Audition and rehearsal guidelines
Theater and Music Theater Programs at Princeton University

The mission of our student production season is to support our students’ exploration and development as theater artists and as human beings. We expect our students to take intellectual and creative risks, and we respect the right of the student and the artist to experiment and to fail. We believe that an atmosphere of generosity and inclusion, as well as transparent and timely communication, best supports creative growth. As faculty, staff, guest artists and senior theater certificate students, we aim to model and encourage responsibility, preparation and flexibility as best practices for effective collaboration.

Our students: The Princeton student body comes from many different backgrounds, cultures and countries. The Princeton theater and music theater programs are non-major programs that enthusiastically welcome all students, with and without theatrical experience. Students appearing in Princeton auditions and rehearsals may have been performing professionally since childhood or may never have been in a rehearsal room before. Given the broad range of experience, we need to be thoughtful and clear about expectations in all aspects of the process, and to make questions and concerns welcome in every setting. Most of our writers, directors, stage managers, designers and crew members are also undergraduate students, and undergraduate education should always be the primary goal. The theater and music theater programs are committed to process taking priority over product.

Before Auditions:
Offer as much information as possible about a show on our program audition website, so that students know as much as they can before they audition or attend a call back. We request that directors NOT pre-cast a show (with the obvious exception of show proposers) - we cannot maintain an open and inclusive environment if roles in our season have been assigned before auditions begin.

Auditions: The audition room is often the first point of contact we have with potential students, and is sometimes the first audition experience a student has ever had, so it is imperative that the Princeton audition room is welcoming, thoughtful and professional. As a director, please greet the auditionee warmly, spend a few minutes getting to know them as individuals, and refrain from making comments on any student’s work in the audition room, no matter how light-hearted! Our general auditions are for several shows at once, so do not expect to be able to give specific direction in this setting. The theater program will ask students to fill in a form at this point in the process relating to questions of consent.

Callbacks: Directors will schedule their own callbacks with our stage management office. Potential cast members should receive at least a proposed rehearsal schedule at call backs, and student cast members should commit to this proposed schedule when they accept a role in the project. Students accepting roles should have read the play or musical before they commit to participating, and should give the director and stage manager clarity about any conflicts. If you are considering participating, you should always feel free to reach out to the director with any concerns about the material or the schedule prior to accepting a role.
Rehearsals:

**Princeton Golden Rule: Rehearsals MUST start and end on time as advertised. All members of the Princeton community are very heavily scheduled and we respect each other’s time by arriving on time and ending promptly.**

Rehearsal rooms should be a rigorous and focused space of work and creativity; they should also be a safe space where all participants feel that their voice is heard and respected. Think carefully about questions of safety and consent in all aspects of the theatrical process. Although the work we do in the rehearsal room requires risk, it must be done in an environment in which everyone feels safe to do that exploration.

Here are some things to think about:

* Be thoughtful and the language you use and the assumptions you make in a rehearsal room
* Prioritize making time in the rehearsal room for conversation around the play, especially around difficult material. For example, any work that explores race, sexuality or gender obviously requires careful conversation. Make sure you have adequate time to discuss and rehearse carefully and thoughtfully, even at the expense of some completing the staging.
* Listen mindfully to each other
* Consider what content, in addition to obviously sexual or violent content, might be complicated for participants. Some examples might be strong language, substance abuse, self-harm
* Allow the cast time some conversation time without the director in the room occasionally
* Take appropriate breaks during longer rehearsals (at least ten minutes every two hours)
* Make sure that there are appropriate breaks for meals when the dining halls are open
* Have a clear cellphone policy. We generally recommend that phones are for breaks and emergencies only; but make a rehearsal room decision
* Everyone should prepare for rehearsal. Actors should work on their scenes, contemplate notes, and get off book in a timely manner. Directors should be prepared for the scenes at hand
* All scenes with intimate, sexual or violent contact should be choreographed intentionally. If your project includes this kind of material, please talk to the theater program about possible support in staging it (intimacy coach, fight director etc).
* Actors must receive consent from their fellow actors before engaging in physical contact with another actor. Consent is never assumed and can be retracted at any time.
* Slow down and examine a moment before working on challenging content, including any kind of physical intimacy. Listen, and speak up. Actors should never hesitate to verbalize their boundaries, to pause the action if anything feels unsafe, and to bring concerns to the theater program
* Check in with each other to be sure that everyone is continuing to feel safe in the work.
* Consider that some participants may have very limited to no theater experience, and may have less ability to separate from acting role than professional actors with more tools
* Consider creating a small ritual for the ending of each rehearsal that allows participants to leave the work behind and resume their own lives
First rehearsals:
Successful projects usually have a well thought through first rehearsal. It is generally good practice (and the professional norm) to schedule a first rehearsal to which you invite all cast, designers, crew, members of the creative team etc, as well as representatives from the theater and music theater program. At this first rehearsal, the thesis proposers and director might offer some context, every person in the room should introduce themselves, and the whole group should go over the above rehearsal page together! You should also choose a student representative, see below.

Student representatives:
The Student Representative is a liaison between the students involved in a program production, and the theater and music theater program faculty. This student is invited to speak up on behalf of any or all student participants regarding concerns or questions that any student involved in the production may have. The goal is to make it easy for students to communicate uncomfortable challenges to the faculty and staff with minimal anxiety. This student rep must be chosen at the first rehearsal towards which all cast and crew are called. For further information about student representatives, please see our theater program website.

Rehearsal schedules:
We allow for a very broad range of rehearsal schedules to accommodate a broad variety of staging results, from sit-down reading through staged reading through full production. However, there are limits to the number of hours our students can accomplish within the confines of their full academic schedules and their obligations to their major department (remember, our students are not theater majors). Please be sure to discuss a proposed rehearsal schedule ahead of time with our production stage management office. Please prioritize a meaningful and educational process over product in this educational context.

Frosh, sophomores and juniors might expect to spend between 100 and 150 hours of rehearsal, to rehearse a fully staged theater program production. Senior certificate students who have proposed a project can work longer, but this does not extend to non-proposing members or cast, crew or creative team! No individual student (with the exception of senior certificate students) should be expected to attend rehearsal more than about 15 hours a week prior to the week that includes technical rehearsals (which requires longer hours). This kind of rehearsal schedule is obviously significantly less hours than a standard professional production, so directors and actors should plan accordingly!

A fairly standard Princeton schedule for a full production during the weeks of classes might include six to eight weeks of rehearsal, in which rehearsal is held three to five days a week for 2-4 hours, with a 3-6 hour rehearsal on one weekend day. Students can rehearse after 4.30 on weekdays; they need to have at least 45 minutes off sometime between 5.30 and 7.30 to go to the dining hall. An exception to this will be the reading and exam periods, when students can be expected to rehearse 20-25 hours a week for a shorter rehearsal period. During this time you will have to organize your schedule around individual student exams, and should give 3-4 days off around Dean’s Date.

No individual project should anticipate having more than about 150 hours of rehearsal total without discussion with the theater program. One useful rule of thumb (obviously a broad generalization) for staging theater at Princeton is to allow for about one hour of rehearsal for one
minute of stage time. This rough estimate would not include the initial learning of music if you are working on a musical, or choreographic sequences.

**Technical rehearsals:**
We think of our technical rehearsals as sacred time when all participants in a creative process are finally in the performance space at the same moment – designers, craftspeople and crew as well as the actors, director, writer, stage management etc. This is where our work finally comes together, and where stage managers and designers do a lot of the work that they have been preparing for over weeks and months. Our most fully staged theater program productions approximately the following amount of tech time: two ten hour days over one long weekend, followed by three evening dress rehearsals, which is usually a 4-5 hour rehearsal call. Other styles of project may have much less. Please be prepared to make thoughtful and calm choices about using this precious time when all elements (except the audience!) come together for the first time.

**Student stage management:**
Most of our productions and projects are staffed by student stage managers, who are rarely experienced in this role and will need everyone’s support and attention (this is also true of many of our designers, producers, dramaturgs etc). The theater program makes every attempt to mentor these student stage managers, but all parties should remember that Princeton stage managers are student assistants who also have a full academic schedule, and not trained stage managers doing this as a full time job! These students will need you to either help with or offer instruction in things like planning the daily and weekly rehearsal schedules, recording blocking, keeping track of breaks, prepping and breaking down the room and so on.

**Theatrical consent around stage intimacy and stage violence:**

All theatrical intimacy and violence should be choreographed. If your project contains this type of material, please be sure you are in contact with the theater program about possible support. The theater and music theater program takes student consent very seriously in the rehearsal room and onstage, and we understand that consent to any stage physicality, intimacy or violence may be offered and later retracted. There is no such thing as blanket consent - regular check-ins to renegotiate and re-affirm consent are a critical part of any process. Encouraging a culture of consent is everyone’s responsibility, and we expect conversation around this in the rehearsal room.

We do expect that students will read the material of the play prior to agreeing to participate in a cast or crew; this does not imply that student’s consent in any particular situation, but will help us all parties to identify challenging material early on.

Here are some questions to ask of the material that will help to understand which parts of the play require special attention:

Does the material require non-sexual physical contact with others? Theatrical intimacy such as kissing? Simulated sexual assault? Derogatory language or profanity? Actions related to disordered eating? Simulated acts of violence or self-harm? Theatrical fire-arms? Revealing costumes and/or partial nudity?
For more information:
Our Production Guide offers a lot more information about the design and production process. All participants involved in a process through the theater and music theater program are also free to speak to the project advisor/s, the theater program director Jane Cox, the music theater program director Stacy Wolf, our producer Darryl Waskow, or any of the below faculty with concerns or questions at any time.

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We hope that this document offers some essential guidelines and answers some basic questions for starting on a rehearsal process at Princeton; we also hope that this is just the beginning of a conversation!