K. Scenic Designer

The Scenic Designer is an artist/scholar who designs the scenery (and often properties) that enhances a given production. The scenery should visually express the stylistic interpretation of the drama unique to the production. It should meet the needs of the actors and the director (and sometimes dancers and choreographers) by allowing for appropriate staging and dance spaces, both within the scene and from scene to scene. Further, the setting should complement and integrate with other visual elements of the production such as costumes and stage lighting.

When evaluating documentation in a tenure dossier, external reviewers, administrators, and the tenure and promotion committee may ask themselves whether the candidate’s tenure portfolio demonstrates the ability to teach and use their practice to explore:

Production Expertise

- Excellence in expressing their artistic intentions for the setting and the collaborative choices of the production team in sketches, storyboards, renderings, and/or scale models, drafting of plans and sections, execution of painter’s elevations, scheduling and listing equipment and material selection, and painting
- Knowledge about the impact of color, line, shape, texture, movement, and composition and demonstrated excellence in manipulating these design elements
- Knowledge of the materials and methods of scenic construction, rigging and shifting, properties, and scenic painting
- Knowledge of movement for acting, dance, and stage combat and their related spatial requirements
- Understanding of the techniques and skills of directing as they relate to scenic design
- Understanding of the related production design areas—projection design, costume design, lighting design, sound design
- Knowledge of relevant standard safety procedures and regulations, as well as those prescribed by related professional organizations such as Actors’ Equity Association (AEA), United Scenic Artists #829 (USAA), the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE), Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDCS), Society of Fight Directors (SAFD), and the American Federation of Musicians (AFM), as appropriate.
- In-depth understanding of equitable practices in the theatre through a display of cultural competency and the techniques necessary (consent based and trauma-informed practices) for honoring the professional and personal boundaries of students
- Training in Mental Health First Aid, Bystander Intervention, Anti-Racism, LGBTQ+ support, and DEIJ work

Historical Context

- Knowledge of dramatic literature across the globe, including historic and contemporary genres
- Knowledge of the history of theatrical production, with emphasis on the visual elements of scenery, properties, lighting, and costume
- Knowledge of the history of art (artists, historic styles, and genres), architecture, and décor applied in context
- Knowledge of economic and social history applied in context
Collaborative Skills

- Excellence in oral, written, and graphic communication skills to secure sensitive translation of designs into workable scenery
- Ability to work and collaborate effectively with artists and technicians in a variety of professional and academic settings
- Knowledge of financial management of scenic production, acquisitions, and maintenance
- Ability to assess the accuracy of the technical execution and operation of the scenic elements of the production
- Understanding of scenic studio personnel management and scheduling
- Excellence in the higher-level planning required in seasonal or repertory contexts
- An understanding of ethical practices associated with the field of professional and academic theatre and performance
- An understanding of how DEIJ is considered when selecting research projects for students
- An understanding of how DEIJ informs the recruitment of students, in cases where that is part of the candidate’s labor
- An understanding of how DEIJ issues impact their life at the university and an ability to think about their own implicit biases

Overall excellence from the Scenic Designer requires the ability to integrate knowledge consistently in the areas noted above. Scenic designers must work with an understanding of the conceptual requirements of a production to create scenic designs that are both artistically and technically sound and can be realized within the constraints of the producing organization. Such expertise is demonstrated by participating in realized production. Off-campus professional activities, such as conference presentations, leadership roles in professional societies, and design opportunities, are strongly encouraged. The Scenic Designer is best evaluated by attending a live performance of a production for which the designer is responsible. Whereas the inclusion of ground plans & associated paperwork is essential as support material detailing the process of the designer, it does little to evaluate true ability. Drawings, charts, and other paperwork should be evaluated but they cannot substitute for the viewing of an actual production. Still or video photography might add some useful information to an evaluation but, again, are inferior to a live production. If recorded media are used for evaluation of a candidate, the circumstances of the recordings must be clearly stated.