

What Is Stage Design?

Stage Design is the art, craft and practice of designing and implementing theatrical 3-D environments for drama, opera, musical theatre, dance performance, live concert events, film, video and television productions and themed events and environments. Though superficially similar in some ways to interior or architectural design, stage design goes beyond decoration to visually, spatially and environmentally support and thematically expand a script, screenplay or scenario by facilitating human interaction and/or choreography within the context of a theatrical event.

Success Factors

The successful stage design graduate student comes to this program with demonstrated skill and experience in stage design and theatrical production and/or affiliated areas or disciplines. The student must be highly motivated, engaged and excellent at creative problem solving. Stage designers must be intellectually curious people eager to develop their artistic talents in the visual and decorative arts, be passionate about working collaboratively and enjoy and excel in working with their hands and their minds simultaneously as they expand their skill and knowledge of theatrical design art and practice, and technical production. Effective stage designers must be able to easily visualize objects and environments in 3D and imagine insightful ways to tell a dramatic story moving through time and space.

Graduate students seeking Assistantships with tuition remission and stipends must have demonstrated experience in scenic painting and/or prop making and be highly motivated, organized and excellent creative problem solvers and eager to work with their hands.

Career Possibilities

- Theatrical stage designer
- Theatrical stage design studio assistant
- Theme Park attraction designer
- Film, video, or media production designer or set designer
- Property artisan
- Property manager
- Scenic artist, Scenic painter, Scenic Crafts Specialist
- Exhibit designer
- Event designer
- Concert set design

Undergraduate and graduate Stage Design, Scenic Painting, and Prop Making students of the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (CCM) have been, or are now currently employed in design, drafting, model making, scenic painting, and prop making, and film, media and television design with The Metropolitan Opera, Playwright's Horizon, Central City Opera, Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires, South Coast Repertory, Opera Theater of Saint Louis, Wolf Trap Opera, Minnesota Opera, Pittsburgh Opera, The MUNY in Saint Louis, Shakespeare Theater St. Louis, The Denver Theatre Center, Cirque du Soleil, The Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Toledo Ballet, Utah Shakespearean Festival, Spoleto Opera Theatre, Chicago Lyric Opera, Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, Stages St. Louis, American Players Theatre, Santa Fe Opera, The Ensemble Theatre of Cincinnati, The Shakespeare Theatre (DC), Glimmerglass Opera, Cincinnati Ballet, Disney, Broadway, and national tours, as well as Art Direction and Set Design for commercial and independent film companies. Representative titles are: *James and the Giant Peach*, *Angels and Demons*, *House of Cards*, *X-Men: First Class*, *Spider Man 3*, *Shrek 2*, *Saving Private Ryan*, and *Little Voice*.

Additional career options are listed on the [Center for Exploratory Studies](#) website.

■ Majoring in Theater Design and Production – Stage Design

The MFA in Stage Design is a 3-year curriculum. The first year of study is somewhat flexible dependent on the level of experience and demonstrated skill and achievement the student has at the beginning of the degree. The first year is dedicated to “filling in the gaps” and strengthening skill sets, where necessary, to prepare the graduate student for the next two years of intensive and immersive study. The second and third years focus on the practice of stage design and production. The student does their Final Project (Thesis) production generally, but not always, in the first semester of their third year. This curriculum stresses a hands-on and immersive course of study where the making of theatre takes precedence over a studio style, theoretical approach to theatrical design.

Our teaching philosophy and methods stress the actual “experience of doing,” where real production experience supersedes the theoretical wherever feasible or desirable. We do not guarantee a minimum/maximum of actualized design opportunities though the scale and complexity of assigned design projects will vary depending on a student’s level of accomplishment when starting the degree and their subsequent growth and ability.

The balance between theater, theater-related, academic, and free elective courses is established by NAST (National Association of Schools of Theater), which has accredited our program.

■ UC Advantages and Special Opportunities

The exemplar faculty and teaching staff are supported by the exceptional facilities. This synthesis optimizes the graduate experience informing and supporting the superb level of instruction.

The department of Theatre Design and Production (TDP) is a separate, centralized department and produces the mainstage and studio productions for the departments of Drama, Musical Theater, Opera and Dance.

Beyond the classrooms and drafting studio, the Design, Scenic Painting and Prop Making students spend much of their time perfecting their skills and developing their talents in the CCM Scenery, Props and Painting Workshops and theatres. The CCM Scene Shop is a generously sized 8,500 square foot space with 24’ clear vertical space and is extremely well equipped. The Scenic Workshop is the centerpiece of the Corbett Center for the Arts and came on line in the late 1990’s and was designed by the architecture firm of Pei, Cobb, and Freed.

Students design for all three main performance spaces: The 740-seat **Corbett Auditorium** underwent a five-million dollar renovation - the result is one of the most visually striking and acoustically balanced college theatres in the nation. Corbett Auditorium is very well equipped with a 54'-0" proscenium, hydraulic orchestra lift, dimmer-per-circuit lighting and extensive sound and video circuiting. Corbett Auditorium won the prestigious 1997 USITT Meritorious Achievement Award for Outstanding New Theatre.

The 400-seat **Patricia Corbett Theater** features a modified-thrust stage with a 42'-0" proscenium opening. The Theater recently underwent an extensive half-million dollar lighting system renovation. Designed by Ming Cho Lee - this theater has a Bayreuth style pit and steeply raked intimate seating.

The **Cohen Family Studio Theater** is a one-of-a-kind flexible space. This venue incorporates a unique architectural ‘apse’ within the outer structure of a more traditional large black-box with a multitude of staging possibilities through the use of modular seating. The theater, with flexible seating for approximately 150, serves as the home for CCM’s workshop series and laboratory productions.

■ Admission Requirements

This is a graduate-level degree course. It is not necessary that the applicant have an undergraduate degree in theatre studies and/or theatrical design or production. However an applicant must demonstrate prior experience and an appropriate level of mastery of skills and technique compatible with a graduate level study of *theatrical* design. The interviewing faculty will also assess the applicant’s professional aptitude and potential for success during the degree course and post graduation.

Admission to the program is by an on-campus interview and portfolio review. In some circumstances a SKYPE interview may be conducted. However we strongly feel that it is very important for applicants to visit the UC Campus, the Conservatory and our facilities and witness first-hand our complex production and educational demands to better understand what they may expect from the program and what the program will expect from them.

A full day visit is recommended. This gives the applicant time to experience the working and academic environment as well as ask questions of the faculty, staff and students with whom (s)he will be interacting daily if accepted into the program.

For consideration into Stage Design the applicant must present a portfolio demonstrating artistic proficiency in drawing, painting and crafts work compatible with the study of theatrical design and production.

The GRE is not required for admission to the MFA in Stage Design.

Transferring to UC Requirements

Students who have completed graduate courses at another institution can request an evaluation for the transfer of these credits into a CCM degree program. The evaluation of such credits is performed by the divisional faculty who have the instructional responsibility for the particular course(s) in question. Once the evaluation has been completed, a recommendation will be submitted to the director of graduate studies for final approval. No more than 12 semester hours can be transferred, and only courses with at least a grade of B will be considered.

Changing Majors within UC Requirements

Acceptance of transfer credit in those major theatre production courses specifically required for the respective degree programs will be determined by an appropriate audition or examination. In addition to fulfilling UC and CCM changing majors within UC admission requirements: for consideration into Stage Design the applicant must present a portfolio demonstrating artistic proficiency in drawing, painting and crafts work demonstrating, among other skills and talents, a flair for the dramatic and theatrical and an ability to perceive and manipulate space. Prior experience in applied theatrical design and technical production work would be necessary to be considered for entrance into the MFA Stage Design degree program.

International Student Requirements

See the CCM Bulletin for TOEFL score information and other guidelines for International Students.

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Graduation Requirements

Awarding of the degree is dependent upon the successful completion of the final design/research project. For stage design majors, this project will include the research, design, and execution of all necessary paperwork (see course description) for an actual or theoretical design assignment. The project will be accompanied by a written argument of the conceptualization/approach and will be presented and defended orally by the candidate before a selected faculty committee.

Application Deadlines

Admission to any of the graduate programs requires the bachelor's degree, or its equivalent, in an appropriate field. For unconditional admission, the applicant must have a quality point average of 3.0 (based on a 4.0 scale) or higher from a fully accredited institution of higher learning. Applicants showing unusual ability in performance, whose previous record falls short of this standard, or whose study was at an institution not accredited by a regional agency, or the National Association of Schools of Theatre may be admitted conditionally or with the status of academic probation.

The same application serves as an application for an assistantship or scholarship.

Although the official application deadline is December 1 for other CCM programs **TDP will consider applications into the MFA Stage Design course up through May 1 pending any open slots in program.**

Special Audition/Interview Requirements: For consideration into Stage Design the applicant must present a portfolio demonstrating artistic proficiency in drawing, painting and crafts work compatible with the study of theatrical design and production.

Please refer to the CCM Application Handbook for all current audition and interview requirements. Visit ccm.uc.edu and click on "Apply Now," or contact CCM Admissions at ccmadmis@uc.edu for more information.

Accreditation

The University of Cincinnati is accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST)

University and Resident Theatre Association (URTA)

Curriculum

Contact: **Thomas C. Umfrid, Professor of Stage Design**
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Theater Design & Production Core

THPR7000	Approaches to Production	3
DRPF7010	Aesthetics	3
THPR6099	The Business of the Business for Theater Production Personnel	3
DRPF7050	Script Analysis	3
THPR8020	Design Research Thesis	3-6

Credit Total: 15-18

Stage Design Core

Production Practicum is required for four semesters, 3 credits per semester, for a total of 12 credits.

Students will begin the Stage Design sequence either with Stage Design I or Stage Design II based on skill level determined by advisor.

THPR7014	Stage Graphics III	3
THPR7016	Stage Graphics IV	3
THPR8041	Stage Design I	3
THPR8042	Stage Design I	3
THPR8043	Stage Design II	3
THPR8044	Stage Design II	3
THPR8045	Stage Design Studio III	3
THPR8046	Stage Design Studio III	3
THPR7047	Stage Design Studio IV	3
THPR7048	Stage Design Studio IV	3
THPR6000	Production Practicum	1-6

Credit Total: 19-24

Electives

	Any course 6000 or above	3
	Must take a minimum of 18 credits from the Adviser directed electives grouping.	18-36

Credit Total: 24-42

Additional Requirements

For the summers between the first/second and second/third years of the degree program, employment in scenic design, theatrical craft/production, or related field is required.

Successful completion of the thesis stage design project and accompanying written documentation with portfolio presentation and defense of the project before a thesis committee.

Groupings

Advisor Directed Electives

Students must complete a minimum of 18 hours and can elect up to a maximum of 36 hours.

Students must also complete professional work experience between years 1/2 and years 2/3.

THPR6009C	Scenic Art Lab and Crew	3
THPR6082	History of Architectural Styles and Décor I	3
THPR6083	History of Architectural Styles and Décor 2	3
THPR7032	Vectorworks For the Theatre for Graduate Students	3
THPR7033	Digital Portfolios for Graduate Students	3
THPR7050C	Graduate Stage Props	3
THPR7051C	Graduate Stage Props II	3
THPR8030	Graduate Seminar in Drafting	3
THPR8073	Graduate Scenic Art 1: Beginning Painting	3
THPR8074	Graduate Scenic Art 2: Scenic Crafts	3
THPR8075	Graduate Scenic Art 3: Painting Styles	3