

# THEATRE MAJOR CAREER GUIDE

ADAPTED FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS FINE ARTS CAREER  
SERVICES CENTER

Theatre is a collective endeavor requiring individual achievement. A single production may, for example, bring together the skills of playwrights, performers, designers, and experts in scene construction and lighting. Theatre may be the most comprehensive of all the arts, and the most challenging and exciting.

While it is true that having a college degree will not guarantee you a position in the world of theatre (or any other field for that matter), it is important to realize that this is the best way to prepare yourself and to increase your chances in the job market. Acknowledging that there is intense competition, given the incredible number of talented people vying for each job, you must somehow set yourself above the others.

A great combination is a college degree with at least one theatre-related internship, additional formal training or study, experience working in the field (such as working crew on a production, volunteering, teaching drama at a local arts center, etc.), enthusiasm along with a positive attitude, and perseverance.

A student concentrating in theatre arts should emerge from the experience more knowledgeable, confident, sensitive, and aware of the benefits of cooperating and sharing with others. Study in the theatre arts offers exposure to creative dramatic expression, primarily in front of live audiences. It involves study of all types of artistic performance in theaters, in educational institutions, on TV, in movies, and outdoors. All major aspects of performance preparation are studied. Major areas of specialization include: acting, directing, theatre history and criticism, playwriting, design, theatre technology, theatre studies (education), and creative drama.

While many theatre majors proceed to careers in the theatre and associated fields, their study may also lead them to success in such fields as teaching, arts management, public relations, and drama therapy, to name a few.

## Skills

The study of theatre equips a student with a broad range of communication and organizational skills applicable to many careers, including those in the performing arts. The theatre major's presentation skills, ability to perform in public, and control of the voice and body provide a solid basis for working effectively with others.

Theatre also develops the ability to concentrate intensely, to listen introspectively, observe keenly, solve problems creatively, think critically, develop a project collaboratively, work independently, work under pressure, meet deadlines, and to maintain composure when faced with the unexpected. Well-developed communication skills enable graduates to contribute and to succeed in many professions. For example, the ability to put feelings and impressions about the world into words is needed by such diverse professionals as a theatre critic and a drama therapist. A sample of representative skills and abilities follows:

<b>Analysis</b>	<b>Artistic/Technical</b>	<b>Communication</b>	<b>Organization</b>
Problem solving	Explaining concepts	Public speaking	Self-discipline
Analyzing and interpreting the emotions and motives of others	Ability to concentrate and practice intensely for long periods of time	Communicating ideas and emotions creatively	Working under pressure and meeting deadlines
Understanding ideas within historical/social context	Sound, lighting, costuming, makeup, and design techniques	Speaking articulately and listening introspectively	Interacting with colleagues in a team setting
Comparing and contrasting ideas/information	Good health, stamina, and body coordination	Voice control/modulation	Ability to maintain composure when faced with the unexpected

## Career Options

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The career options that exist for theatre majors are quite extensive. Here is a sampling of a few of the many job options that exist for theatre majors:

### **Professional Actor/Actress**

Most successful actors and actresses have paid their dues by performing in a variety of situations including local, community and school productions, summer stock, touring companies, etc. Actors and actresses should be articulate, with clear, pleasant speaking voices. They should be poised and have the ability to perform in front of people. Individuals working in any field of entertainment need a thick skin. They should be able to deal with rejection that everyone runs into at one time or another in their career.

### **Playwright**

This person is responsible for writing the script for a theatrical production. Playwrights should have excellent writing skills and a good command of the English language.

### **Director**

A Director brings plays to life. S/he coordinates all aspects of the production to give the play a unified look and feel. Directors need to be creative people who have the ability to guide actors and actresses in their speech and physical movements.

### **Stage Manager**

This individual takes over the responsibilities of the director when his/her job is completed. There are many duties involved, including: scheduling and planning rehearsals, making sure that actors and actresses are there on time; updating the script as changes are made; blocking the show; and calling cues during the run of the show. A stage manager must know at least a little about everything in the theatre: acting, directing, set design, lighting

and costuming. The more knowledgeable the stage manager, the more successful s/he will be in the job.

### **Dramaturg/Literary Manager**

A dramaturg serves as a researcher, advisor, writer, and editor for a production. Some of the more common tasks performed by a dramaturg are analysis of the text/story, research into prior productions and historical context, preparing notes for the director, advising the director and cast, and writing the audience guide to the play. A distinction made between a dramaturg and literary manager is that a dramaturg has duties related to a specific show. A literary manager (resident dramaturg) has ongoing duties with the theatre company including review and selection of scripts.

### **Theatre Educator**

Theatre teachers instruct or coach students in the techniques of acting, directing, playwriting, script analysis, and the history of theatre. They help students acquire confidence, assurance, speaking skills, and timing. They encourage students in their work, direct rehearsals, and guide them in their roles. At the same time, they instruct students in backstage work including set design, production organization, set building, stage lighting and sound, properties, costuming, and makeup. You must have a teaching certificate in order to teach in public schools. To teach in higher education, it is necessary to have a master's degree, at least. But, you need not limit yourself to teaching in formal schools. Many theatre educators find work in professional theatres, often working in outreach programs. It is important that you have a passion for teaching young people. So, it is a good idea to only go into this field if you really love teaching, instead of using it as just something to do until your "big break" comes.

### **Drama Therapist**

Drama Therapists usually work closely with a consultation team of medical professionals to treat and rehabilitate people with physical, mental, and

emotional disabilities. Using the creative processes inherent in drama, therapists conduct individual or group sessions to determine the underlying causes of some problems and to help patients achieve therapeutic goals. This type of therapy has proven to be effective in treating a variety of conditions. A master's degree and certification are usually required. Graduate programs in drama therapy prepare students to use drama as a therapeutic tool in working with all clients—children, adolescents, and adults. Admission to these graduate programs usually requires the equivalent of a double major in theatre and psychology, or a major in one with considerable coursework in the other. This career requires paid work experience in addition to a clinical internship. Drama therapists must have artistic ability, an understanding and appreciation for theatre, a good sense of humor, patience, tact, stamina, and the ability to build rapport with others.

### **Arts Management**

Arts organizations, like most for-profit companies, have a number of administrative, business, or management functions. These roles require people with creativity and an understanding and passion for the arts as well as skills in a range of areas from finance and marketing to education. Arts management and arts administration are interchangeable terms. Some people draw a distinction between them using administration to mean the more bureaucratic, operational side, and management to mean the more creative, strategic side of the field. However, that distinction is not widely made. In fact, some of the oldest and most respected programs train arts administrators. The specific positions available at an arts organization will depend on what the organization does and how large its budget and staff are. Since arts managers are needed in virtually every arts organization from theatre companies to museums, many opportunities exist in this field. For example, a museum is likely to have staff members in education that work with school groups to introduce children to the exhibits. A gallery needs employees with good organizational and computer skills to coordinate exhibits and work with artists to track various art submissions. An opera

company, concert hall, or theatre needs box-office and front of the house workers to manage ticket sales, write press releases, market the productions in the community, and create visibility. Some theatre companies need general managers to schedule tours, monitor union agreements, and run the business side of performances. Over the last decade, arts management has become a growing field with increasing specialization and training. A number of new graduate training and certification programs have emerged. These programs may be useful, depending on your interests and goals. Some arts managers, for example, suggest eventually pursuing a business degree with a specialization in nonprofit management. Almost without exception, however, arts managers advise getting work-related experience first and considering graduate study later on. If you decide to investigate graduate study, begin by asking professionals what programs they think are valuable and respected in the field; do not just ask one or two people and assume their opinions are representative.

## Job Titles

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The skills and abilities developed through a major in Theatre serve as the building blocks for a wide range of occupations and career paths. It is important to realize that the activities represented by these job titles might be found in business, government, educational institutions, non-profit agencies, or arts-related businesses. These job titles are examples of some of the ways in which theatre majors have applied their skills and abilities. In general, an advanced degree is required for those occupations marked with an asterisk (\*) on the list that follows:

Prod. Support Services  
 Actor/Actress  
 Artist-in-residence  
 Box Office Manager  
 Carpenter  
 \*Arts council director  
 Electrician  
 Voice-over Artist  
 Coordinator Hair/Makeup

\*Arts Administration  
 Company Manager  
 Director  
 Arts fundraiser  
 Scenic Artist  
 \*Theatre librarian  
 \*Business Manager  
 Personal Manager  
 Artist's Agent

Education/ Theatre teacher  
 Development Director  
 Producer  
 Scenic Designer  
 Press Agent  
 Lighting Designer  
 \*Drama therapist  
 Audience Relations Specialist  
 \*Community arts center director

Marketing Director  
Draper  
\*College Professor  
Grants specialist  
\*Literary Agent  
Property Designer

Outreach Coordinator  
Booking Agent  
Special Effects Technician  
Acting Coach  
Public Relations Director  
Casting Director

Costume Designer  
\*Managing Director  
Publicist  
Stage Manager  
Dramaturg  
Technical Director

## Some Employers of Theatre Majors

Community organizations  
Fundraising firms  
Production companies  
Theatres  
Arts Councils  
Libraries  
Cruise lines  
Entertainment law firms

Educational/cultural institutions  
Television/radio/film  
Colleges, universities, schools  
Touring companies  
Performing arts organizations  
Amusement and theme parks  
Film companies

## A Few Words About Agents

Most theatre professionals (especially actors, directors) should have an agent. Agents find jobs for performers. In return, they receive a commission for each job they find, usually paid out of the performer's salary, which the agent has negotiated on behalf of the performer. It is the agent's business to seek out talented artists and help them develop their careers. For more information on the steps to finding an agent, refer to the "Job Search for Performing Artists" guide located in FACS.

## Earnings

The most successful actors, producers, and directors may have extraordinarily high earnings but for others, because earnings may be erratic, many supplement their income by holding jobs in other fields.

Median hourly earnings of actors were \$11.61 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$8.47 and \$22.51. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$7.31, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$51.02.

Median hourly earnings were \$16.82 in performing arts companies and \$10.69 in the motion picture and video industry. Annual earnings data for actors were not available because of the wide variation in the number of hours worked by actors and the short-term nature of many jobs, which may last for 1 day or 1 week; it is extremely rare for actors to have guaranteed employment that exceeded 3 to 6 months.

Median annual earnings of salaried producers and directors were \$56,310 in 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$37,980 and \$88,700. Median annual earnings were \$70,750 in the motion picture and video industry and \$47,530 in radio and television broadcasting.

Minimum salaries, hours of work, and other conditions of employment are often covered in collective bargaining agreements between the producers and the unions representing workers. The Actors' Equity Association (AEA) represents stage actors; the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) covers actors in motion pictures, including television, commercials, and film; and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) represents television and radio studio performers. Some actors who regularly work in several media find it advantageous to join multiple unions, while SAG and AFTRA may share jurisdiction for work in additional areas, such as the production of training or educational films not slated for broadcast, television commercial work, and interactive media. While these unions generally determine minimum salaries, any actor or director may negotiate for a salary higher than the minimum.

Under terms of a joint SAG and AFTRA contract covering all unionized workers, motion picture and television actors with speaking parts earned a minimum daily rate of \$759 or \$2,634 for a 5-day week as of July 1, 2007. Actors also receive contributions to their health and pension plans and additional compensation for reruns and foreign telecasts of the productions in which they appear.



According to AEA, the minimum weekly salary for actors in Broadway productions as of June 2007 was \$1,509. Actors in Off-Broadway theaters received minimums ranging from \$516 to \$976 a week as of October 29, 2007, depending on the seating capacity of the theater. Regional theaters that operate under an Equity agreement pay actors \$544 to \$840 per week. For touring productions, actors receive an additional \$113 per day for living expenses (\$119 per day in higher cost cities). New terms were negotiated under an "experimental touring program" provision for lower budget musicals that tour to smaller cities or that perform for fewer performances at each stop. In an effort to increase the number of paid workweeks while on tour, actors may be paid less than the full production rate for touring shows in exchange for higher per diems and profit participation.

Some well-known actors—stars—earn well above the minimum; their salaries are many times the figures cited, creating the false impression that all actors are highly paid. For example, of the nearly 100,000 SAG members, only about 50 might be considered stars. The average income that SAG members earn from acting, less than \$5,000 a year, is low because employment is sporadic. Therefore, most actors must supplement their incomes by holding jobs in other occupations.

Many actors who work more than a qualifying number of days, or weeks per year or earn over a set minimum pay, are covered by a union health, welfare, and pension fund, which includes hospitalization insurance to which employers contribute. Under some employment conditions, Equity and AFTRA members receive paid vacations and sick leave.

Many stage directors belong to the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers (SSDC), and film and television directors belong to the Directors Guild of America. Earnings of stage directors vary greatly. The SSDC usually negotiates salary contracts which include royalties (additional income based on the number of performances) with smaller theaters. Directing a production at a dinner theater generally will pay less than

directing one at a summer theater, but has more potential for generating income from royalties. Regional theaters may hire directors for longer periods, increasing compensation accordingly. The highest-paid directors work on Broadway and commonly earn over \$50,000 per show. However, they also receive payment in the form of royalties—a negotiated percentage of gross box office receipts—that can exceed their contract fee for long-running box office successes.

Stage producers seldom get a set fee; instead, they get a percentage of a show's earnings or ticket sales.

## Common Graduate School Options

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The three most common graduate degrees offered for theatre are the Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.), the Master of Arts (M.A.), and the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.). For more information about graduate school, see Career Services.

**Master of Arts (M.A.):** This is often referred to as a research degree and provides students with a strong background in theatre history, dramatic literature, and theory and criticism. Students also explore creative areas of special interest including dramaturgy, playwriting, design, and directing. Completion of the M.A. degree typically requires a thesis. The Master of Arts in Theatre is intended as advanced education for students with substantial background in theatre who wish to expand their knowledge and skills in theatre and drama for the purposes of preparation for doctoral studies, preparation for MFA training, enhancement of secondary school teaching skills and credentials, or enrichment for other personal goals. A master's degree usually takes 2-3 years to complete.

**Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.):** The M.F.A. is the terminal degree in many areas of theatre. The most common areas of study are: acting, directing, drama and theatre for youth, playwriting, theatre technology, theatrical design, and theatre management. Completion of the M.F.A. degree typically requires a thesis. In the case of acting-directing and design candidates, the thesis is usually based on a

performance or production project accomplished during their program. In the case of playwriting candidates, the thesis is based on a script which is produced during their program. A M.F.A usually takes 2 to 3 years to complete.

**Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.):** The primary credential for college level teaching is The Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), although one can teach with a master's degree in some areas of theatre. The Ph.D. typically involves both course work and a major research project. It usually takes four to six years of fulltime study. The traditional career for recipients of the doctorate degree is college teaching and research. The Ph.D., however, can lead to a wide variety of career options such as working as a consultant for an arts agency or for a non-profit organization, or working as an official in a national or state arts policy organization (e.g., National Endowment of the Arts, state arts councils.)

## Resources For Theatre Majors

100 Careers in Film and Television	ArtSEARCH
Current Jobs in Performing Arts	National Directory of Arts Internships
Audition Book: Winning Strategies for Breaking into Theater, Film, and TV	Back Stage Handbook for Performing Artists
Biz Interviews	Biz Directory
Breaking into the Business in LA	Breaking into Commercials
Career Clippings: Theatre and Dance	Business of Theatrical Design
Careers for the Stagestruck and Other Dramatic Types	Career Opportunities in the Film Industry
Great Jobs for Theatre Majors	Film Casting and Production Directory
How to Audition for TV, Movies, Commercials, Plays and Musicals	Getting Started in Film: The Official AFI Guide
How to Get the Part...Without Falling Apart!!	How to be a Working Actor
Opportunities in Performing Arts Careers	How to Get Into the Entertainment Business
Petersen's Breaking Into Television	Opportunities in Acting Careers
There's Money Where Your Mouth Is: An Insider's Guide to a Career in Voice-Overs	Opportunities in Entertainment Careers
Resumes for Performing Arts Careers	Petersen's Breaking Into Film
	Real People Working in Entertainment
	Your Film Acting Career: How to Break Into the Movies & TV & Survive in Hollywood
	Wow! Resumes: Creative Careers

## Online Resources

**Alliance of Artist Communities**

<http://www.artistcommunities.org/>

A consortium of artists' communities which offer residencies in all disciplines.

### **Art Job**

<http://www.artjob.org/>

Comprehensive, up-to-date national listings of jobs, internships, fellowships and other employment opportunities in the arts. Fine Arts Career Services subscribes. Contact us for the username and password.

### **ArtSearch**

<http://www.tcg.org/>

THE publication from the Theatre Communication Group for full-time, part-time, seasonal, year-round and internship opportunities in the performing arts. Fine Arts Career Services subscribes. Contact us for the username and password.

### **Artslynx**

<http://www.artslynx.org/>

With a neat and well-organized series of connecting icons, Artslynx has master folders dealing with "Dance," "Visual Arts," "Writing," "Film," "Arts Administration," "Music," "Arts of Social Responsibility," "Education," and "Arts Advocacy." All are rich in resources.

### **Arts Net**

<http://www.artsnet.org/>

Artsnet is a clearinghouse of arts management resources available on the Internet.

### **Association of Performing Arts Presenters**

<http://www.artspresenters.org/>

Excellent site for those interested in arts administration positions in the performing arts. Includes a job bank.

### **Backstage Jobs**

<http://backstagejobs.com/>

Free job listing service for all behind-the-scenes jobs in the live entertainment industry.

### **Actor's Fund**

<http://www.actorsfund.org/>

This amazing resource offers a wealth of information for actors, dancers, musicians, producers, directors, carpenters, stage hands, singers and others in the spotlight and behind the scenes. They also have a terrific resource center for health insurance as well as human services for people with HIV+/AIDS and the elderly. Highly recommended.

### **American Alliance for Theatre Education**

<http://www.aate.com/>

The mission of AATE is to promote standards of excellence in theatre and theatre education, connecting artists, educators, researchers, and scholars with each other, and by providing opportunities for our membership to learn, exchange, expand and diversify their work, the audience and their perspectives.

### **Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE)**

[www.athe.org](http://www.athe.org)

The Association for Theatre in Higher Education is an organization of individuals and institutions that provides vision and leadership for the profession and promotes excellence in theatre education. ATHE actively supports scholarship through teaching, research and practice and serves as a collective voice for its mission through its publications, conferences, advocacy, projects, and through collaborative efforts with other organizations.

**College Central Network**

<http://www.collegecentral.com/utfacs/>

Fine Arts Career Services database of art related opportunities. Fine Arts students can post a resume and create an online portfolio.

**Curtain Rising**

<http://www.curtainrising.com>

Lists theatres in the US and other countries by state and county.

**Entertainment Careers**

<http://www.entertainmentcareers.net/index.asp>

Jobs, internships, and career information in the entertainment industry.

**Entertainment Employment Journal**

<http://www.eej.com/>

An online, interactive database of jobs and internships focusing exclusively on careers in the creative, professional, production and technical areas of the entertainment industry.

**Hollywood Actors Network**

<http://www.hollywoodnetwork.com/hn/acting/index.html>

Jobs for actors, singers, and dancers posted for a variety of locales. Again, not a practical way to land an audition, but useful in examining what the performing arts scene looks like.

**Lincoln Center Directors Lab**

<http://www.lct.org/dirlab.html>

The LCT Directors Lab is a developmental program for nurturing stage directors from around the country and around the world.

**Literary Manager and Dramaturgs of America**

<http://www.lmda.org/>

**NYFA Interactive**

<http://www.nyfa.org/>

Free national information resource for artists in all disciplines and for everyone who supports them in any way.

**National Performance Network**

<http://www.npnweb.org/>

NPN brings to national attention some of the most exciting and stimulating new work in dance, theater, music, and multidisciplinary art being created across the United States through both direct and indirect support to touring artists.

**New Dramatists**

<http://newdramatists.org/>

New Dramatists is a unique resource for the American Theatre. The company is dedicated to the playwright and serves as an artistic home, theatre research and development center, and writers colony for the national theatre just a few steps from Broadway. The company finds and nurtures new talent through a competitive, membership selection process and a seven-year playwright development program.

**Playbill Online**

<http://www.playbill.com/index.php>

This site claims to be "THE Source on the Web for Broadway Theater Information." And it lives up to its name, providing a wealth of information for both theatre goers and professionals. Check out their "Casting and Jobs" section which is divided into the following categories: performer, technical, design, administrative, academic, and the mysterious "other".

### **Professional Associations & Organizations Actors' Equity Association**

<http://www.actorsequity.org/>

The Actors' Equity Association is the labor union representing over 40,000 American actors and stage managers working in the professional theatre. Equity's website contains information about the union and its various departments, programs, and contracts, industry-related news, and casting notices.

### **Showbiz Jobs**

<http://www.showbizjobs.com/>

Search engine for all types of jobs in the entertainment industry.

### **Southeastern Theatre Conference, Inc. Job Contact Service**

<http://www.setc.org/>

Search for full-time and/or summer employment in theatre, including technical, academic positions and administration/management.

### **The Dramatists Guild of America**

<http://www.dramaguild.com/content/index.html>

The Dramatists Guild of America is the only professional association for playwrights, composers, and lyricists. Membership is open to all dramatic writers, regardless of their production history.

### **The Playwrights Center**

<http://www.pwcenter.org/>

An incubator of new work for the stage, and the nation's most powerful resource for playwrights.

### **Screen Actors Guild**

<http://www.sag.org/>

The primary role of Screen Actors Guild concerns the members' wages and working conditions, on their jobs, most Guild resources are spent on enforcing the contracts under which the members work. However, their web site has a terrific links page.

### **SCTA**

<http://www.southcarolinatheatre.com>

Contains information on SC theatre festivals and auditions.

### **South Carolina Children's Theatre**

<http://www.scchildrenstheatre.org>

Information on the SC Children's Theatre in Greenville, SC. Includes auditions and shows as well as upcoming events.

### **Southern Casting Call**

<http://excoboard.com/exco/index.php?boardid=19246>

Casting information for film in the Carolinas and other Southern states.

### **Theatre Communications Group**

<http://www.tcg.org/>

The national organization for the American theatre with over 440 member theatres offers a wide array of services.

### **Theater Mania**

<http://www.theatermania.com>

Guide to finding discount theatre tickets for most theatres in the US.

### **University/Resident Theatre Association**

<http://www.uerta.com/>

The University/Resident Theatre Association is the country's oldest and largest consortium of professional theatre training graduate programs and associated professional theatre companies.

**United States Institute for Theatre Technology (USITT)**

<http://www.usitt.org/>

The Association of Design, Production, and Technology Professionals in the Performing Arts and Entertainment industry.

**Other Colleges & Universities**

**ELAC Theatre Library Links**

<http://www.perspicacity.com/elactheatre/library/links.htm>

Great list of links on just about everything related to theatre.

**New School Library Theatre Resources**

<http://library.newschool.edu/>

Extensive list of topics related to theatre.

The information in this guide was adapted by Caitlin Colyer and Ashley McNamee for the use of Winthrop University students Dec. 2009 from

The University of Texas at Austin. Fine Arts Career Services. *A Career Guide for Theatre Majors*. On the Internet at <http://www.utexas.edu/cofa/career/media/theatguide.pdf> (visited 2009).

With the help of

Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008-09 Edition*, Actors, Producers, and Directors, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos093.htm> (visited 2009).

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