What Is Stage Design, Props and Scenic Art?

Stage design, scenic art and prop making 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 venues. Though similar in some ways to interior or architectural design, stage design and scenic painting go beyond decoration to visually 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, scenic painting and prop-making student is 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 acquire a broad-based knowledge of theater arts and technical production. Stage designers must be able to easily visualize objects and environments in 3D and imagine interesting ways to tell a dramatic story moving through time and space.

Scenic painting and prop making supports scenic design and are intrinsic to the art form. Scenic painting students must possess talents for drawing and painting and they must be able to work well with others. Students aspiring to careers in prop making must be organized, 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 panting, 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, Props and Scenic Art

Our teaching philosophy and methods stress the actual "experience of doing," where real production experience supersedes the theoretical wherever feasible or desirable. The number of realized stage design, scenic painting and prop making opportunities will vary depending on a student's growth and ability.

All BFA stage design, scenic painting and prop making undergraduates take drawing, 2D, 3D, CAD, design studio and production courses as well as courses in other design and production areas in a combination of concise intros, full year basic courses, and one and two-year advanced sequences depending on talent, growth, and interest in the major area. Students also study theater history, script analysis, dramatic literature, English, world, European and/or art history, supplemented with more courses in liberal arts and the humanities, science and free electives, as needed.

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. The University of Cincinnati has adopted a General Education Program, which our degree conforms to and includes a senior year capstone experience, typically a realized stage design project undertaken in the student's senior year.

UC Advantages and Special Opportunities

The UC-CCM TD&P stage design, scenic painting and prop making faculty are first-tier teaching professionals and instruct and inspire students in actualized projects beyond the classroom. Our teaching philosophy and methods stress the actual "experience of doing," where real production experience supersedes the theoretical wherever feasible or desirable.

The quality of instruction is matched by the exemplar facilities. Beyond the classrooms and drafting studio, students spend much of their time perfecting their skills and developing their talents in the CCM scenery, props and painting workshop 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 center piece of the Corbett Center for the Arts and came online 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

Admission to the undergraduate program is by portfolio review and interview that may be conducted at any on- or off-campus interview location. GPA, class rank, standard test scores and recommendations are also considered. Graduate interviews must take place ON CAMPUS. (Rare exceptions may be made.) It is important for applicants to visit 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 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, though beneficial, is not necessary to be considered for entrance into the stage design area of study.

Scenic Design : BFA portfolio FAQ

Your portfolio is a representation of your artistic and theatrical ability, potential, and range. It does not need to be limited to theatre or set design work -- we invite you to show us examples of artistic, 2D or 3D design work unrelated to set design or the theatre. The purpose for your portfolio is to show the committee what you are capable of doing artistically and what potential you have for further development. For example, a portfolio for an application in scenic design could include:

- Artwork, drawings, sketches, paintings, sculptures, graphic designs (posters, cartoons, etc) figure drawing, collage, art and design projects, or ceramics of any kind and in any medium/media, or photos of these.

- Photographs of set design models

- Photographs of set pieces, props, decorations, or craft projects you have designed or made from yours or another's design idea. We value good prop making and scenic painting but please don't make these examples the centerpiece of your *scenic design* portfolio.

- Examples and/or documentation of other areas of theatrical craft like a costume or mask you have made or a backstage tech project you have built.

- Examples of your hand and/or computer drafting, digital design work, or fine art or show photography, if possible.

Remember, your portfolio needs to be more than a collection of programs, clippings, posters, or show photos. Show your best and most recent work first.

Transferring to UC Requirements

In the case of transfer students from member schools of the National Association of Schools of Dance, National Association of Schools of Music, the National Association of Schools of Theatre, or other properly accredited institutions, credits previously earned with a grade of *C* or better in liberal arts courses paralleling those in the college-conservatory curriculum generally will be accepted. Transcript evaluation takes place after acceptance and prior to registration, usually during the summer preceding initial matriculation. 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 transfer 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, though beneficial, is not necessary to be considered for entrance into the Stage Design area of study.

Changing Majors within UC Requirements

In the case of students changing majors within UC, credits previously earned with a grade of *C* or better in liberal arts courses paralleling those in the college-conservatory curriculum generally will be accepted. Transcript evaluation takes place after acceptance and prior to registration, usually during the summer preceding initial matriculation. 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, though beneficial, is not necessary to be considered for entrance into the stage design area of study.

International Student Requirements

In addition to the requirements mentioned earlier, international students must also adhere to the following instructions.

1. Apply BEFORE December 1 for the following fall enrollment date.

2. Forward proof of English proficiency through the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). The University of Cincinnati has strict requirements (see table below). TOEFL applications can be obtained from TOEFL, Box 6151, Princeton, NJ 08541-6151. (Phone: 609-951-1100) or (Fax: 609-771-7681). Not required for Artist Diploma (AD) students (except AD Opera Directing).

Minimum TOEFL Scores Internet Computer Paper

Undergraduates (except Voice) 66 187 515

Master's (Strings, TDP) 68 190 520

Proof of English Proficiency can also be provided by a 6.5 minimum score on the IELTS test. If you submit a PTE (Pearson) score for this requirement, please contact the CCM Admissions Office for details.

Graduation Requirements

Continuation and graduation in this program is based on a semesterly review of satisfactory progress in course work and production assignments. In addition to your University grade point average (GPA), your semesterly GPA for all of your CCM/TDP undergraduate curriculum courses must be at least 3.0 or higher. Students earning less than a 3.0 GPA in these courses will be subject to review, possible program probation, or dismissal. Additionally, the **University of Cincinnati,** College-Conservatory of Music annual portfolio reviews will take place within each production area. Failure to show progress in professional aptitude may result in program probation or dismissal.

Advancement to the second year and each succeeding year in theatre design and production is by permission of TD&P faculty review board, which meets annually to evaluate student performance and progress. A student's merit is determined by class, lab, production work, and professional attitude and potential. A *C-* is the minimum acceptable grade for core theatre design and production courses (16THPR). If the student earns a *D+* or less, the course must be repeated until an acceptable grade of *C-* or better is earned.

In the senior year, the student must successfully complete the capstone project and successfully complete the major core curriculum in stage design, props, and scenic art.

Application Deadlines

Applications must be received by the date posted on the CCM Admissions website. Applicant files should be complete (including transcripts and recommendations) before on-campus interviews are conducted.

Admission to UC's College-Conservatory of Music is competitive. The admissions process begins after August 1 for entrance in the following fall semester. Application deadline for CCM is December 1. However, stage design will consider late applications through April 1.

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**
thomas.umfrid@uc.edu
(513) 556-9452

Mark A. Halpin, Assistant Professor of Stage Design
mark.halpin@uc.edu
(513) 556-9418

Theater Design & Production Core

ENGL1001	English Composition (EC)	3
ENGL2089	Intermediate Composition (EC)	3
	Choose either Natural or Social Science (NS,SS)	3
DRPF2052	History of Theatre (FA, HP)	3
DPRF2053	History of Theatre (FA, HP)	3
	Select from History Elective Group	6
	Choose two from the Dramatic Literature Elective Grouping	6
THPR1061C	Appreciation of Theatrical Design and Production (FA)	3
THPR2011C	Technical Production 1 (QR, FA)	3
DRPF1050	Script Analysis (SE, FA)	3
THPR6099	The Business of the Business for Theater Production Personnel	3

Credit Total: 39

Stage Design, Props and Scenic Art Major Courses

THPR1060	Stage Graphics I	3
THPR1062	Stage Graphics II	3
THPR2014	Stage Graphics III	3
THPR2016	Stage Graphics IV	3
THPR3041	Stage Design 1	3
THPR3042	Stage Design 1	3
THPR2070C	Scenic Art I	3
THPR2071C	Scenic Art II	3
THPR6009C	Scenic Art Lab	6
THPR4049C	Stage Props I	3
THPR4050C	Stage Props II	3
THPR6008	Stage Props Lab	6
THPR6000	Production Practicum	12
THPR2021C	Technical Production II	3
THPR3033	Digital Portfolio	3
THPR6082	History of Arch. Styles & Décor	3
THPR6083	History of Arch. Styles & Décor	3

Credit Total: 66

Theatre Design & Production Supportive Core

	Choose two from the TD&P Supportive Core	6

Credit Total: 6

Area Supportive

Students will take either Intro to AutoCAD OR Vectorworks for the Theatre.
Students will also take either Stage Design II OR Scenic Art III AND Stage Props II (repeated).
A TOTAL of 9 credits must be completed in this category.

THPR2090	Intro to AutoCAD	3
THPR1031	Vectorworks for the Theatre	3
THPR4043	Stage Design II	3
THPR4044	Stage Design II	3
THPR2072	Scenic Art III	3
THPR4050C	Stage Props II	3

Credit Total: 9

Free Electives

	Any college level course	6

Credit Total: 6

■ Groupings

History Electives

Students must choose 6 credits of history from the below 2 choices in consultation with Advisor.

HIST1003	World History I (DC, HP)	3
HIST1004	World History II (DC, HP)	3
OR		
HIST1005	European History I (DC, HP)	3
HIST1006	European History II (DC, HP)	3

TD&P Supportive Core

Choose two courses or six credit hours with approval from your area Advisor.

THPR1000C	Introduction to Costume and Makeup (FA)	3
THPR1020C	Introduction to Stage Lighting & Sound (FA)	3
THPR2040	Assistant Stage Management (DC, HU)	3

Dramatic Literature Electives

Students must choose 6 hours from this list of courses.

ENGB2050	Shakespeare's Plays	3
ENGB3006	Introduction to Shakespeare	3
ENGB3048	Early Modern Drama I	3
ENGB3049	Early Modern Drama II	3
ENGC2040	Topics in Drama (HU)	3
ENGL2024	Literary History of Drama (HU)	3
ENGL2027	Introduction to Creative Writing: Drama (FA, HU)	3
ENGL2064	African Literature II: Drama (HU)	3
MUST6010	Musical Theatre History and Literature I	3
MUST6011	Musical Theatre History and Literature II	3