

The Shaw Festival

Behind the Curtain

Careers in Theater Arts

During their performance season of April through November, the Shaw Festival employs approximately 600 people in various occupations involved with theatre production. Of these staff members, less than 15% are the actors/performers you see on stage. The majority of the staff members are hard at work behind the curtain. This ongoing work needs to be completed for multiple performances on a daily basis in four distinct theatre settings in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Canada. Therefore, flexibility and adaptability are extremely important to the production team. The various careers at Shaw and other theatres require knowledge and skills to be effective and to ensure a successful performance.



Theatre arts careers include, but are not limited to: script writing, directing, producing, set design, modeling and set construction, creation and fitting of wardrobes, make-up, lighting, music direction, sound, choreography, promotion, finance, business operations, education and of course acting, dancing and singing. These are among the many career fields that blend their own style and perfection in each multiple show schedule each season, making the

Shaw Festival the unique repertory theatre it has become over its 51 year history.

When we speak about careers in today's workforce, people tend to focus on higher education and college competition – obtaining the appropriate credential/degree that is recognized in the field of study and perhaps even a job description requirement of employers in the industry. Along with a degree, field experience is very important and useful in the theatre arts world. Like many professions, careers in theatre require honing of your craft and abilities over time. Certain careers may require an extensive work history in the field, guided practice, apprenticeships, internships or cooperative learning experiences. In middle or high school, it is recommended that students perform or work in school or community theatre productions to learn whether or not there is a real interest in pursuing a career in the theatre business.



Opportunities beyond Middle and High School

The best advice for students and parents looking to discover more about theatre careers is to seek the guidance of those working in the field and do your research on college and local community programs of study as well as technical schools that are geared towards specific certificates or degrees in theatre

art majors. Students should also speak with teachers and counselors in their schools about local programs, internships, shadowing and workshops. The Shaw Festival, along with many theatre companies both large and small in communities across the country, provide youth summer camps and weekend and after school workshops which offer wonderful opportunities as you begin to navigate your way through the wide range of careers in theatre. You may discover these types of programs at a local community college, university or technical school that have degree programs in Theatre Arts.



When students are close to completing high school and have a serious interest in a career in theatre arts, research on technical colleges and universities is essential. When seeking a program of study students and parents should seek colleges and universities, both public and private that are accredited. In some cases certain institutions or programs may carry a specific trade association credential; a certification that is recognized by a national organization. Before you enroll in any post-high school program of study, a

student, school counselor and people who have interest in your decision (i.e., parents, guardians) should be engaged in the process.

Here are some types of questions you should explore with family:

- Costs associated with college completion – tuition, books, technology, tools of the trade, acting/singing lessons and cost of living expenses. These can add up quickly, especially in cities where theatre thrives and there are more opportunities – usually large metropolitan cities like New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Toronto, Canada.
- What is the projection in 3-5 years of career opportunities in this field in your region, state or the country?
- How far might I have to or be willing to travel in order to find gainful and full employment in the theatre?
- What is the state of theatre companies in my region, if there are any? Does my personality fit well with living on the road for 6-8 months at a time if a production company travels from city to city?

As a prospective student in a program of study, you should ask questions of each college, university or technical school admission's counselor to gain information about their past graduates' success. Knowing the rate of post-program employment may give you an idea of whether or not the school's program was valuable and worth the time and money.

A career in theater arts, such as the Shaw Festival, can be very exciting, ever-changing and fulfilling. But as with anything, it can be challenging and takes dedication and hard work.

Useful Links

National Association of Schools of Theater FAQ for Students and Parents - nast.arts-accredit.org/index.jsp?page=Students%2C+Parents%2C+General+Public

National Association of Schools of Theater - nast.arts-accredit.org/

National Office for Arts Accreditation - www.arts-accredit.org/

U.S. Occupational Outlook Handbook Theatre Related Career Areas:

Entertainment - www.bls.gov/ooh/entertainment-and-sports/home.htm

Design - www.bls.gov/ooh/arts-and-design/home.htm

Media & Communications - www.bls.gov/ooh/media-and-communication/home.htm

Canadian National Occupational Classification - www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/lmi/noc/index.shtml

College, University and Technical Schools - www.a2zcolleges.com/arts/Drama/

