

Student Design Guide: Set Designers

Introduction

This information is meant to help guide student designers through the process of realizing a design for the Welsbacher, Wilner or Miller performance spaces. We consider the realization of designs to be a very important element of your education, if not the most important. This guide is designed to help you maximize the quality of your experience as well as to help streamline the process for you, your production team, and the shops. It is very important that you stay in close contact with your design faculty through this process. If you break the chain of communication with your design faculty member then when you do feel that you need help that faculty member will not be in a position to help and advise you.

In addition to reading this guide, you should be familiar with the School of Performing Arts Handbook, included on the CD as a .pdf file.

Getting Started

Step one, get the script, as soon as it is available. Don't wait until the last minute hoping you'll have time. Read it early so you have time to mull your ideas over. Research the time period. Draw a few sketches. Work visually. Don't arrange 4x8 platforms. Keep in mind how we stress concept and appropriateness in design class, not carpentry. You do not have to know how to solve every single problem or construction challenge. Your TD and/or the Faculty Tech Director can help you out there. Create first then seek help.

First Design Meeting:

Very early in the process we will need to schedule a design meeting between you and the director. If at all possible your design faculty should be included in that meeting. Try to come to that meeting with some ideas and sketches. ABSOLUTELY come to that meeting with the script read and an understanding of the performance space. Things you will bring to that meeting:

1. Script
2. Sketches
3. Notepad and pencil
4. Sketching materials
5. Research materials if applicable.

You should come away from this meeting with a fairly solid direction to follow. At this point you should be able to produce more sketches and start working on a rough groundplan. Discuss these ideas with your design faculty and technical director. If necessary schedule another meeting with the director. Most likely you will need to have several design meetings.

Design Process

When you start this process you need to commit to a constant and thorough process of work. You will need to be producing on a daily or near daily pace. The amount of work will keep up until you are ready to turn in drawings and renderings. If you skip steps, such as renderings or drawings, it will catch up to you later. There are logistical considerations to keep in mind as you progress. Here is a list that may not be complete, depending on your design.

1. You will have to answer to the budget. Don't design directly for the budget. Save money in places that might enable you to have more freedom in other areas. If our set is

unaffordable the TD will rein you in. This is fine. It happens all the time in the professional world.

2. There is a finite amount of time and labor available to execute your design. Look at the season schedule and study the show schedule before and after your show. Like the budget, the TD will rein you in if necessary.
3. Safety is always a consideration.
4. Keep in mind the laws of physics. Newton was a smart man.
5. You cannot break the fire curtain line over 9' unless that surface is continuous all the way across. If you feel that your design is hopelessly compromised, talk to the faculty.
6. You must design a set that works with the lighting and costume designers. Consult them and the faculty.

First Production Meeting

Ideally, you will have a rough groundplan and rendering to show at the first meeting. For some shows early in the year the schedule may be too tight for this. For all other shows there is plenty of time. Changes to your design may occur at this point, expect them. At this meeting your TD will probably be able to tell you when they expect your final design and what your budget is. Different productions will have different production meeting schedules depending on where they fall in the semester. Be sure to keep up on the notes from these meetings and any notes that come in rehearsal reports. Check your e-mail daily.

Final Design

On the date that your TD has assigned you will turn in your final design. Your final design will include the following items:

1. Final rendering(s) or scale model.
2. Groundplan and section in 1/4" or 1/2" scale.
3. Multiple groundplans if there are set changes or multiple sets.
4. Detail drawings of all set pieces in an 11x17" format.

DO NOT be late with your drawings. If you miss the deadline be prepared to start cutting scenery. If you are really behind be prepared for your design assignment to be assigned to someone else. Lateness causes problems with scheduling and at some point we have to switch from production to damage control. This may also affect future design assignments. If personal issues arise that prevent you from carrying out your duties you will need to contact your design/tech faculty as soon as possible.

Paint Elevations

Within a week of handing in your set drawings you should have paint elevations done. Even if you plan to paint the set yourself you will need to produce paint elevations. Meet with your design faculty and be prepared to leave the elevations for a few days so paint can be ordered if necessary. Discuss a paint schedule with your TD and design faculty. Paint elevations will include all surfaces that get paint, including the floor and platforms.

During Production

You should visit the scene shop daily to see if there are questions or problems arising. This is a crucial part of the process and should not be skipped. It is important that you look for problems early and not just find them when you get to tech rehearsal.

Some props will need your eye so expect to be involved with that process too. You may need to build and/or paint some props. Expect to spend a lot of time painting through this process. Some pieces may have to be painted at different times in the construction process. Don't wait until the set is completed to paint it. You probably won't have time. Consult with your design/tech faculty to see what help is available.

The Deadline

Opening night is not the deadline for having things finished. First tech is the deadline. The tech/dress rehearsal process is for finishing touches and fine-tuning. I cannot stress this enough. The attitude that opening night is the deadline has prevailed for too long. Do everything in your power to stay on top of things. Problems will arise during the tech process. If you are still trying to finish building/painting/propping then you will not be in a position to deal with these issues. Either they will not be dealt with adequately or someone else will have to step in to bail you out. Either way, you failed.

Summary

You have taken on the responsibility and honor of a design position as an elemental part of your education. If you are reading this I can assume that you are not at WSU because you love writing English papers and exploring algebra. You are at WSU to learn how to design or to learn design as an element of other goals. This is a professional training program and these are the minimum standards expected of you as such.