTING

Finding work as an actor can be challenging, but the work is immersive, satisfying, and will foster constant growth. Actors often build up their resume serving in a wide spectrum of roles at different theatre companies.

After completing 50 weeks of work at an equity-membership theater, you can apply for the Actor’s Equity Association. If you were to be cast in an equity role, this would immediately make you a member of Actor’s Equity. Joining Actor’s Equity Association can lead to the next level of performance opportunities towards a more sustainable acting career.

While you are still a student, find as many places as you can to act, on and off-campus. Summer Stock programs are a great way to network and travel to work with new people, as well as building up your acting credentials.

In the early stages of an acting career, there can be long periods of time off between shows, and finding means to financial stability can be challenging. While the archetype of the starving actor is to wait tables, you have a long list of great skills as a theatre major that can help you find a more stable job!

Working in arts administration is a great way to build up other parts of your resume while you continue to progress as an actor. Many arts organizations (including non-theatre organizations) would greatly benefit from your knowledge of the fine arts, as well as your dynamic speaking and audience engagement skills.

Theatre majors possess excellent storytelling skills, and are uniquely gifted in summarizing broad concepts into understandable and interesting concepts. These abilities are crucial within many disciplines of arts administration. For more information, be sure to read the arts administration section of this guide and check out our Arts Administration Career Guide.
THEATRE PRODUCTION

Working on the production side of theatre requires a complex knowledge of all the moving parts associated with live productions. Directors possess a vision for how projects will come together, and the people skills to foster a collaborative and comfortable working environment. Directors are fabulous negotiators, fostering compromise between various creative entities. Successful directors will also possess administrative and entrepreneurial skills, as they will often be expected to speak to the public, serve on the business side of the operation, and understand how the various facets of a production fit together.

Technical theatre specialists are highly specialized in their craft. Be it costume or set design, sound, or lighting, these positions are best learned on-site and with hands-on experience. If you are interested in working in these fields, find as much work opportunity as you can, at whatever level will take you. Internship opportunities will allow you to explore all of the various technical aspects and eventually help you to specialize where you have the greatest skills. Both theatre companies and theatre venues employ technical theatre specialists.

THEATRE EDUCATION

For the purpose of this guide, we are defining theatre education as more than just jobs within a school district. Theatre is taught in many places, and many theatre professionals can become educators, even if their degree is not in Theatre Studies.

To get a job as a school theatre teacher, you will need to hold a state teaching certificate. If you are a theatre studies major, this process will be laid out by your faculty, but usually involves student teaching, a criminal background check, and the passing of licensing exams. If you did not earn a degree in theatre studies but choose to become a teacher after graduation, many certification programs exist. Through a combination of coursework, exams, and student teaching, it is possible to become a credentialed teacher after you graduate.

Working as a school theatre teacher is a highly rewarding career that combines making live theatre, pedagogy, and advocacy. Many theatre teachers thrive on the feeling of teaching young people about the various facets of theatre production. The experience of teaching theatre at the elementary, middle, and high school level is entirely different, so it is essential that students explore their strengths and interests when it comes to these settings.

If your goal is to work in the schools, find any way you can to get in front of students, even while you are still in college. You could help with summer theatre camps for young kids, or work as an assistant producer at a community children’s theatre. Getting these experiences early and often will strengthen your resume for your first teaching job.

The Texas Educational Theatre Association (TETA) maintains a large and thorough job board at tetatx.com. If you are looking to leave the State of Texas, many other state theatre education agencies maintain similar job boards.

THEATRE EDUCATION (cont.)

Most professional and children’s theatre companies have education departments, with staff whose purpose it is to educate the patrons and consumers.

Some nonprofit organizations exist to support theatre education in low-income or underserved regions. Some performing arts centers have education initiatives of their own. These positions combine strong administration and advocacy skills, as well as a passion of bringing live theatre to all audiences. While these positions may not involve directly acting, they require a vast knowledge of the various aspects of theatre production.

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THEATRE ADMINISTRATION

Regardless of your long-term career goals, picking up some experience along the way as a theatre administrator is infinitely useful. In many smaller theatre operations, individuals are working in creative and administrative roles simultaneously. Working in theatre administration involves being methodical and highly organized. Even though these roles are more “desk jobs” by appearance, they often call on individuals to be highly versed in the inner workings of theatre. These professionals work in marketing, community engagement, development (fundraising), education (mentioned above), and operations. The more specialized skills of these positions can be acquired through working internships, as well as pursuing a minor in arts management. For more information, check out our Arts Administration Career Guide!

JOB TITLES

**Education**
- Theatre Teacher
- Theatre Professor
- Education Manager

**Acting**
- Actor
- Acting Coach
- Artist-in-Residence

**Production**
- Dramaturg
- Director
- Producer
- Scenic Designer
- Carpenter
- Lighting Designer
- Electrician
- Hair and Makeup Artist
- Stage Manager
- Costume Designer
- Casting Director

**Administration**
- Theatre Administrator
- Business Manager
- Audience Relations Specialist
- Outreach Coordinator
- Grants Specialist
- Marketing Associate
- Development Manager
- Community Arts Center
- Director

VIEW YOURSELF MULTI-DIMENSIONALLY

In the modern arts world, the more you can see yourself as a multi-faceted professional, the better. If you are working as a theatre teacher, that doesn’t mean you cannot build a professional performance resume at the same time. If you are working in the marketing department of a performing arts center, you will be developing useful skills to help market yourself. Diversify your skill set! Every opportunity can be used as a chance to grow.

LET’S TALK ABOUT MONEY

As a starting actor, director, or technician, you may be living more of a freelancing lifestyle. You can live financially stable as a freelancer if you manage your funds and upcoming opportunities carefully. As a freelancer, it is wise to sit down with a certified financial planner to develop a plan for how you will process payment from various theatre companies and venues, and how much you need to put aside for income tax. Individuals working as theater administrators or educators are more likely to see a full-time salary that often come with benefits.

FURTHERING YOUR EDUCATION

A **Master of Fine Arts (MFA)** is a degree that students often use to gain more experience, build their resume, or study with a certain institution or mentor. While an MFA is not necessary for many employment opportunities, it could be useful in becoming more specialized or pivoting to a different city or region. Students should weigh the pros and cons of attending graduate school carefully and seek multiple opinions on how this could impact an individual’s career trajectory.
...NOW WHAT’S NEXT?

Maybe reading this has left you with even more questions, and feeling even less sure about what career opportunities you may want to explore. That is okay!

Setting up an appointment with Fine Arts Career Services is a great place to brainstorm possible career pathways and help to make your application materials reflect you in the strongest way possible.