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Props Management in Professional and Educational Institutions

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PROPS MANAGEMENT IN PROFESSIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in

The Department of Theater

by

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	iv
Abstract	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Current Books and Reference Sources on Props Management.....	2
Chapter 3: Summarizing the Survey	3
Chapter 4: Outlining Types of Theaters.....	5
Chapter 5: Outlining the Goals and Responsibilities of a Props Manager	7
Chapter 6: Outlining Three Areas of Management: Schedules, Finance, Personnel.....	12
Chapter 7: Schedules.....	13
Prop Shop Deadlines	13
Additional Events.....	18
Shop Operation Hours.....	19
Chapter 8: Finance	21
Show Budgets.....	21
Maintenance Budgets	25
Methods to Generate Income	26
Methods of Acquisition.....	27
Chapter 9: Personnel	31
Skillsets	31
Contracts.....	32
Quality Standards of Production	34
Task Assignment.....	36
Education and Mentorship	39
Chapter 10: Educational Outreach	41
Chapter 11: Conclusions	42
Chapter 12: Areas for Further Investigation	43

Resource List	44
Appendix 1: Props Production Thesis Survey	46
Appendix 2: Institutional Review Board Documentation.....	77
Vita.....	80

List of Figures

Figure 1: Types of Responses to the Survey	4
Figure 2: Hours of Acquisition vs. Hours of Administrative Tasks	7
Figure 3: Number of Part Time Employees per Prop Shop	8
Figure 4: Number of Full Time Employees per Prop Shop	8
Figure 5: Hours of Acquisition vs. Hours of Administrative Tasks	11
Figure 6: Advanced Budgeting Planning in Weeks.....	13
Figure 7: Start of Acquisition Prior to Opening in Months	14
Figure 8: Furniture Prop Completion Deadlines.....	16
Figure 9: Hand Prop Completion Deadlines	17
Figure 10: Set Dressing Completion Deadlines.....	17
Figure 11: Percent of Institutions which Give Permission to use Excess Show Budgets.....	24
Figure 12: Average Number of Hours Spent per Week on Financial and Budgeting Paperwork.....	24
Figure 13: Types of Responses to Survey.....	47
Figure 14: Types of Productions Performed at Each Institution.....	48
Figure 15: Length of Season	49
Figure 16: Number of Hours Spent Acquiring Props	50
Figure 17: Number of Hours Spent on Administrative Tasks	50
Figure 18: Number of Full Time Prop Shop Employees	51
Figure 19: Number of Part Time Prop Shop Employees	52
Figure 20: Number of Over Hired Hours per Month.....	53
Figure 21: Number of Prop Shop Interns per Institution	54

Figure 22: Percent of Prop Managers Involved in Hiring Employees.....	55
Figure 23: Percent of Prop Mangers Able to Terminate Employees	56
Figure 24: Number of Undergraduate Students Working for Class Credit in Prop Shops	58
Figure 25: Average Prop Budgets for Shows	60
Figure 26: Highest and Lowest Prop Budgets for Shows	61
Figure 27: Percent of Institutions Using Each Method of Purchasing.....	64
Figure 28: Advanced Budget Planning	67
Figure 29: Prop Shop Operation Hours	71

Abstract

This thesis is a study of common practices and unique challenges of theatrical prop shop management in universities and how this compares to professional theaters and other prop producing organizations. The following pages will identify the commonalities and differences between prop shops in terms of management of budgets, schedules and personnel and will offer examples of common current practices. Also reproduced here is a survey of prop managers and its results, which was developed to produce facts and figures which are used as evidence. A direct comparison of educational and professional theater institutions has not been published. The evidence presented by the survey and a study of existing literature suggests that the two types of institutions are not as different as anecdotal evidence might suggest. This survey and the conclusions drawn here will serve as a starting point for an academic discussion about how prop shops are managed and how the subject is taught.

Chapter 1: Introduction

As I began my career as a prop artisan and manager, I heard many comments and anecdotes about how operational procedures worked at various institutions. People working in professional settings would comment on how things “were back in school,” people working in educational settings would comment on how things “are in the real world,” and other similar comments. Often the speakers would take a grass is greener on the other side stance, claiming that those working in institutions other than the type they worked in had an easier time accomplishing the tasks and responsibilities of a prop manager. For the purposes of this paper, the term “institution” refers to a professional company, producing organization, university, college or educational department so that one term can be used to identify multiple kinds of organizations.

Part of my decision to undertake this project was to better understand what claims that I heard from other prop managers and artisans were based on, test them, and either verify or refute preconceived notions about prop management at different kinds of institutions. I wanted to develop a quantifiable and detailed study of the two types of institutions, something free of personal bias and the inaccuracies of human memory.

I have produced a survey that is replicated in appendix one to gain a better understanding of the current practices of props managers. The survey has been used to generate statistical information and create an overall picture of how prop shops operate. The survey combined with the writings of other professionals creates the backbone of my work. On top of this I have layered my experience in professional and educational institutions. In the course of my education and career I have attended two universities, worked for a half dozen professional companies and visited about two dozen other institutions.

The purpose of the study is to produce a reference for researchers and working professionals and educators seeking to better represent the industry in which we work.

Chapter 2: Current Books and Reference Sources on Props Management

Many instructional references exist on the subjects of carpentry, fabric work, metal work and other crafts commonly used in prop shops. Few references exist on the subject of how an individual manages the finances, personnel, and production schedule in prop shops. There are only two books published in the last few decades concerning the managing of a prop shop. In their introductions both authors speak to this lack of written material and both are primarily focused on the regional theater business model (Strawn x; Mussman, *The Prop Master* 3).

Sandra Strawn mentions one hundred and sixteen universities offering undergraduate prop craft courses, and five offering graduate level courses, she speaks of props management courses only at the universities that offer graduate courses (26). Mussman says that “most institutions emulate...professional theater” and that the methods she writes about are “universally applicable” (*The Prop Master* 4). While she does not specifically mention colleges and universities, Mussman is implying that those institutions are teaching students in a professional context, while acknowledging the “differing frameworks of each organization” (*The Prop Master* 4). Strawn does say that she has written her book “for the student, prop professional, and prop enthusiast,” nonetheless her book is geared towards management in the professional setting and does not devote much time, towards how to manage students and balance instruction with the production of props for a show. Prior to these two authors, the most prevalent book on props from a management point of view, and not a craftwork point of view, is *Properties and Dressing the Stage* by Karl C. Bruder, published in 1969. It is important to point out that this book is part of *The Theater Student Series* and was written specifically for educational purposes. While other props management and craftwork books of the time are written and marketed as references and handbooks, this is the only one written specifically as a text book for classroom use. I am working to fill the research gap in the body of literature on props management by directly comparing the props management in educational theater departments with that in professional theater. My goal is to foster a better understanding of what practical differences exist in managing a prop shop in various types of institutions.

An interesting current trend among authors in this field of study is that their published books are often outgrowths of their websites. Hart and Strawn, who both published books in 2013, continue to post to their websites and make references back and forth between the two resources. The published books, by Hart, Strawn and others, are important because they lend credibility to the author as well as the student referencing the author. In an industry where work is often executed by untrained professionals and maybe volunteers, it is important to have credible references for a classroom setting. Websites, on the other hand, are important because they allow students, researchers, and practitioners access to up to date information from currently working professionals and educators. This intermingling of hardcopy books and internet resources is reflective of modern classrooms that require students to be fluent in both types of references.

My survey and research will provide statistical data reference which is uncommon in the study of theatrical production. My work also overtly compares two segments of the prop management population which have not been directly compared in a published work before. This comparison between educational and professional institutions is something that happens in conversations between individuals in the work place and classroom. I am attempting to bring this casual conversation into to a realm where it can be studied and analyzed in a meaningful and measurable way.

Chapter 3: Summarizing the Survey

The survey I produced was a questionnaire for prop managers, seeking detailed information regarding their management of time, money and personnel in their shop. I began by asking a few general questions about their shop and institution so that I could categorize their answers during analysis and to direct the survey to questions specific to the type of institution they worked for. The survey continued to solicit data in three sections; personnel information, finances and budgetary information, and scheduling information. Questions were formatted in a variety of ways so that responses could be quantified and analyzed later. Some questions were required so that comparisons could be made across the board among all respondents. Other questions were optional if they were deemed to be non-essential or too sensitive in nature. At the end of each section as well as within specific questions, respondents were given the opportunity to make open ended comments which helped to create a more specific picture of each shop and manager's style. The comments were also helpful in allowing respondents to offer information that I had not anticipated. The survey was open for six weeks and once closed the data gathered was used to create statistics and establish trends.

I requested responses to my survey from 111 prop managers through the Society of Prop Artisan Managers (S.P.A.M.) and through 9 other personal contacts. Many of the members of S.P.A.M. were highly willing to participate in the survey because I am a member of the group. I solicited responses from other prop managers through professional and educational contacts. The group of people that I have surveyed is a representative sample of the general population of prop managers, equally balanced between educational and professional, large and small institutions, and a variety of affiliations with conferences and organizations. The League of Resident Theaters lists 74 constituent member theaters and the University/Resident Theater Association lists 53 member schools and partner theaters (LORT, URTA). Of the S.P.A.M. members, 77 work for institutions that are associated with either LORT or URTA (S.P.A.M.). In a 2014 survey of theater professionals 172 people out of 766 claimed to work in the props area (Peoples). Mr. Peoples sought respondents through a number of professional organizations such as S.P.A.M., the United States Institute for Theatre Technology, and thecontactsheets.com. He received responses from theater professionals nationwide who identified themselves as working in 93 different types of jobs divided into 25 different areas of production and management in the entertainment industry. When asked to choose just one job title by this survey, only 25 respondents chose to solely identify as a props master, 4 as props designer (Peoples). According to the report produced from that survey, 22% of theater professionals work in props and 4% are props managers (Peoples). It is significant to note that the population which I surveyed was a smaller subset of the population Peoples surveyed, and we contacted many of the same people. I had a larger total number of respondents than the number of his respondents that self-identified as members of the subset which I was studying. He surveyed all theater professionals who were not actors and got responses from 25 prop managers. I surveyed prop managers only and

received 34 responses. The ratio of requests to responses that I received supports the validity of the results of the survey and helps to balance out any responses that are outside of the normal range.

Of the 120 people I contacted 34 completed the survey. This was a 28.33% return rate. Responses varied enough across multiple fields that the results of the survey represent a general cross section of the industry. As shown in Figure 1 below, there were 9 responses from prop managers at educational institutions and 25 from professional institutions. The size of prop staffs, including the manager, varied from one person to seven people and the average props budgets on individual shows ranged from \$500 to \$15,000. If there is a sampling bias, it is toward prop managers who are members of S.P.A.M. However, it is difficult to ascertain whether this is a bias in the sample population or a trend in the real population because there is not publicly available a database of prop managers who do not affiliate with professional organizations. There may be many prop managers who have affiliations with the United States Institute of Theater Technology or other groups, but the membership of such organizations and their job titles are not public record. One under represented group is prop managers working at for-profit institutions.

Any graphs and figures in this document were derived from the survey. The survey and its results can be found in Appendix 2. The anonymity of the respondents was protected by not asking for any personal, institutional or geographic identifiers and by requesting that they never name any of these items in their open ended comments. To further preserve the anonymity of respondents I have omitted their written comments, some of which may have contained information that might be used to identify the respondent or the institution they work for.

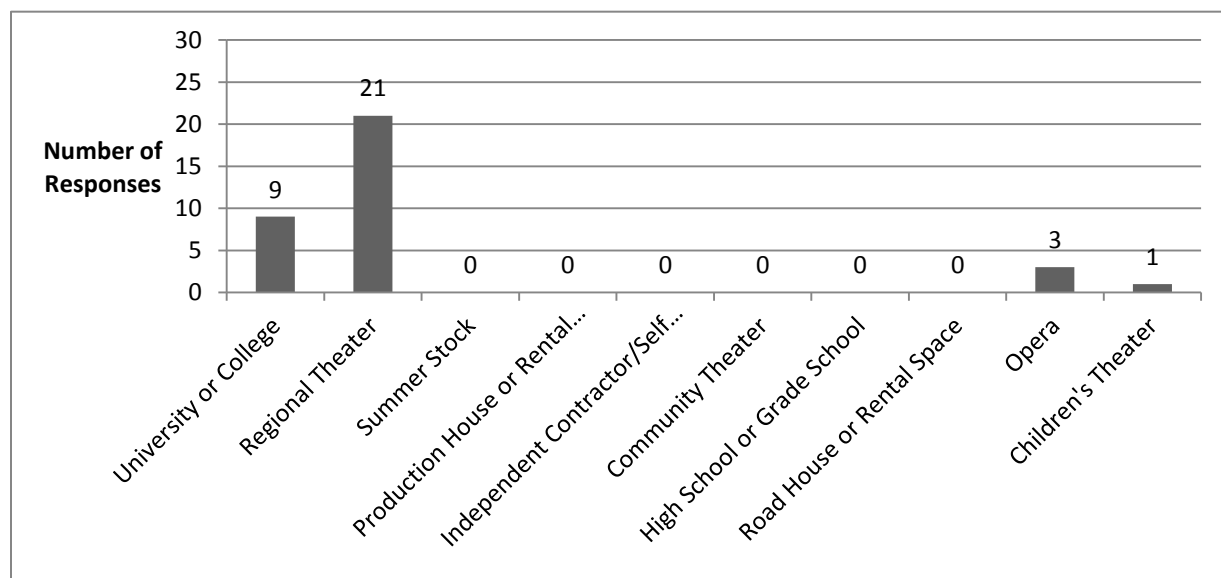


Figure 1: Types of Responses to the Survey

Chapter 4: Outlining Types of Theaters

The kind of organization in which you work will affect how you work. The propping processes will remain the same no matter what kind of theater organization you work with, but how these places conduct business can differ widely. For example, a professional theater is not going to have the same methods of operation and business structure as a school theatre would. Even though the aspects of putting the show together would be similar, the framework and chains of command vary and will have a bearing on how you accomplish your work. Institutional differences are expected (Mussman, *The Prop Master* 37).

Theater props shops fall into a small number of institutional business models; For Profit, Not For Profit and Educational. Most For-Profit props work is done through a “prop house” which produces or rents items on individual contracts and are not associated with any one particular performance group. Some of these have a large warehouse of props storage available to clients to rent or purchase. Some have a shop capable of building and modifying items to meet the specifications supplied by clients. Most have both of these capabilities. There are a small number of for-profit performance groups that keep their own prop shops, but these tend to be large companies that operate on a continental or international scale. A prime example of this is Cirque Du Soleil, who’s “Creative Center” in Montreal houses facilities where they create props as well as build scenery and develop specialized performance equipment used exclusively in Cirque Du Soleil productions (Cirque Du Soleil). Prop shops working for motion picture studios such as MGM also fall into the For Profit category.

The majority of theaters in the United States hold a Non-Profit status with the Internal Revenue Service under U.S. Code 501 subsection C. Professional not-for-profit theaters are often members of the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) and therefore hold collective bargaining agreements with theatrical unions. Most of the time the collective bargaining applies to actors, directors and designers. Some larger regional theaters also have bargaining agreements with musicians, ticket vendors, and with stagehands and shop workers. When this is the case, laborers and artisans in the props shops are paid wages and benefits set by union contracts and work hours are regulated by the union. For a prop manager this means that they might be required to allow their union affiliated workers to take breaks of a specified length at specified intervals among other requirements. The most common union represented in shops is the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, IATSE. Managers are not included in the bargaining agreements. Many not-for-profit theaters do not have agreements with these unions and still execute professional contracts in their props shops. In these cases artisans and managers alike execute their own contract negotiation. Also shop operation hours and break times will be based more on negotiation between the manager and workers than on standards set by unions or other organizations. There are “community” theaters which hold a 501(c) status and operate primarily on a volunteer basis. Few community theaters employ a prop manager, though some do have technical staff to oversee the construction, installation and operation of technical elements.

Universities, colleges, high schools and other educational institutions also produce theater, and much of their work is executed by their faculty and students. Some educational institutions do work with outside groups to create props. Some might have volunteers that work to help the educational mission of the institution; others might rent from or contract with professional theater institutions. There is a group of theaters that are closely associated with universities but still execute professional contracts as a separate institution. Many of these types

of theaters hold collective bargaining agreements through the University/Resident Theatre Association (URTA). In the URTA associated theaters the props staff of the professional institution and educational institution are so entwined that the same prop shop and manager work for both institutions and the operational management of the prop shop is indistinguishable between the types of productions. Because these prop shops often have students working on professional shows and the prop manager works for the educational institution as much as he or she works for the professional one, I have chosen to refer to these as educational institutions for the sake of this study. This current work will focus primarily on Professional Non-Profit theaters and University theaters, both URTA associated and not.

Chapter 5: Outlining the Goals and Responsibilities of a Props Manager

The head of the prop shop is the prop manager. Many theaters use other titles for this position; the most common is “prop master.” Other equivalent titles include “props director,” “prop mistress” and “prop designer.” These titles vary primarily based on differences in the managerial and artistic responsibilities of the position within an institution. Mussman uses the term prop master and has this to say, “The prop master is seen as the true manager, the official head of the department, reporting to the production manager in line with the other production department heads” (Mussman, *The Prop Master* 17). For the purposes of this discussion the term “prop manager” will be used, because no matter what title is used in any specific situation, the head of the props area has managerial duties that include those described here.

In addition to the managerial duties, nearly all prop managers will be involved with the creation and acquisition of props at some point. In larger shops with multiple artisans, the prop manager will less frequently build props. In shops that do not employ artisans the manager will build and acquire all of the props, as well as execute all of the managerial duties. Prop managers at educational institutions spend less time than professionals on the acquisition and build of props, as seen in Figure 2. This might be because they are giving students the opportunity to build props as part of their training. It may also indicate that prop educators use their stock items more often than buying or building new ones. This would support the anecdotal idea that educational institutions have lower expectations of production quality. The prop managers at these institutions might be inclined to choose the best piece of what is already available rather than acquiring the prop that meets the exact specifications of the show. Further explanation on why a university might prefer the use of stock over a newly acquired piece can be found in Chapter 7 in the section titled *Methods of Acquisition*. Prop educators may also spend less time on acquisition of props because they are spending a large portion of their day in the classroom.

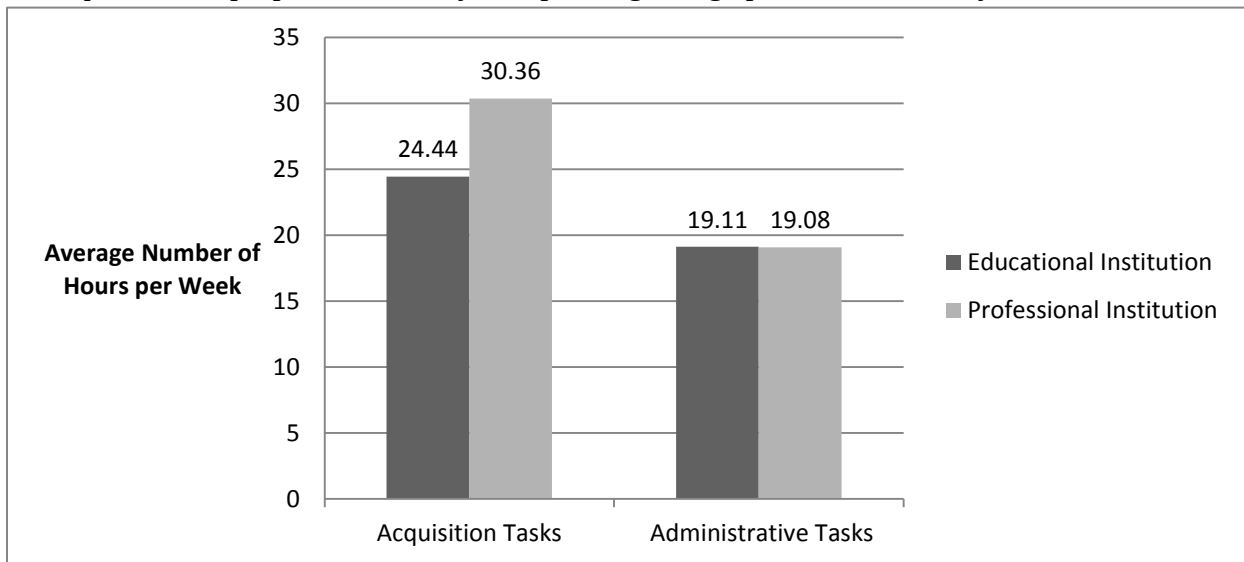


Figure 2: Hours of Acquisition vs. Hours of Administrative Tasks

The goal that is common among all theatre properties shops is to produce all of the properties for a given show within the parameters set by the scenic designer and meeting the needs of the show as outlined by the director, stage manager, and playwright. A prop manager's job responsibilities as outlined by their institution are aimed at achieving this goal. In addition to his or her contractual job responsibilities a prop manager will use personal managerial styles and techniques to help achieve this goal.

The production of props for a show is the primary responsibility of any prop manager. Tangential responsibilities within the props area are those which exist to support the production of show props or are an outgrowth of that duty. Tangential responsibilities include but are not limited to: work place safety, safe usage of props on stage, financial management, personnel management, work space maintenance, and management of a stock of props. Every prop manager will have tangential responsibilities; they are necessary functions of the primary responsibilities. Secondary responsibilities are duties which a prop manager is required to execute by their institution which are not necessarily related to the production of props for a show. There are events which happen at most theaters that require the support of the props area, and other areas, which are not fully produced performances. Secondary responsibilities include events such as fundraising events, staged readings or lobby displays. The number and type of secondary responsibilities a props manager has depends on the organizational structure of the institution he or she works for. Not every prop manager will be responsible for all of the secondary responsibilities, some may even have none.

Safety in its various forms is a tangential responsibility of the prop manager as a person in a position of authority and accountability. Going back to what was stated in the previous paragraph, safety is an outgrowth of producing props for a show; being a tangential responsibility does not mean that safety is a lesser responsibility. As an area head it is up to the prop manager to ensure that the work place where his or her employees work is safe. He or she needs to ensure that employees are safe from immediate injury and from long term exposure and usage injuries. The prop manager is also responsible for guaranteeing that the items produced by his or her shop are safe for actors, stagehands and others to use. Another responsibility that is tangential to the production of props for a show is the maintenance of all the spaces associated with the prop department. This includes the work spaces where items are created, the spaces where stock items are stored both long term and during the short term run of the show and may also include company vehicles used by the prop department.

Some situations allow a prop manager to defer some of the tangential responsibilities to other members of the prop shop or even another company member outside of the props area. Some prop shops employ a Shopper who manages much of the financial paperwork; some companies employ such a Shopper that serves multiple areas. Other companies, especially universities and large professional institutions, employ a Safety Officer who is in charge of maintaining first aid kits, MSDS catalogues and safety training employees in all areas. This person likely has certifications in skills such as first aid and CPR, and may hold a license and or have experience as a health care professional, usually either a nurse or emergency first responder. The safety officer position may be a standalone position, or it might be incorporated into the job responsibilities of another position, such as the prop manager or an assistant technical director. If there is not someone on staff at an institution holding the title and responsibilities of Safety Officer, area heads are responsible for the maintenance of first aid kits and safety equipment and training with their area.

Another tangential responsibility of the prop manager, as the head of their production area, is to attend specific meetings and be prepared to give a status update on the progress being made in his or her shop, ask questions and be an active participant in any discussions which involve the work of their shop. Most important among these are production meetings, design presentations, technical rehearsals and possibly preview performances. Often a prop manager will request that their assistant attend these meetings alongside them so that the assistant has all the pertinent information they need without having to get it second hand. Having the assistant present also means that if the prop manager is unable to attend a meeting, there can be a continuity of representation from the props shop. In an educational setting the prop instructor might require that students attend production meetings to observe the proceedings as a learning opportunity. If a student is the prop manager on a show, then the instructor would attend the meetings to advise and observe the student and provide feedback. A prop instructor will have similar standards for tech rehearsals as for the production meetings. In the professional setting it is less likely to find both the prop manager and prop assistant observing technical rehearsals. Some prop managers do not require other prop staff members to be present if the rehearsals are not during regular business hours. Other prop managers do require that another staff member be present, but working in the shop. Because tech rehearsals last many long hours, it is not uncommon for the prop manager to observe the first few rehearsals up until the show has been worked from start to finish one or two times. Then they might ask that the assistant or some other senior members of the props staff attend rehearsals in their place. Dividing the tech rehearsals among multiple people is a way to solicit another opinion on the work that has been executed or may need to be executed. The division of the task allows for the props staff to share the burden of the long hours. There can also be benefits for each individual who participates in the tech rehearsal. If an employee is paid hourly, they might accrue overtime hours, if not they might be reimbursed with comp time off later in the process. Another benefit might be a greater sense of involvement and accomplishment in seeing the prop shop's work integrated with other areas. Many artisans prefer to see their work in the context of the show before it is presented to an audience. They may then choose to make adjustments to the items they have worked on with the approval of the manager and designers. If the responsibilities of tech rehearsal are shared it also allows the props shop to continue working either on notes for the current show or on preparation and build for the next show. This practice is uncommon in the educational setting because the prop manager will want to oversee and mentor any work that is being done in the shop and as well as the proceedings of the rehearsal.

The means by which the primary, secondary and tangential responsibilities are accomplished is left to the prop manager. When asked how many hours a day they operate their shops, prop manager all responded about the same, 8.6 hours on average (Duvall). They use this time to complete the same kinds of tasks in order to fulfill similar responsibilities. As seen in figure 5 below, a difference between educational and professional prop managers and how they spend their time is that educational managers spend less time building and acquiring props than professionals do (Duvall). What this chart does not show is that prop instructors spend more time in the classroom and professional prop managers spend more time acquiring props for secondary shop responsibilities such as lobby displays and fundraising events.

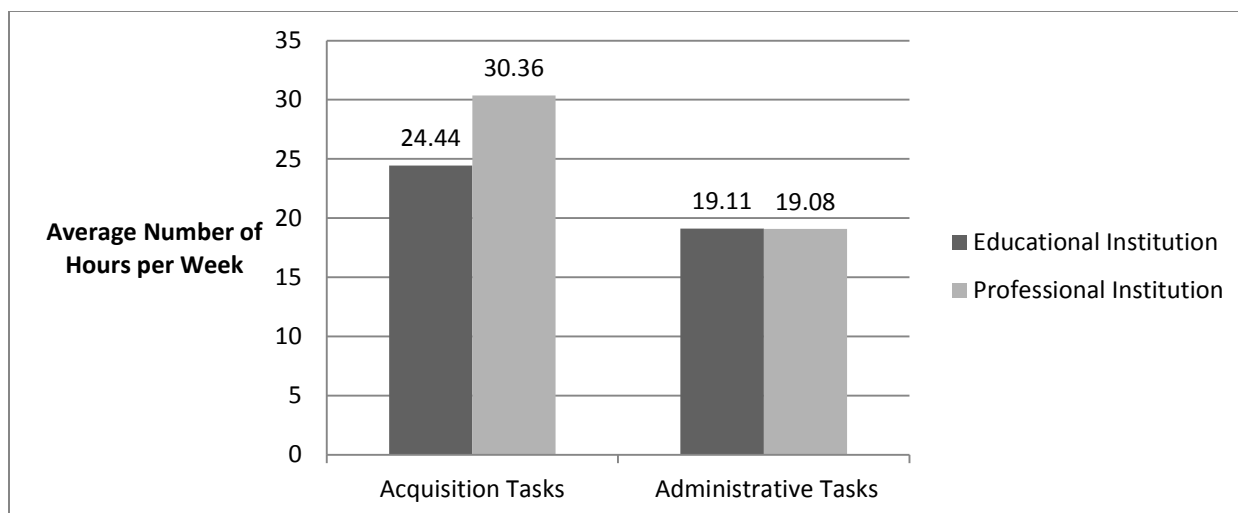


Figure 5: Hours of Acquisition vs. Hours of Administrative Tasks

The next few chapters will look at how prop managers utilize schedules, budgets and personnel to accomplish the primary task of producing props for a show, and compare how strategies differ between professional and educational institutions. These three items are resources that directly support the primary responsibility of the prop manager. As an outgrowth of the responsibility to produce the props for a show, it is the prop manager's responsibility to effectively utilize these resources.

Chapter 6: Outlining Three Areas of Management: Schedules, Finance, Personnel

This document will focus on three areas of management; schedules, finance and personnel. These are the three main areas a props manager can manipulate to accomplish his or her tasks and goals. As mentioned previously, the goal that is common among all theatre properties shops is to produce all of the properties for a given show within the parameters set by the scenic designer and meeting the needs of the show as outlined by the director, stage manager, and playwright. These other company members have the artistic quality of the show as their primary concern. These artistic qualities are subjective and difficult to define. Each show has a different appearance based on an artistic concept which is appropriate to the production. “The appearance of what finally reaches the stage is often a result of what is available rather than what is desired. These, it is hoped, are pragmatic choices dictated by time, budget and energy” (Sweet). Here “energy” is the effort expended by the personnel of the prop shop.

The prop manager uses schedules, budgets and personnel, which are finite and quantifiable resources, to create a product that has the intangible qualities of art. It is the prop manager’s job to realize a portion of the artistic concept through practical resources. Time, money and personnel are resources that every prop manager must efficiently utilize. There are other resources available to some prop managers but not others in varying quantities, such as a significant stock of items, a designated space to work in or other props shops to borrow from or work with. These resources vary greatly from institution to institution. By utilizing schedules, budgets and personnel a prop manager can compensate for a lack of any other resource. For example, if a prop manager does not have employees, then that person must execute all of the artisan work within the given time. If the budget allows, a prop manager working without sufficient personnel to accomplish a show within the time given might choose to either send projects to another institution to be built or choose to purchase and rent items instead of building them. If a prop manager has enough personnel to delegate tasks to, then he or she can spend more time building relationships with people who are willing to loan items, which could reduce cost. To save time and effort by personnel a prop manager might rent items from another theater or a prop rental house. If a prop manager has a large enough budget but no shop space, he or she could pay to rent shop space.

The budget, calendar and staff are set before a show begins production and a prop manager generally cannot increase these resources without decreasing one of the others. A manager’s effectiveness in juggling these three areas can show his or her skill in managing a props shop. “Most importantly, the properties director manages the build as it moves through the shop, adjusting crew assignments and determining priorities ... They also work with the production manager to balance the budget needs for the show and the personnel hires” (Strawn 16). I have chosen to focus on finance, time and personnel for this study because of their importance and universal application.

Chapter 7: Schedules

From what I have witnessed for prop managers there is a generally expected and accepted daily and weekly schedule. Most prop managers work on site or shopping for a show during regular business hours within the regular work week. This means roughly 8:00am to 6:00pm Monday through Friday, give or take a few hours. To this add the occasional weekend shopping day and after hours work at home on tasks such as reading scripts, making prop lists and planning work. The exception to this rule is load in and tech weeks which will add anywhere from 50% to 100% more hours to the workweek, according to comments made in the survey. Usually the prop master does not have a heavy say in the overall calendar of productions for a season in an institution. Items such as design due dates, first rehearsals, tech week and opening of shows are set by the artistic director, production manager and other administrators of the institution. In this chapter, I will discuss the deadlines a prop manager sets within his or her shop and how they fit into the larger calendar, events held by the institution outside of productions which need the support of the prop shop, and the daily work schedule for a prop shop.

Prop Shop Deadlines

Karl Bruder has this to say about creating props for a show, “Time spent planning props before casting and rehearsal saves the [artistic] team lots of hours and energy later, since many errors can be easily avoided by this process. As a rule, props are collected and stored right from the beginning of the preparation of a play, but they tend to show up for use onstage fairly late in the rehearsal process” (38). That is a generalization about the prop shop’s overall timeline in regards to the whole production. There are some more specific deadlines in a prop shop not found in other production areas.

A prop manager will set some deadlines that will only affect himself or herself. Most often these are deadlines for completing pre-build work such as reading a script and creating a props list, budgeting a show or researching a period and style of a show. According to the survey, most prop managers begin planning and budgeting a show 14 weeks before the rehearsal process starts (Figure 6). This is about 11 weeks before the average build process starts (Figure 7).

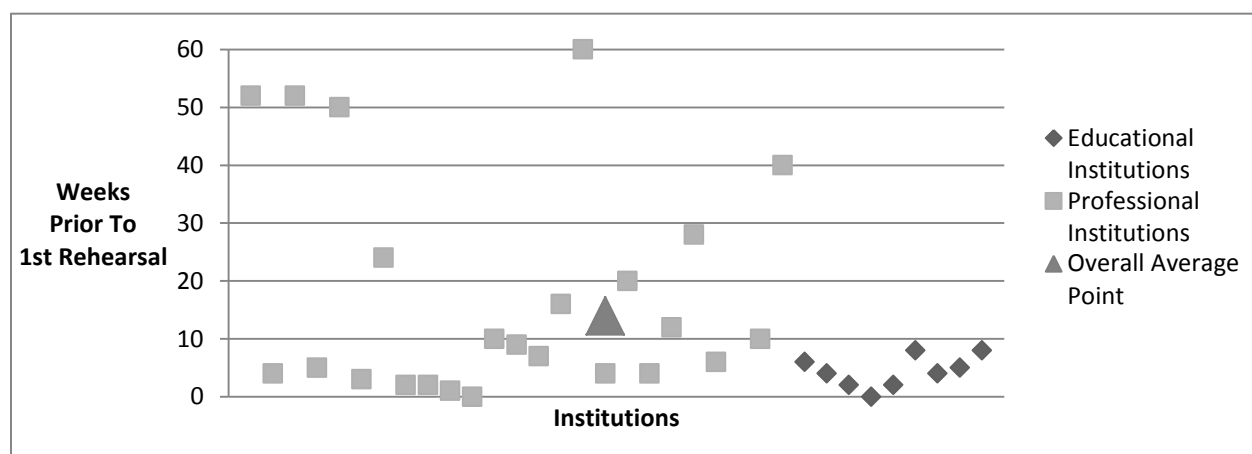


Figure 6: Advanced Budgeting Planning in Weeks

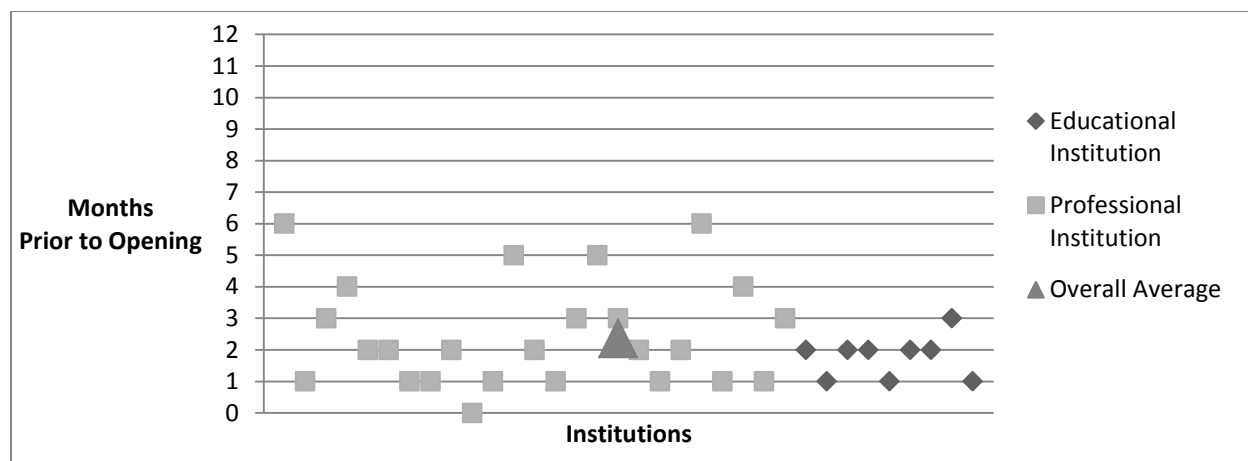


Figure 7: Start of Acquisition Prior to Opening in Months

“Understanding the script [and other preproduction and planning tasks] before the first production/design meeting is critical to participating as a collaborative and supportive partner in the design process” (Strawn 31). Reading a script, making a props list and researching a show allow a props manager to speak with other members of the production and design team in an informed manner. The first meeting about a show will happen weeks or months before the rehearsal and build process begins, and if a prop manager is prepared at this time, it will allow that manager to plan ahead, anticipate the needs of the show and organize their labor appropriately. Also having the planning finished earlier allows the prop shop to more efficiently react to changes required by the needs of rehearsals. Such planning makes it easier to meet deadlines that affect other areas of the production, like personal props for rehearsals or dressing for a set.

In an educational setting a props instructor likely will set some of the pre-production deadlines for a student in a managerial role. This might be done so that the instructor has time to review and critique the student’s pre-planning process and materials. An instructor might also choose to set the deadlines for a student with limited experience, so that the student can understand the benefits of the process and build good habits under the guidance of a mentor. It can be easy for a novice prop manager to spend too little time on budgeting and planning work on a show, because they do not have experience doing so and do not understand the advantages of fully completing these tasks. Conversely, it can be easy for the novice to spend excessive amounts of time on researching a show. “Although fascinating, flipping through [internet research] can consume valuable research hours and fail to provide what you are ultimately trying to find, especially if you are looking for something specific” (Strawn 38). Another challenge to a pre-planning process that a props instructor might face is that students who are working or managing for class credit may not sign up for the task far enough in advance of the production to effectively account for their contributions to the process. The artistic and production team may begin in October for a show that does not go into the shops until January which would split the divide between semesters. But students may not sign up for classes in a spring semester that determine their role in a show until the prior December. If a student is acting as manager, director or designer they must have committed to a show long before they have signed up for classes, so that the preproduction process can begin with enough time to complete the show. For these reasons prop managers in educational institutions may choose to manage shows that occur early in semester themselves, while assigning students to shows that occur later in the semester.

Rehearsal props are items built or pulled to approximate the prop that will appear on stage. A prop manager may choose to provide the item to rehearsal if he or she needs to have the real item in the shop. The prop manager must strike a balance between spending time providing the rehearsal prop and providing the real prop. The balance must be struck with the understanding that the rehearsal prop takes up part of the time, personnel and money that might also go towards the real prop. The deadline for rehearsal props will be very early in the production process. If rehearsal props are provided it is likely that the deadline for show props will occur later in the process than it would have been otherwise. This is true for managers in both educational and professional institutions.

Many professional prop managers who have the benefit of an experienced staff ask that their staff help to estimate completion times for individual projects. Strawn notes that “[Labor estimates] allow the artisan to break down the project into specific process steps...,” a process which would be particularly useful for a student learning to manage their own time in a shop. A props educator must be careful when allowing students to make their own labor estimates. The educator must ask questions like: “Is the student’s estimate realistic?” “Will the estimated timeline allow the student to learn about their personal work habits?” “Would assigning a shorter timeline push the student to work faster, and would that be a detriment to the quality of their work?” Questions like these allow the educator to tailor the production experience to the needs and growth of the student.

Another type of deadline that a props manager might set is a prop addition deadline. This is a date, often about a week before the first tech rehearsal, when no more major props can be added to the props list. Many prop managers will adjust the timing of the deadline in comparison to the start of tech rehearsal depending on the needs of the show, their relationship with the artistic team and the resources available to them. The prop manager, stage manager, director and designer agree to the date before the start of rehearsals so that work in the shop and in rehearsal can be scheduled appropriately. Creating an agreed upon point at which changes to the show are finished allows the prop manager time to address all of the needs of the production before technical rehearsals begin. It also allows the stage manager, cast and director to work with a defined set of props to create a fully realized show. In an educational setting the prop educator might also vary the addition deadline date in comparison to the start of technical rehearsals based on the experience of a student acting as prop manager.

Most show props can be broken down into a small number of categories; different managers create different categories for their shops. Bruder has only two categories: hand props and set dressing (37). Harvey Sweet adds a third category, personal items (220). Few prop managers have as many categories as Margret Harris who lists six; stage props and furniture, hand props, personal props, costume props, dressing, and light fittings (Motley 15-16). These categories not only help to identify props, they also help to prioritize the work to be done on the props. “The work of finding and making the props will, of course, not be finished by the time rehearsals start: it will certainly go on until the last minute” (Motley 14). Prop managers often set different deadlines for their shops based on the different categories they choose to define. Sometimes a prop manager will prioritize particular props specific to the needs of a show. If there is an item that should be into rehearsal early in the process for the director’s or actor’s needs this might be pushed ahead in the prop shop so that the item can be assessed and adjusted as needed. The deadlines vary based on when during the rehearsal and production process each type of prop is needed. For example personal props which an actor might use to help create their character are needed early in the rehearsal process, but set dressing which the cast never interacts

with is not needed until all of the scenery is complete and installed. “The director will be most anxious to see the furniture, because its size and shape will affect the ease with which the company can move about the space” (Motley 14). According to Mussman a prop manager should try to have the whole show propped by the time tech rehearsals start, and if 90% of the props are complete and the 10% that is left is small notes and set dressing then the build process can still be considered a success (The Prop Master 134).

Interaction between props and other production areas includes items chosen by the costume designer but supplied by the prop manager, things like parasols, canes, handbags and pocket watches. Some institutions will consider personal props to be part of a costume and not under the purvey of the prop manager at all. Some props need to be electrified, such as lamps. At some institutions this modification is made by the electrics department headed by the Master Electrician. The deadline for the completion of a prop that needs to be electrified will be set in coordination between the prop manager and master electrician. Similar deadlines are set when props need the cooperation of the scene shop, paint shop or sound. There are variances between institutions as to which area stores crossover items and is primarily responsible for them. The variances depend not on the type of institution, but the preferences of the area managers and the resources, including storage space, of each area. In all cases the prop shop will need to set a date to complete its work on a crossover item before handing it over another area.

As demonstrated in Figures 8, 9 and 10, 97% of all props managers try to have all furniture completed before the first technical rehearsal, 91% try to have all hand props completed before the first technical rehearsal and 65% try to have all set dressing completed by the first dress rehearsal. This means that 61% of props managers set a goal of having all props with which actors interact completed before technical rehearsals start. In educational institutions, the average prop completion goals tend to cluster closer to the designer run and first technical rehearsal. In professional institutions furniture and hand prop completion goals happen more often near the designer run and technical rehearsals, which is the end of blocking and acting rehearsals, the set dressing goal is closer to the final dress. The survey questions and comments sections do not offer any explanation regarding this difference between the deadlines at educational versus professional institutions. One possible explanation for the difference is that the educators are attempting to set goals that are easier for their students to achieve by either grouping all the categories of props on fewer deadlines or by pushing all of the deadlines back towards technical rehearsals. Another explanation might be that the professional prop managers are creating more deadlines to better delegate tasks and subdivide work.

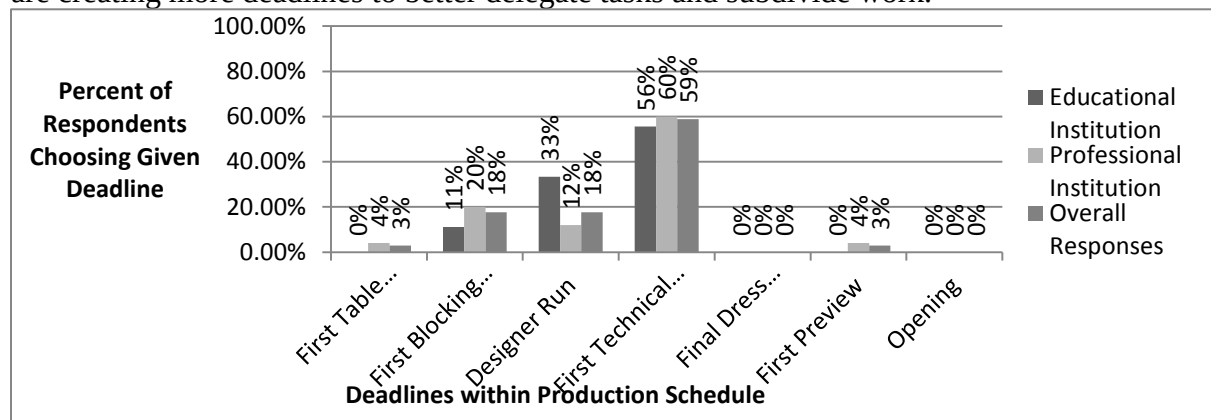


Figure 8: Furniture Prop Completion Deadlines

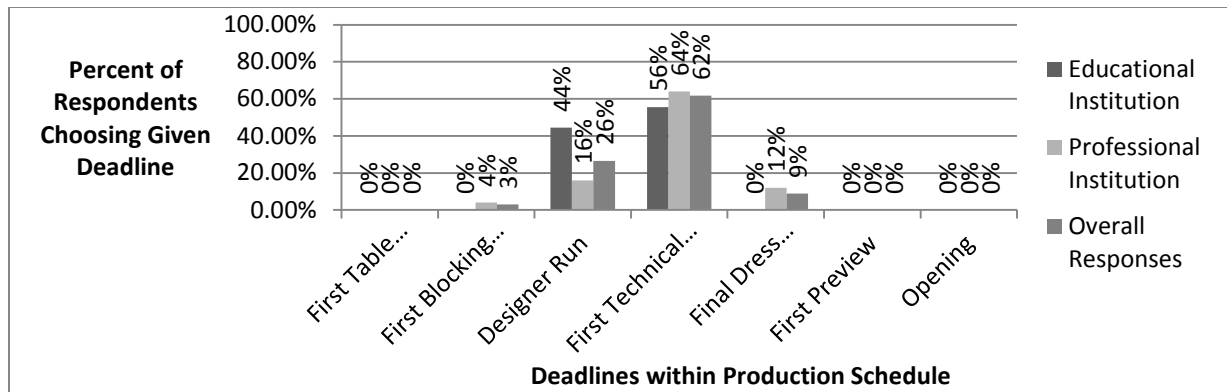


Figure 9: Hand Prop Completion Deadlines

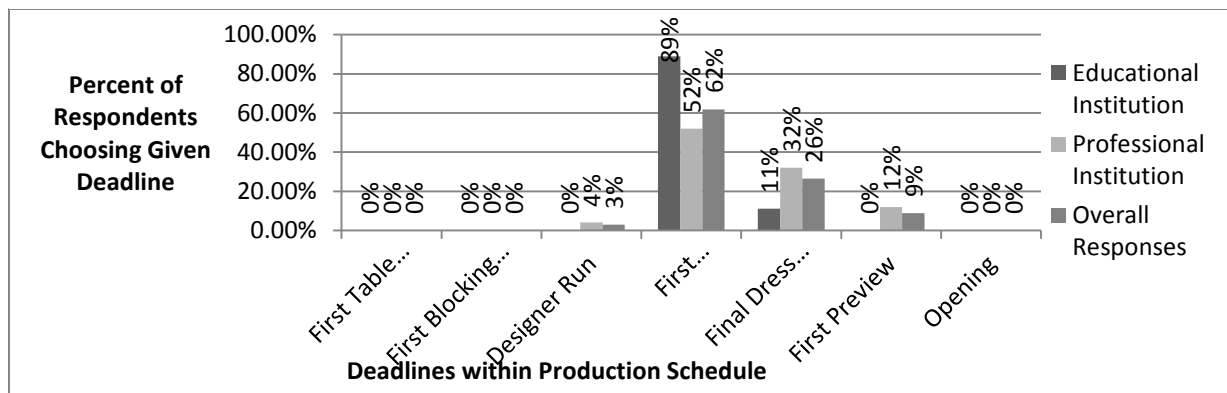


Figure 10: Set Dressing Completion Deadlines

Deadlines such as prop add deadlines or prop completion dates are never hard and fast. Usually they are set by the prop manager in order to help prioritize work and give employees a goal to shoot for. In some instances the production manager or stage manager might set these deadlines, as evidenced by Mussman's article *Top of the Props*, she lists "deadlines for rehearsal and show props" among other calendar items that are set by the production manager and other administrators, "production meetings, schedule for daily and technical rehearsals... and the performance schedule from previews to the close of the show" (48-49). Prop deadlines are subject to change depending on the demands of the show.

Educational institutions might be more likely to sacrifice some of these deadlines in order to provide student designers and managers with training they need to meet standards of production. This does not mean that the overall calendar changes. Things like first tech rehearsal, final dress and opening night are hard dates that do not change; in both educational and professional institutions it takes a significant disaster to change these kinds of dates. But dates that prop managers set for their own areas might be subject to change. In a professional props shop these goals and deadlines are set with the expectation that "additional help greatly increases the time you [the prop manager] have to get projects done, especially if the artisans possess the level of talent and knowhow to positively assist you [the prop manager] and accurately complete the assigned projects" (Mussman, *The Prop Master* 106). Those goals are also set so that the artisans have sufficient time to complete their projects with all of the appropriate input from designers, directors and stage managers. Educational prop shops will set similar deadlines to emulate the professional setting. However there is an understanding that the students may not "possess the level of talent and knowhow to positively assist you and

accurately complete the assigned projects.” The students might need more time and opportunity to hone their skills. It may be the case that students could be taking on rolls as directors or designers and might not be able to meet deadlines because of a lack of understanding of the process or the types of information need from them. Student stage managers also might not know how to communicate every piece of information needed to every part of the production team that needs it. Student prop managers also are learning how to prioritize their work and meet deadlines. If an instructor, either as production manager or props manager, sets the deadlines for the prop department, then the students might be allowed more leeway than in a professional situation because they are developing skills like work ethic and prioritization. If student prop managers set their own deadlines they might be allowed more leeway by other area heads because they are learning not only the work skills needed to set the deadline, but also learning how to set realistic deadlines for themselves and the shop they manage.

Many prop managers will work in both educational and professional institutions throughout their career, and they are using the same types of deadlines in both places. Prop educators are setting similar deadlines, and adjusting for the needs of an academic institution. In terms of the overall schedule of deadlines it appears that props managers working in educational institutions do their best to emulate a professional schedule for two primary reasons. First, it is a proven system that works well to complete a show to the specifications of the designer, director and others. Second, prop managers in educational institutions are training students to work in professional institutions, and are therefore setting an example of how to work in those institutions. The educational system is helping to support the current professional practices by training future prop shop employees under similar circumstances to what is found in professional shops. If props educators did not provide this type of training, then there would be a greater learning curve for entry level positions in professional shops.

Additional Events

Another scheduling responsibility that a professional props manager might have is to support events produced by the theater in addition to the main season shows. For all of these events the props manager will need to devote some scheduled time and labor from either his or her self or the prop shop personnel. Fundraising events might incorporate a small scale show or musical review that needs to be supplied with props. These are treated in a similar manner to other shows in a season with a limited budget and time obligation. The organization might also request that the props area supply items for sale during an auction or special event. Auction items tend to be recognizable props from shows which the purchaser would place value on because of their use on stage, not because of their market value. Fundraisers are meant to produce income for the institution; employee time is an expense for an institution. To properly balance income and expense managers will need to balance the amount of time scheduled to work on fundraisers against the institutional value of that event. Some theaters rent their spaces to outside organizations and individuals for corporate events, weddings and similar events. The props area may assist in decorating for these events and the institution could be seek further compensation from the client for the props artisans’ time and the use of stock props. Another type of event which might require the props department to allocate some time and labor is a theater’s educational outreach. Institutions could request that a prop manager spend some time performing guest lectures for schools which will pull the manager from their regularly scheduled workday. Talkbacks and interviews are also part of a theater’s educational and public relations outreach which a professional manager might be required to participate in. In all of these cases,

the additional events happen within the same scheduled calendar as the main stage shows. While a prop shop is producing props for a production, the manager must also balance time spent on the additional events. This likely means taking time off of the main production to serve the needs of the additional event, which would lead to a need to begin the process on the main show earlier in the overall season calendar to compensate for time spent on the other projects.

A prop manager in an educational setting will most certainly participate in talkbacks and question/answer sessions with student groups. They may also be required to guest lecture at other educational institutions as part of an outreach mission. In an educational setting they will likely not be required to participate in other kinds of special events and fundraising. Many universities do not allow for the sale of university property for the benefit of an individual area, shop, or department. Public universities and large private schools are financially supported by tuitions, grants, and public funding in ways that professional theaters and small colleges are not; therefore the larger institutions do not require theater groups to practice fundraising through secondary events. Because of this prop managers at educational institutions are not usually required to make compensations in their scheduling for these additional events. They may have to schedule time for the educational aspects, but these probably do not mean as large of a stoppage of work on a production and there for may not need larger scheduling compensation.

Shop Operation Hours

Sandra Strawn cites her 2012 survey of members of the Society of Prop Artisan Managers in regards to hourly operation of props shops; “Staff hours during non-tech weeks are commonly 40 hours a week with additional 10-30 hours during load-in and tech week” (23). These hours vary among the props shop staff. It is not uncommon for the prop manager to work more than 40 hours a week and for artisans to work less. Most prop shops work a five day week from Monday to Friday. This may change during a load-in and tech week because of the scheduled rehearsals. During these two weeks a prop manager may work up to 12 consecutive days from the Monday that begins a load-in through the weekend tech rehearsals up until a Friday opening. If a prop manager has an assistant he or she might delegate some of the long hours to the assistant to avoid burn out. Most likely the artisans in a prop shop do not work all of these days either; they will likely keep their regular five day work week. However, because the stage space is shared between the prop shop and all of the other production areas during load-in and because the prop manager is present for long tech rehearsals that often run late into the night, some prop managers adjust the daily work hours for themselves and their crew. This comes in the form of artisans arriving earlier in the day to perform notes on a show and ending work earlier to clear the stage so that stage management and rehearsals may have the space. Also, a prop manager may start his or her own day later to provide sufficient time off of work to rest after a late night.

During most of the year prop shops keep regular business hours opening between 7:30 and 9:00 and closing between 4:00 and 6:00. According to the survey prop shops operate an average of 8.6 hours per day (Duvall). Throughout the work day there are times provided for breaks and meals. At many institutions the prop manager determines breaks in conjunction with their staff. In larger regional theaters, these break times are determined by a union, when one is represented in the prop shop. Unions also determine the regular work week, setting the standard number of hours at 40 and requiring overtime pay for anything over 40 hours within a week.

At an educational institution the hours of operation are different because many of the weekday work hours are taken up with classroom instruction. This means that the students that

make up the workforce of the props shop are not available for labor and the prop manager also likely teaches some of those classes. According to comments made in the survey, prop shops that operate primarily on student labor often allow students to self-schedule their work hours around their class schedules. To maintain some control over the operational hours of the shop, many administrations of educational institutions schedule lecture style classes for the morning hours and practicum classes for the afternoon. Practicum classes allow for students to work as artisans in shops for class credit. This creates an environment where students can practice their skills under the supervision of a prop instructor while providing the prop manager the labor they need to complete a show. More often than not, the prop instructor and prop manager are the same person. The exception to a single person filling both roles is when students are working as prop manager on a show. Prop instructors who do not carry a full instructional course load spend some of their time without student labor performing the administrative duties of the prop shop or other duties required of them by their institution. Sometimes the prop manager uses these hours to go out and shop at brick and mortar stores. This means that educational shops are only building and pulling props during a limited number of hours on any given day, 4.9 hours per day according to the survey (Duvall). Because of these short hours prop managers do not give student workers extended meal breaks and likely limit the work breaks to one break from five to fifteen minutes long, if they provided a break at all.

Whether during tech week or regular shop operations prop managers at both kinds of institutions are generally accomplishing the same tasks in the same hours. The difference between the two tends to be how the prop manager divides their time. While a prop manager in a professional setting may need to juggle administrative and acquisition tasks simultaneously throughout the day and week, one in an educational institution may need to carefully divide their time so they can be present when students are working.

Chapter 8: Finance

I have worked at institutions whose annual overall operating budgets range from less than \$12,000 dollars at a community theater group to more than \$6,000,000 at a large summer stock opera company. This range is reflected in the prop shop as well. Some small institutions I worked for did not have any money ear-marked for props, requiring everything to be acquired for free or purchased out of other area's budgets. At the larger institutions I worked on shows where the props budget was too large for the show, and was never completely spent. The money budgeted for a show is intended to be used to purchase items for use on stage or supplies to create such items. This money is the subject of the first section of this chapter. The second section is about shop maintenance budgets and specifically applies to institutions which have a space dedicated to the creation of props. I have worked for some professional companies and visited smaller universities that do not have a physical prop shop. In these places, the prop staff shares work space with the other areas, most commonly the scene shop and costume shop. Institutions that do not have a separate prop shop usually do not have a budget for up keep of the equipment dedicated props. Many people view production areas only as places that generate expenditures for an institution. But in fact many prop shops have ways to generate some income. I personally have spent a significant number of hours at multiple institutions either working directly with external groups who want to rent props or prepping prop stock pieces to be rented. The amount of income a prop shop generates and the way in which it does so can affect the way that a prop manager operates their shop. It requires that they allow time and personnel to accomplish the task and can have a positive effect financial situation of the prop area or the larger institution. These methods of generating income are the subject of the third section of this chapter. The final section of this chapter is titled "Methods of Acquisition." While not all methods of acquiring props require that money be spent, a manager's choice of which method to use has an effect on the show's budget.

Show Budgets

"Every show has a budget and you should insist on knowing before you start work how much has been allocated to props" (Motley 13). It is important to any theater institution that a prop manager keeps each show on or under the target budget. The majority of theater institutions base their projected show expenditures on projected ticket sales and income from other sources such as donations, grants and in-kind services. Because all production budgets, including prop area budgets are based on an estimation that includes projected seasonal income, the prop budget is essentially an estimation of expenditures that can be incurred without doing damage to the overall operation of the institution. According to comments in the survey, many theater institutions will assign an overall budget to each show then the production manager and area heads work to divide each show budget between the various production areas. Other comments showed that some theater institutions will assign an overall budget to each area for a season, then the production manager works with each area head to divide the area's season budget between each show. At regional theaters there is a relatively direct correlation between the prop budgets and the institutional operating budget. At universities the correlation is less direct. Likely the theater department operates partially off of university funds, partially off government and foundation grants and maybe even some donations. Funds are also drawn from ticket sales, though they are generally a smaller portion of the institutional budget as compared to a professional organization. These funds are then balanced against both classroom and production needs. When the props area comes in under the projected budget for a show, then the larger budget benefits by coming in under projected expenditures.

The budgeting process begins with a preliminary budget made using the props list as approved by the artistic team. A preliminary budget is the prop manager's estimation of the show's needs. As the process continues the preliminary budget is checked against the target budget, and adjustments are made to bring the two in line with each other. The prop manager uses research and experience to estimate how much each prop will cost and determine if the current design of a show is feasible. Budgeting choices may depend on the availability of certain materials and tools in a shop. Prop managers working in professional institutions will often seek out the advice of their artisans when creating a budget. The artisans will have ideas about what methods and materials will serve the needs of the props to be built for the show. "Knowledge of materials, of how they behave and how to manipulate them is crucial to success in prop making; without it you cannot decide how to make something, calculate costs, plan your time or predict how things will work" (Wilson 7). Sometimes, because they often operate as specialists in a specific craft, artisans may have better ideas for materials, tools and techniques than the manager might. In an educational institution, where the artisans are mostly students, the manager may not rely heavily on input from the artisans to create the budget, but an educator may ask students to produce a budget for specific projects as a learning opportunity. A professional institution might choose to spend more on materials than what an educational institution is willing to pay. "When props are being made by professional prop makers it is the labour which is expensive, so it may be more economical to buy the better material; but if the designer himself, or an amateur [or student] prop maker, is doing the work it is obviously less extravagant to buy cheaper materials and adapt them" (Motley 13).

Preliminary budget information is shared with the production manager and designer and adjustments are made as needed. According to the survey 68% of theater institutions, both educational and professional, have a budgeting process that involved collaboration between all production area heads (Duvall). "Making a preliminary show budget ... should be done as a means to begin defining the show and what it will take to build it as designed" (Strawn 59). Such a process helps the head of the props area to determine how the show will proceed through the shop and to communicate any possible challenges before they become problems. A prop manager needs to be flexible with this budget and understand that it will most definitely change throughout the production process as props are purchased, built or pulled. Prop managers working with students need to be especially flexible as students will need more oversight, and will be more likely to make a mistake which would cost money. Everything from miss-cut boards to broken tableware is more likely with an inexperienced workforce. In such cases it would be prudent for a prop manager at an educational institution to include a little extra in their budgeting estimates for unforeseen expenditures.

As work begins on prop acquisition for a show a prop manager will transition from a preliminary budget to a working budget. This may not necessarily be a formal change in operating procedure, but may be a change from estimating to accounting for actual dollars spent and making adjustments to account for differences between estimates and actual expenditures. It is at this time that it becomes necessary to track each purchase and receipt so that the prop manager can maintain an accurate and up to date picture of the status of the budget of a show.

Many prop managers include a contingency in their preliminary and working budgets. A contingency in a budget helps to cover additions and changes that might come from the rehearsal process, an increase in the cost of goods such as lumber and other unexpected expenses. It also helps to ensure that even if some of the contingency money is spent, the show will come in under budget. The number of contingency dollars varies from show to show depending on the

complexity of the props for a show. Period shows and shows that have lots of consumable props or special effects require a larger contingency because period props may be hard to find, the amount of food eaten may vary depending on blocking or a special effect may cost more to produce than an initial estimate. Some prop managers set the contingency at a specific dollar amount, most use a percentage of the overall props budget for a show. The percentage used tends to range from 10-20% and will vary based on the show as well as the preference of the prop manager. If a prop manager is confident with their initial cost estimate, the contingency will be smaller. This confidence comes from familiarity with the director, designer, script and availability of appropriate props. Having a working relationship with members of the artistic team and knowledge of available resources can help a manager to anticipate the kinds of changes that might occur and make a more accurate preliminary budget, requiring a smaller contingency. An example of a show that needs a small contingency line in the budget would be a show that is being remounted from a previous production, the design is already set, props likely are already in storage and challenges are easily anticipated and may already have been solved. An example of a show that needs a large contingency line in the budget would be a new script that requires the actors to eat onstage. In an educational setting the props instructor might require student prop managers to have a higher contingency because of their inexperience and the likelihood that they will not create accurate estimates. Also, as mentioned earlier, a props instructor may have a higher contingency because students are more likely to make mistakes when building props which would require that more materials to be purchased.

If a show comes in under budget professional prop managers are more likely to have permission from their administration to use the unspent money on non-show related materials, such as new tools, maintenance in the shop or storage, extra raw materials or hardware to keep on hand. Educational prop managers likely do not have permission to spend excess budgets in this way. As seen in Figure 11 below, slightly more than half of the professional institutions give permission to use extra show budgets on non-show related items, while only about a quarter of educational institutions give this permission. If a show in an educational institution comes in under budget props managers tend not to be able to spend the money on non-show related materials. This is often because financial oversight is controlled by someone who works outside of theater and many purchases such as tools and furniture are viewed more as capital investments that need to be purchased out of specific budget lines. Some regional theaters operate in a similar manner, purchasing expensive tools or equipment from a capital investment budget. When this happens in regional theater there may have been a fundraising campaign to generate the money to purchase the items. The purchase of the items may also have been part of a larger capital improvement. If an institution is not using capital funds to purchase large equipment, then the purchase of such items might be worked into the budget for a show. By assigning a show a larger budget than what it actually needs, the institution can account for the purchase under the budget line for a show. Or the purchase can be made out of a larger operational budget line. The financial administration for the institution may be able to create a budget line for the purchase of large equipment that is separate from show and maintenance budgets. This is probably the method many prop managers would prefer and might be the cleanest in terms of book keeping. But it requires the prop manager to have a good rapport with the financial administration.

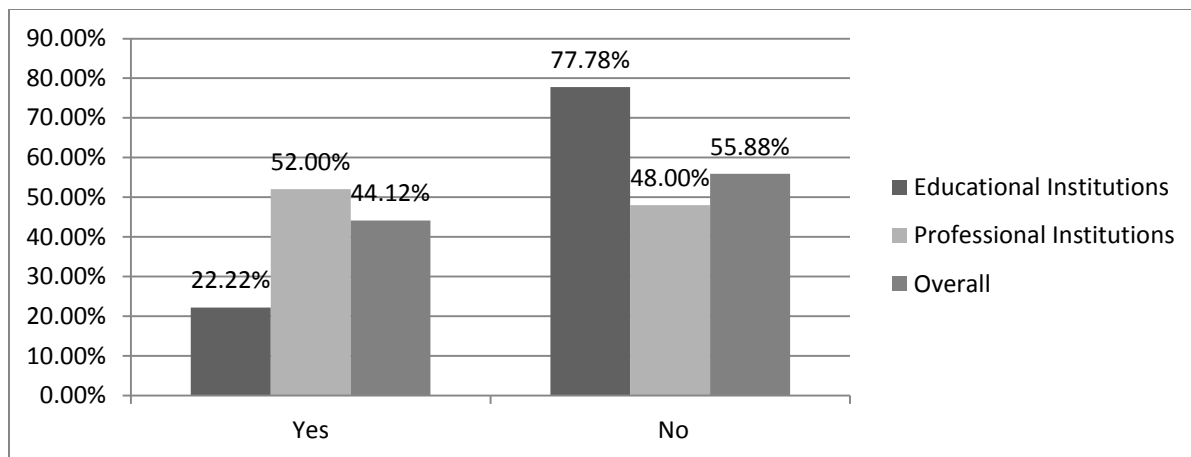


Figure 11: Percent of Institutions which Give Permission to use Excess Show Budgets

I had expected to find that educational managers would execute more financial work. However, when looking at trends in the data and comparing anecdotal evidence, it appears that prop managers at educational institutions operate in similar ways to professional shops. Even though the bureaucratic structure at a college or university may seem more complicated, in practice it is not that different from a professional theater. Part of this stems from the fact that educational institutions and most professional theaters are 501-c tax exempt organizations and must meet certain IRS requirements and keep their financial records in a specific way. Also, both educational and professional institutions have a bureaucratic structure that includes branches that oversee finances which are separate from the production branch. Because of this, there is a need for financial record keeping and accountability between areas. Figure 12 below shows that all prop managers spend a similar amount of time on budgeting paperwork. The comments made in the survey support this idea. It seems to be the case that because a college or university is a larger institution, they have developed procedures to standardize purchasing throughout all areas and have more staff to track the finances. In an educational setting the prop manager may need to take time to work through all of the steps and procedures prescribed by the financial administration. In a professional setting the prop manager may have to develop their own procedures to track purchases and rectify their receipts against the official record of purchases.

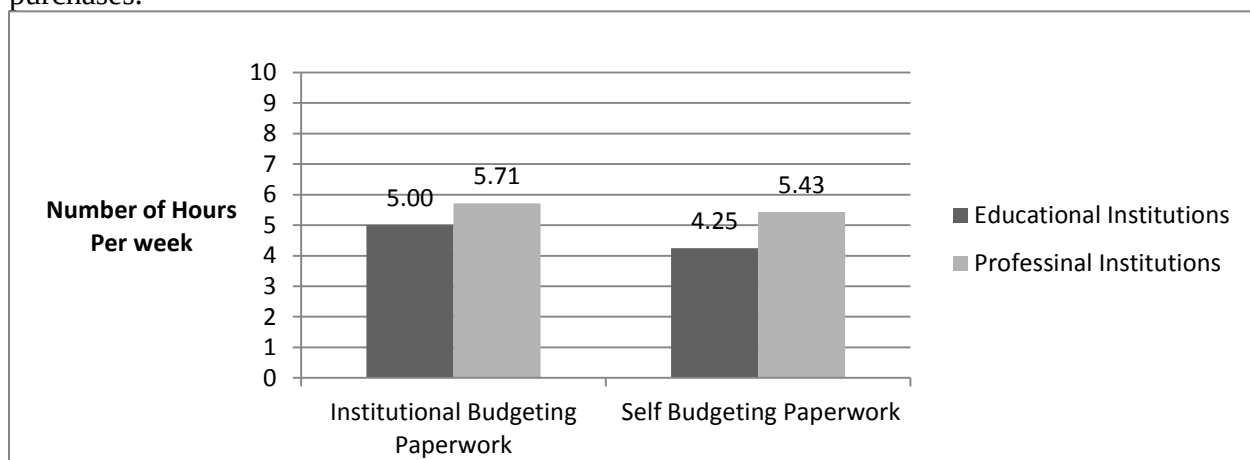


Figure 12: Average Number of Hours Spent per Week on Financial and Budgeting Paperwork

The amount of money budgeted to a prop shop for specific shows is dependent more on the comparative size of the institution than the type of institution. The largest regional theaters have similar sized budgets to the largest university theater departments, and smaller regional theaters have similar sized budgets to the smaller university theater departments. Within each institution budgets are scaled for each production in similar ways. The ratio of a budget for a small cast straight play to a budget for large scale musical at an educational institution is similar to the ratio of budgets for the same at a professional institution. It is not true that one type of institution has smaller budgets across the board than the other type.

Maintenance Budgets

Universities are large organizations with large administrative branches. “Depending on the accessibility and openness of the relationship between production and administration (usually a reflection of the size of the organization), [the] structure of control over the budget and how it gets spent may work as easily as having a designated prop budget for tool maintenance” (Strawn 67). Because educational institutions tend to view tools for props shops or furniture which makes up a stock of props as capital investments they tend to be purchased in a different way than lower priced props that are purchased for a show. Furniture, hand props and tools that are purchased for a specific show or project are easily assigned to a show budget. Some universities charge students specific fees attached to their tuition that are meant to purchase software, computer hardware and other technology. Some theater departments apply for some of these funds to purchase tools and equipment for prop shops, arguing that such items are “technology” that is used by students in the classroom setting. In contradiction to all of this, some educational institutions do provide prop managers with an annual props maintenance budget. In that case the educational prop manager tends to treat the budget in much the same manner as a professional prop manager.

In professional institutions prop managers are often given an annual shop maintenance budget. This money is intended for use on upkeep of tools, purchasing new tools and improvements and maintenance to the prop shop and storage spaces. This budget tends to be approximately equal to or smaller than the average show. Some prop managers attempt to spend all of the money they are allotted for this each year, so that their work spaces and equipment are always in good repair and continually improving. Prop managers who try to spend this entire budget likely wait until the end of the fiscal year to deplete the funds. This practice ensures that the prop manager has money on hand to take care of any emergency repairs or unforeseen purchases of tools needed for specific jobs. Other prop managers, in an attempt to save money, reserve the maintenance budget for repairs and essential maintenance. Managers working with this philosophy tend to seek the approval of higher management when making specific improvements or special purchases; even if those are paid for out of the same budget line. Administrators often encourage this second method because it means that the overall annual budget is more likely to come in under its target number.

In the case of maintenance budgets, increasing levels of bureaucratic oversight of finances might account for the differences between educational and professional institutions. In a larger institution, such as a university, where financial oversight is among a large number of people and procedures are standardized and codified it can be more difficult for a prop manager to develop the kind of relationship that will allow him or her to ease restraint on budgeting practices. In smaller institutions it can be easier for the prop manager to justify one time prop maintenance purchases made on a show budget and for the personnel in charge of institutional finance to give permission. When comparing the data on my survey, the universities that report

the smallest budgets, which indicates a smaller university and therefore also a smaller financial bureaucracy, also report having the ability to spend excess show budgets on shop improvement and maintenance. Smaller institutions which have smaller operating budgets probably do not have the resources to create a dedicated shop maintenance budget. In a larger bureaucratic structure, financial oversight is depersonalized. This could be an advantage because it is easier to unify budgeting and spending in all areas and every manager is held to the same level of accountability. It could also be a disadvantage when necessary purchases need multiple levels of approval from administrators who may not understand the need for the purchase. Another disadvantage would be when approval processes are not conducive to purchases which are time sensitive. This is not to say that only universities have this level of bureaucracy, some larger regional theaters and for profit institutions have similar financial oversight procedures.

Methods to Generate Income

One way for a prop department to generate income is to sell props. This is usually done because there is a need to reduce the props stock, not because the prop area or the company as a whole needs the funding. If a professional company is selling props because funding is needed, it is a sign of much larger financial troubles. A sale of overstocked props might happen on a regular schedule, once a year to once every five years, or it might occur on an as need basis. When this happens the least used items are culled from stock and sold either individually or as a lot to the public for a price set by the prop master and production manager. “Big Ticket” items such as expensive antiques or iconic props from shows are often sold at auctions.

While some institutions choose to lend props to others free of charge, “...some theaters and schools prefer to rent props rather than lend them” (Mussman, *The Prop Master* 113). Because the vast majority of prop shops have a stock of items that sit unused for long periods of time, a prop manager might choose to let some of these items out to other companies that need them. Items are rented on a weekly basis with the rental cost paid either at the beginning or end of the full agreed upon term. The price of the rental varies based on the value of the item and more expensive or rare items often require a security deposit that is paid back to the renter when the item is returned in good condition. The budget line to which the money earned off of rentals goes towards varies between institutions. Some theaters add the money to the general fund and list it as an income line on the annual budget. Other theaters allow prop managers to keep the money as petty cash dedicated to the props shop.

These forms of generating income become complicated in many educational institutions. Many universities consider things like furniture and lighting fixtures to be capital investments and require that they only be sold through the campus facility services or university surplus. This means that props which fall into this category must go through the university channels to be disposed of and if they are sold, the money goes into a budget line outside of the theater. Because of the difficulty of disposing of props and the loss of stock value, educational theater institutions tend to view props, especially large or expensive ones, as long term investments. University administrations and financial personnel may not fully understand the ephemeral nature and temporary status of stage props and settings and therefore may have a difficult time justifying expenditures on items that may only be needed once or twice a decade. It becomes an added responsibility of a university prop manager to help the administration to understand the need for purchasing props specific to an individual show and the need for a stock of props and its associated storage space. If a prop manager works within the proper bureaucratic system to dispose of props that are no longer needed, it can aid in the effort to build a relationship with the larger institution.

Methods of Acquisition

There are four main ways to acquire props; purchasing, building, borrowing and pulling from stock. These will be discussed in detail in this section. There are some other, less common ways, such as donation, to acquire props. But these are rarer and are highly based on very specific situations. Because of this, they are difficult to study and speak about in a generalized manner. The four main methods of acquisition are well known and documented.

Some prop managers prefer to purchase items if they can be found either online or in stores. Shopping can save time. Even if it is more expensive to purchase an item rather than create it from scratch, purchasing a finished item saves time spent building a prop from start to finish and one might be able to use time shopping to acquire multiple props at once. Mussman gives another reason to buy rather than build, “Long ago, it was less expensive to build things yourself than to buy them at the store. Nowadays, that isn’t always the case” (The Prop Master 115). However, there are downsides to primarily shopping. Purchased items may not meet the exact specifications of the show and would need further alteration. Shopping at brick and mortar stores requires the prop manager to be away from the prop shop, their team and other members of the company that might need to contact the prop manager.

The use of credit cards and other charge cards is becoming more prevalent for online purchases and for brick and mortar stores, and some institutions are moving away from using petty cash altogether. According to the survey 20% of all prop managers do not use petty cash, although 50% are reimbursed by the institution for purchases made with personal funds (Duvall). The difference between petty cash and reimbursement is that petty cash is dispensed before purchases are made and reimbursement is paid afterward for specific purchases that have already been made. Usually, according to the survey, a prop manager does not need to list a specific item for purchase when requesting petty cash from their financial administrators. Petty cash is often dispensed in the form of a check that is either cashed or deposited by the holder, if it is not dispensed in the form of actual cash. Not dealing in petty cash provides financial protection to the institution because it allows for better digital tracking of every purchase and it is easier to limit purchases if necessary. Tracking the purchases through a card system also protects the purchaser because verification of the purchase is made directly to the institution by a vendor through the card system; and not by receipts for cash or check purchases provided by the vendor to the purchaser then turned in to the institution’s financial managers. The bank or other institution which supplies the card also provides some protection methods against loss and theft. These methods of protection do not exist for petty cash. If a petty cash holder is robbed or loses the cash the liability may fall upon that individual who must reimburse the institution. In other cases the institution may take the loss and disperse more petty cash to the individual for the amount which was lost.

Whether using a card or petty cash for purchasing props, it is of utmost importance that a prop manager keeps receipts and other records of all purchases. Only with these items can an accurate budget be kept. 86% of all prop managers surveyed are required to rectify their receipts against the records held by their institution (Duvall). Of the five that are not required to do this, one operates only using reimbursement, one chooses to rectify for their own records, and the institution’s finance departments does the rectifying for two of the prop managers. By keeping a record of receipts received against expenditures dispersed a prop manager and his or her institution insure against unwarranted loss of funds.

A second method of acquisition some prop managers prefer is to build items from scratch when they can. This allows each piece to be built to the exact specifications of the designer and the quality of each piece can be carefully monitored. To build from scratch a prop manager will need to purchase raw materials, hardware and other goods in order to create the item. Building from scratch does take time and talent especially if there is a lot of detail needed in the design of the piece. Talent means a specific level of skill and aptitude that a staff member must possess to complete the creation of a prop. Also, a piece built new might need alteration and treatment to make it look old, a process known as “distressing.” If a piece is purchased used, it might be chosen over a new piece because it needs less distressing or is less expensive.

Borrowing, the third method of acquisition, is a skill that does take a special talent of a prop master. Props might be borrowed from vendors, individuals or other theater producing institutions. By borrowing I mean the temporary loan, rental or bartering of an item used as a prop. Knowing what stores and individuals are willing to loan or rent items takes time, research and negotiation. A prop manager must take care to maintain a good relationship with those stores and individuals. Maintaining a good relationship can result in the owner of an item being more willing to cut a deal for a prop manager. Often prop managers compensate owners of items not with money but with other goods or services. “Depending on the policies of your theater, bartering with those from whom you borrow can produce great results. Some theaters will let prop masters offer free tickets to the show or advertisement space in the play program as bartering leverage” (Mussman, *The Prop Master* 112). This requires advance coordination with other members of the company and with the item’s owner. One major downside to borrowing or renting is that the prop manager may not be allowed to alter the item.

When borrowing a prop manager should have a form which outlines the details of the agreement between the owner of the item and the borrower. This is also true if the prop manager is the one facilitating someone else borrowing from the prop manager’s institution. The form should give the following information: the name and contact information for both individuals and both institutions, a detailed description and/or picture of the item(s), the date the item was borrowed and expected date and time of return, the cost of the rental and record of when it is paid, the cost of a security deposit if one is required of its receipt, consequence of damaging or destroying the item or not meeting the expected return date, whether or not the borrower can make alterations to the item, And a signature and date for the borrower and owner. Both the borrower and owner should retain a signed copy of this form. All of this information protects both parties from a misunderstanding of terms of the agreement. If there is a dispute of the agreement a signed form can help to settle the argument between the two parties, especially if legal action is taken. Often the borrower and the owner may have a personal relationship and a handshake agreement might suffice, but a written agreement will help to preserve that relationship should an accident happen and the item be damaged. If the borrower and owner do not have a personal relationship, the written agreement will serve as a means to clearly establish the boundaries and procedures of the agreement. And if the agreement is fulfilled to the satisfaction of both parties, it can be conducive to future borrowing.

Pulling from stock is a preferred method of prop acquisition by almost all prop managers. “Being able to utilize items purchased for previous shows saves hundreds of dollars as well as hours of labor otherwise used to find and procure the items” (Strawn 141). Items from a stock already owned by the company can be altered in any way needed, they do not cost any money to purchase, and require much less time to find and acquire. However stocks are a finite resource and large items such as furniture may need some level of alteration to meet the needs of a show.

This alteration can vary from a simple dusting and cleaning to major reshaping, refinishing and reupholstering. In reality most prop managers, working for either professional or educational institutions, use a mix of building, buying, borrowing/renting and pulling from stock.

Working at an educational institution often adds layers to the process of acquiring props, some layers present challenges others create some ease. For educational institutions that have a concentration in props production, building might be preferred because it provides students with the opportunity to learn and practice hands on skills. When building instead of buying props, there is another advantage to working in an educational setting in that there are students who provide a workforce to draw from. According to my survey, 88.89% of university props shops have at least one student working either for class credit or for pay (Duvall). The downside to these student workers is that they are still learning the skills they need and props that are built might take longer to produce or be of lesser quality. In addition, students are more likely to make mistakes which can affect the amount budgeted for a prop. A prop instructor will likely need to compensate for these mistakes by purchasing more material. Quality can be maintained through careful oversight by the prop instructor and through the use of stock items. From what I have observed, props stocks held by educational theaters are generally comparable to professional theaters. Large well established well-funded universities tend to have a respectable stock with a designated storage area similar to many of the midsized and larger regional theaters. Smaller colleges which own smaller stocks may not have a designated storage area, instead choosing to use prop furniture for everyday operations of their classrooms and offices, which is then pulled for use in shows. Strawn sights the size of university props shops as a reason to borrow items, “In small theatres and especially at the university and community theatre level, the properties director is often a one-person shop. ... The one-person properties shop usually relies on strong local contacts for borrowing items...” (16). Because colleges and universities have large groups of alumni and others that are loyal to the institution, sometimes a prop manager is able to leverage the good reputation of the institution to help in borrowing, renting or buying items from individuals and locally owned vendors. Many independently owned vendors are willing to give a reduced price to institutions because of their educational mission. Whether paying reduced price or full price, most educational institutions operate as not-for-profit groups under federal and state tax code. This can generate a significant reduction in the price of items because such groups do not pay sales tax. On the other hand, educational institutions often have a larger financial bureaucratic framework within which a props manager will have to work. There might be restrictions on where purchases are allowed to be made, what forms of payment can be used or how much money an individual can spend without seeking prior approval. For a prop manager to be most effective, they must be endowed by their institution with the authority to acquire items on behalf of the institution. In a list of borrowing guidelines Sweet specifically mentions this, “Only someone with authority to borrow should negotiate a loan and acceptance of responsibility for the borrowed item” (224). The ability to purchase, rent and borrow is a requirement for a prop manager at a professional institution. In an educational institution it may be more complicated for a prop manager to perform these tasks because the administrators that can give purchasing authority are outside of the theater and may have strict regulations on purchasing. Most universities have restrictions on the types of vendors where purchasing cards can be used and the amounts that can be charged to purchasing cards. Prop instructors often need to build a working relationship with financial administrators and help them to understand the need for purchases that other parts of the educational institution may not need to make. As you can see in Figure 11 on page 21, prop managers at educational institutions spend slightly

fewer hours on financial paperwork than those at professional institutions. There is a greater difference between the self-imposed budgeting work and the institution required budgeting work at an educational institution than the difference between the two at a professional one. One explanation for this trend could be that the difference is a result of the larger financial administration and bureaucracy that universities have. How individual shows are budgeted ahead of production is of little consequence outside of the production manager and area heads such as the prop manager. What is of consequence to the larger institution is tracking each purchase that is made and accounting for every expenditure. It could be possible that the larger institution of a college or university has a more effective and efficient means of tracking purchases and accounting for area spending. If tracking receipts is more effective, it would mean less time spent on the task and less need for prop managers to institute their own tracking process within their area.

Chapter 9: Personnel

I have been employed by institutions both as a laborer, as a mid-level manager and as head of the prop shop. As such, I have been involved in selecting the prop shop staff in different ways from different angles. The first section of this chapter discusses the personnel by looking at what skills they possess and how that affects the work executed in the prop area. The prop manager is responsible for selecting people based on the skillset they have. The selection process leads into the hiring process and execution of contracts which is the subject of the second section of this chapter. Contracts especially are not often discussed in published works and are frequently discussed among my prop peers. I wanted to make sure to include this section in my survey and paper to understand the concrete numbers regarding managers and their interaction with their staff's contracts. Third section looks at how a prop manager can maintain and increase the quality of work produced by their personnel. This is an area of particular interest to me as I have often worked directly with students, interns and other prop staff to help learn or improve skills. Personally I am always seeking to create better work from myself as a laborer. The fourth section deals with task assignment, a responsibility afforded to those prop managers who have a work force to manage. The only time I have worked in a single person prop area is when I was also serving in other roles as well, usually scenic designer/technical director. I have been lucky in that I most often worked with other people in the prop area. In some situations the other people in the prop area have been interns or students; which leads into the final section of this chapter which is education and mentorship.

Skillsets

The skills and craft work employed by each manager and his/her team vary greatly and will affect the type of work done in their shop. All prop managers play to their strengths and the strengths of their team. Some props must be built because they are designed specifically for a show, or because it is easier or cheaper to build the item than to purchase it. Very few shows can be produced without building or altering any props. Therefore prop shops must have the skills to be able to create objects from scratch. A good manager will balance the skills in their shop. If a prop manager is working as a one person shop, he or she will have to have a wide variety of skills or the ability to over hire workers or send work to outside shops. If the manager is able to have assistants and artisans then he or she should choose people whose skills in prop creation complement their own. For example a prop manager who is a good stitcher would hire an artisan who is a good carpenter. Because of the many different kinds of items that fall into the category of props, a prop shop needs to have the ability to create a wide variety of objects from a wide variety of materials with a broad base of skills and techniques. In a professional setting a prop manager working in a single person shop will be chosen by an institution in part because they possess a wide range of skills and talents. In a multi-person professional shop it becomes important for the manager to recognize the areas where they do not possess high levels of aptitude and be willing and able to effectively delegate tasks to skilled artisans. In an educational setting, selecting a support staff with a wide variety of skills and high aptitude is not an easy task, because in the vast majority of cases the prop instructor does not have the ability to pick and choose their students. At most educational institutions the prop instructor is the only professional in their area, all other workers are students. While these students may have some skills needed to balance out the talent in the shop, there is no guarantee, the prop instructor must endeavor to instill a large foundation of skills in their students.

Contracts

In a professional setting, a prop manager is usually highly involved in hiring the employees he or she supervises, according to my survey. In this setting a prop manager must seek out candidates for open positions, vet the applicants and has the primary say in the final hiring decision. This prop manager likely has the support of his or her Production Manager and other theater administrators in advertising for the position and sifting through the candidates. Large theater institutions have Human Resources departments that verify that candidates meet standard qualifications by checking criminal background, driving and insurance records and publicly available information. Depending on the size of the prop shop and how work is divided, a prop manager may also have a prop assistant help in the hiring process. According to my survey the prop manager in a professional setting also has the ability to reprimand, discipline and even terminate employees in their area. This is usually done with the support of the production manager, managing director and other administrators. Because a prop manager assigns work hours and expectations, he or she must maintain a work force that can meet those hours and expectations. The contract that an employee signs with an institution forms the basic expectations of their job description, further expectations are laid out by the manager overseeing that employee. If an employee does not meet those expectations it is the prop manager's job to address the problem, identify its cause and help an employee solve it in a reasonable fashion. The prop manager is the first level of assessment for their employees making sure they are meeting the contractual agreement. If an employee is unable or unwilling to meet the expectations of the work place, and the manager has addressed the problem, then the institution can take further action. Some theaters allow an employee's pay to be docked or other disciplinary action to be taken. In many cases these types of actions are required before a contract can be terminated. In most cases a prop manager may have partial say in what an employee may be paid, the length of an artisan's contract and if they receive a bonus. Rarely does a prop manager have any decision making capability as to whether or not an employee is paid hourly or salary nor other contractual benefits such as availability of insurance, retirement accounts, amount of vacation and sick time. These decisions are made by administrative branches of an organization overseen by the Managing Director. Most organizations create a baseline for these types of benefits and for amount of pay depending on how similar positions in other areas are compensated and on competitive market rates. These guidelines pertain not only to employees in the prop area but also the contract of the prop manager as well.

In an educational setting it is rare that there are professional employees in a prop shop other than the manager. Figures 2 and 3 on pages 6 and 7 show that the average educational prop shop has 1.6 employees. If there are additional employees, they are likely to be an entry level artisan, not another manager. This artisan may be employed only part time. Rare is the university that has multiple managers and instructors in the prop area. In a university organization a prop manager has much less responsibility for an employee's contract. They likely have no say in the contract length or amount of pay and do not have the ability to take disciplinary action. A manager may make recommendations to their supervisors in regards to these actions and whether or not to renew a contract. A university's Human Resources department will take a much more active role in the vetting candidates for open positions and will implement a standard process of filling an open position. Because universities have administrative structures much larger than any theater, the faculty, staff and service positions in that university are protected and filled with multiple instances of approval by the administrative structure of the institution.

A category of employee that is only found on the collegiate level is student employees, both on the graduate and undergraduate level. If the school offers an assistantship or fellowship for graduate level prop majors, these students are always employed in the prop area. Student employees have a much more limited contract than professionals in terms of responsibilities, hours worked and length of contract as well as pay and benefits. Some student employee contracts may be limited to the length of a semester, lasting as little as three months and limited to as few as eight hours a week. Other student employee contracts may last as long as twelve months and up to twenty hours a week with provisions for additional work hours. Student employees also do not receive any benefits beyond a paycheck. There is some variance among universities as to whether student employees are contracted on a salary or hourly pay. A university prop manager may help to recruit students to their area both as students and employees, but they do not have much, if any, control over student employee contracts. Often student workers in a prop shop are recruited from a larger institutional pool of workers. Because of this, many university prop shops, one third or more according to my survey, employ student workers who do not major in theater production (Duvall). Prop shop student workers may come from majors as varied as studio art to marine biology to chemical engineering.

In a professional setting most contracts are between nine and twelve months long. A twelve month contract means that there is little down time in both building and performing shows. Administrations consider this to be an advantage because they can keep producing income in the form of ticket sales throughout the year. Some regional theaters find that there are periods during the year where ticket sales are low. In some areas this period is in the summer when patrons are likely spending vacations in other places. Other theaters are located in places that are vacation destinations, for these companies the down times are in the periods between the winter and summer holidays. Because of these lulls in performances there is also a lull in production, and the administrations may choose to keep employees in the prop shop and other shops on shorter contracts. In other words institutions do not extend production contracts longer than the length of the performance season. According to my survey 40 % of the prop shops at professional institutions have a three quarter year contract (Duvall). Another solution that some theaters use is to build furloughs into an employee's contract. This allows the administration to be more flexible with placement of an employee's unpaid leave. It also allows employees a greater amount of security in their job position. For example, one props master surveyed has a twelve month contract with no furloughs, but their assistant has a twelve month contract with seven weeks of furlough spread throughout the year and the carpenter has a seven week block of furlough all in one block in the summer (Duvall).

Contracts for prop managers in educational institutions operate a little differently because they are usually built around the traditional academic school year. Because students generally are not present from mid-December to early January, nor from May to August, prop educators often are not contracted during these periods. Because build times and performances work around the academic calendar and there are highly limited classes to teach in the down time, administrations have less need to furlough employees in the prop shop and other areas, instead opting to create contracts that exclude the vacation months. In practical terms this means that most prop managers at educational institutions work on nine month contracts.

However, because prop shops begin their planning, budgeting and other duties well before a show begins work in the shop, many prop managers working in either an educational or professional setting find themselves working on shows while not on contract. This may mean they are reading scripts, making props lists and budgets and researching during the summer

months, but not building or acquiring props. This likely takes up hours of work but not physical labor, for which the prop manager is not compensated. In many institutions prop assistants and artisans do not execute the administrative duties within the prop shop. In professional theaters these employees are often on shorter, salaried contracts or are paid hourly. In educational theaters the students most often fill the roles of assistants and artisans, and therefore are not on paid contracts and do not fulfill any job responsibilities while not on duty.

Educational prop managers rarely get to choose the personnel that are working in their shops, either because these are students or because the institution has a heavy hand in choosing staff members. Because students have other obligations within the institution in the form of classes, their schedule is not solely dedicated to working in the prop shop. Therefore prop managers at these institutions do not have as much say over when there are workers in the shop. However, these same prop managers tend to have a clearer divide in their work day between administrative and shopping tasks and managing labor on the shop floor. Professional prop managers tend to juggle these tasks simultaneously because their labor is present for the entire workday. Professional props managers also have a higher quality of labor because they have an expert staff that does not need as much supervision. Because professional prop artisans need less oversight, their manager is free to complete other tasks while they are working. If the professional props manager finds that his or her staff does not meet the needs of the shop, then he or she has more ability to terminate the staff. If the laborers in a props shop are students working for class credit, the manager does not have the ability to terminate workers who do not meet the production standards. They must either help the deficient worker to improve or wait until such time as the worker reassigns his or her self. It is in personnel management the educational and professional prop shops vary the most, as compared to other areas of management.

Quality Standards of Production

The quality of the product produced in a prop shop is a personnel issue because the employees execute the work to the best of their ability. Although not directly commenting on the personnel, Strawn does comment on the mental abilities of a props staff in regards to quality of production; "High production standards supported by an understanding of how things work on stage demand innovation and a passion for doing this very specialized work to create props meeting the design parameters, production in a timely manner and working within the budget restrictions" (22). Qualities such as "understanding," "innovation" and "passion" are qualities and abilities held by props staff members and qualities that can be improved upon. The best way to increase the quality of a product is to increase the abilities of the props shop employees. In a professional institution this can be done in a number ways. The method that is usually the first resort is to purchase better quality of tools. Many props artisans prefer this because it involves the least amount of time and effort to get a relatively high degree of improvement. Better quality tools may come in the form of newer models of existing tools. Many new tools incorporate laser guides and fine adjustments that increase the accuracy of the tool. Or it may mean purchasing specialized tools that do a specific job better than existing ones.

Another method of improving production quality is to provide the employees with extra training. Mussman speaks about training within the props shop, "Theater, like any other art, encourages growth and supports all learning processes that benefit the production and experience of the artists. Training your staff to continue to learn and gather new skills while improving the old will take your entire department to the next level" (Mussman, *The Prop Master* 19). On the

job training is assumed to be part of a props artisan's job, because new tasks arise with almost every show. In regard to a prop manager searching for artisans to hire Bruder says, "He must train people who can help him collect or make the props and take care of them before, during and after their use in the play" (43). Bruder here assumes that education and training is part of the professional prop manager's job when speaking in broad general terms about the prop shop's responsibilities. In many regional theaters and production houses the constant nature of work makes it difficult to find time for continuing education. Some institutions understand the value of extra training and provide their employees with opportunities to attend evening classes or annual conferences; some even go so far as to pay for registration and reimbursements for travel expenses. A prop manager can support the continuing education of their employees by documenting to administrative personnel the tangible benefits of conference attendance or the increased production values because of new skills.

Internships are also a means for individuals to increase their skills and the quality of their work. If an institution offers an internship that pays less than minimum wage they are obligated to provide learning and professional development opportunities. While this legally applies only to for-profit institutions, many not-for-profit institutions choose to follow the regulations, because it provides a baseline for the compensation of interns (U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division). For many theaters professional development opportunities come in the form of performance reviews between the intern and their supervisor, portfolio and resume reviews, and presentations by guest artists. Performance reviews provide the intern with feedback on their work and a chance to develop as an artisan. Portfolio and resume reviews provide the intern with a chance to build their job application skills and prepare them to enter the workplace as a full professional. Guest artist presentations provide the intern with a chance to view the types of work executed by professionals. Generally, all theaters consider internships to be a hands-on learning opportunity. It provides the intern with the chance to work side by side with professionals and gain experience in the field. Professional theaters that are located close to educational institutions often develop a reciprocal relationship where students can take internships for course credit toward their degree. Over the course of a contract it is expected that the quality of an intern's work will increase, this provides a benefit to the area as well as the intern. Many managers prefer to hire employees that have had an internship because of the quality expectations placed on professional interns.

A third way to improve the quality of props produced might be to hire more personnel, either on a permanent or temporary basis. This can help by reducing the number of tasks assigned to each artisan and manager. Some people might be hired because they have specific talents that serve the current production needs. There are some disadvantages to hiring more people. If the new artisans are working in the same shop as the rest of the staff they must share the same space and tools, which may not have been chosen with a larger staff in mind. A bottle neck of work might occur if multiple artisans need the same tool at the same time. Another way to effectively increase the number of staff members is to hire out work to another institution all together. This may be more expensive, but if the proper outside institution is chosen the work will be of high quality. Sending jobs to other institutions might be a good option if the current institution's staff does not have the needed skills or the institution does not own the tools, materials or resources to accomplish the task.

In an educational setting a prop manager might choose to sacrifice the quality of a production to provide opportunities to students. According to survey responses 67% of prop shops in educational institutions give students class credit for working in the shop, and nearly

half employ student workers on a paid basis (Duvall). It is interesting to note that many universities have a general pool of paid student workers, so the students working in props shops often times are not majoring in theater or performance and production of any kind. Because the labor in these props shops is almost exclusively students, managers have an obligation to provide educational experience to their employees. This means that even if the manager has a high level of skill needed to build a prop or produce a show, they might encourage a student to take on the project so that the student can develop. As a result the final product might not be executed to the manager's professional standards, but the learning objectives of the individuals and the institution can be achieved. Because of the educational priorities of the institution, university theater productions some times are perceived to be of lesser quality than professional productions. However, the quality should not be measured by the product shown to the audience; rather the quality of the university production should be measured by the educational opportunities provided to the students.

Task Assignment

There are a variety of ways in which prop managers assign tasks to their employees. On one end of the spectrum is to assign one task at a time to the workers and to give all of the pertinent information at the time when the task is assigned. On the other end is to allow employees to self-assign tasks and gather all of the information they need for themselves from research and contact with other company members. Most prop managers work somewhere in the middle of this spectrum, allowing workers to choose some tasks that interest them while keeping a relatively high amount of oversight. There are two aspects to consider when looking at this spectrum, first how tasks are assigned, second how information about those tasks is disseminated.

Very few prop managers operate only on the control end of the spectrum when assigning tasks. It would be difficult to assign every task individually and keep all of the information compartmentalized. It would be a disadvantage to the head of the props area to micro manage tasks in such a way. If a prop manager assigns multiple tasks, an artisan can manage their time so that one project can progress while another has down time, such as paint drying.

Almost all prop shops allow for workers to request projects that interest them. This keeps employees interested in the tasks they are working on and keeps morale high. That said, it is the responsibility of the prop manager to keep an eye on the overall completion of the show props and keep tasks moving towards completion. This may mean assigning workers to tasks which they may not enjoy or reassigning workers to make the most efficient use of the resources at hand.

In an educational setting, prop managers assign tasks to student workers not only with the goal of completing a show but also with improving the skills of the student. This allows an instructor to assign a task that will challenge a student in an area where they might need to improve, or to allow a student to apply skill they have learned in a classroom setting to a show production setting. However, the prop manager also has to keep the time table in mind and may assign tasks to students that show a high degree of proficiency so that the needs of the show will be met. In a professional setting there is an expectation that workers will have a high level of proficiency in the types of task which they are likely to complete and be able to manage themselves to a greater degree. With this expectation in mind prop managers will try to hire artisans with expertise in certain skills that are needed to round out the overall skill set within a prop shop. The general trend in professional prop shops seems to be that prop managers will

take input from their artisans and assign specific large tasks allowing the artisans to work with relative independence. Prop managers that do this also tend to keep a list of other tasks that need to be completed so that artisans can self-assign small projects to work on in their down time.

A high degree of compartmentalization of information becomes a disadvantage because workers would lack an understanding of how their project fits in with the overall show. Many times artisans can help to foresee and overcome challenges when they understand how their work will interact with others. On the other hand it is not necessary for every prop artisan in a shop to know all of the details of the show being produced. This would create a quagmire of communication and might be a distraction for workers that should be focused on the task at hand. In large professional shops, especially larger institutions that operate primarily with guest designers, the expectation is that all communication between the prop shop and other areas will flow through the prop manager. The advantage here is that a props manager has all of the pertinent information and communication with the guest artists is streamlined. In this situation it would be rare for a prop artisan to communicate directly with a designer or stage manager that is offsite. In smaller professional institutions and institutions that have resident designers or stage managers it would be more common for the prop artisans to speak directly with other areas and develop working relationships with those people. These theaters tend to have smaller prop shops, where managers and artisans are required to take on a wider variety of tasks. Broader communication and greater independence of artisans frees up the manager to complete production tasks that might be assigned to artisans in a larger prop shops.

Whether in a large or small prop shop, prop managers keep written lists of tasks to be completed and what is commonly called a “prop bible.” The prop bible is a collection of all of the information regarding a particular show; this includes but is not limited to: props lists, purchasing information, rehearsal notes, budgeting information, research, and design information. Strawn has this to say about the prop bible as a means of communication within the prop shop; “during the process of the build, when a question arises about how something should “look,” the best answer is usually available by reviewing the research materials and designer notes” (43-44). This compendium of information should be readily available to the artisans in the prop shop, either as an open source or by request from the manger. The information does not support the work completed if it is not properly distributed. Most prop managers make both the “to-do list” and the prop bible available to their entire shop. This allows for workers to self-assign tasks and to seek out information about their projects without taking the prop manager away from other tasks to answer questions. For this to be most effective the to-do list must be marked with priorities and be updated daily with notes coming out of rehearsals and performances. “Many times a director or an actor will discover something about a prop at rehearsal that creates the need for props to change some item, add a new one, or revise his plans in some way. A work list should be kept carefully and should include enough information so that the crew chief can know all about the problem and take action before the next time that prop is used” (Bruder 95). Bruder here uses the term “crew chief” in a way that indicates a middle manager within the props shop that others might refer to as a “prop assistant,” and what he calls a “work list” others call a “to-do list.” The assumption that Bruder is working under is that the prop manager will update the work list and the middle manager will make sure that he or she and the other artisans in the prop shop will use that list to self-assign tasks to accomplish what needs done. Strawn promotes combining the to-do list and props list as a means to managing

assignments in an equitable manner. “Putting artisan names to particular props allows the properties director to balance the load across the shop, see where collaboration is needed or determine whether a specialist/over hire situation is needed (Strawn 49).”

Task assignment is a job that requires a props manager to plan ahead. Even if the manager chooses to assign tasks on a day to day basis, he or she will need to have multiple tasks in mind for each artisan and be prepared to adjust assignments based on the needs of the production and the efficiency of the workers. “A good practice is to select the most urgent items from the complete list, and make separate lists of what should be achieved each day, even noting down the time each person or place should be visited, or each job finished” (Motley 8). In an educational setting a prop manager likely will distribute information more widely to other members of the prop shop staff. If the manager is a student, the instructor may require this information to facilitate mentorship. The instructor may require that the student copy them on all emails and written information and require a regular meeting either weekly or daily with the student manager to check on progress and address issues. If the prop manager is an instructor, they may distribute information to their students so that the students gain an understanding of the production and communication process. By setting themselves up as an example of a more ideal communicator an instructor helps students to strive for a professional standard.

In the largest regional theaters and production houses the head of the props area might delegate the management of a whole show to another individual within the props staff. The choice to operate in this manner is usually based on how many shows are in simultaneous production. The head of the department will be managing the overall shop and possibly one show, while at the same time the middle level managers are managing smaller scale shows. If this is the case the head of the area is often titled the “prop director” and the staff member managing a single show is sometimes titled “associate prop manager” or some variation on this theme. In this scenario the prop director sets the calendar for the entire season and some of the major deadlines for shows as well as helping the production manager in determining target budgets for each show. From there the associate prop manager will break down the calendar and budget for the specific show and will assign prop acquisition tasks to other prop staff members. Some theaters will hire the associate prop manager from outside the company on a show by show basis, not for the entire season. Other companies might temporarily promote a member of the company to associate prop manager, if they do not have someone in that position full time.

The management structure of props director to associate prop manager to prop artisans is very similar to the structure found in educational prop shops where students manage shows. In the educational setting the prop instructor will manage the overall shop, setting target budgets and major deadlines and likely taking on management of some shows. Students assigned to shows as prop manager are responsible for setting specific deadlines and making sure all of the props for the show are pulled or built and purchasing props under the supervision of the prop instructor. The student manager will also help assign tasks to student artisans, although it would be the responsibility of the instructor to oversee the work executed by the student artisans. The management structure and task assignment is further diversified when the institution has both graduate and undergraduate students which study props. If the graduate students who work in the prop shop are not concentrating in prop production, then they are put to work as artisans with a higher level of skill or independence than the undergraduate students. If the graduate students who work in the prop shop are concentrating in prop production, then they are assigned as managers on individual shows by the prop instructor. The graduate prop managers also have more responsibility in overseeing the undergraduate artisans. They will not only assign tasks to

student artisans, but will provide training in the shop as well, acting as a second type of instructor. The delegation of management on specific shows in an educational institution is a reflection of the associate prop manager/prop director management structure.

Education and Mentorship

As demonstrated in the previous section, the quality of a production could be closely associated with education and training of personnel. There is another facet to this association; mentorship. Professional shops may have internships which incorporate an educational or career development aspect, but this is not the primary concern of a prop manager when interacting with the intern. The primary goal of a professional prop manager is to accomplish a show as designed, on time and under budget. The professional prop manager will provide an intern with professional experience without the pressure of higher standards of product output placed on regular employees. With the intern in mind the manager must budget time and money for the interns inexperience, and must also budget personnel and time out of the production of props to train the intern.

In an educational setting a prop manager's goal is instruction and mentorship. This comes in two forms. First is in the class room. At universities all faculty positions, and some staff, are required to carry an instructional course load. Most prop managers are required to teach in their specialized field, and sometimes are asked to teach outside of that field. Primarily props courses focus on craftwork and hands-on skills, only about half a dozen universities are teaching prop management courses (Strawn 26). The classroom setting allows students to learn, test and practice skills and techniques before applying them to a fully realized show. Some educational prop managers try to incorporate elements of the current show into their classes to serve both the educational and production goals. This allows students to understand real world applications of their classroom material and it allows for the show to be accomplished utilizing the labor and resources at hand.

Second, prop instructors provide mentorship to student prop managers. This mentorship happens primarily outside of the classroom setting on the shows produced by the institution. The student might be a worker in the props shop working under the props manager and for their time they receive credit for practicum class. In this case the student worker is learning hands on construction and craft skills. Also a practicum student is acquiring a personal work ethic and learning to meet deadlines placed on them in a prop shop setting. According to my survey 66.66% of university prop managers have students working in this manner (Duvall). 44.44% of prop educators assign students to work as prop managers on specific shows (Duvall). This presents a whole different set of challenges and procedures for both the student and the mentor. The student has to learn and apply a whole set of management skills. Some of this will be limited of course, they will not get to choose their personnel, they will have to work within a predetermined set of deadlines, and they will have a different set of financial guidelines. The financial guidelines and rules placed on a student prop master may differ greatly from the professional management setting. Most educational institutions will only allow staff members to spend institutional funds, not students working for class credit. Which means a student prop manager will have to decide on what items need to be purchased either by research online or shopping at brick and mortar stores, then request that a faculty or staff member purchase them. There is a range of involvement from the mentor with purchasing power that varies from shopping alongside the student to requiring the student provide all of the information necessary to purchase a specific item at a specific price at a specific vendor. A mentor decides where along this scale they operate based upon a balance of learning opportunity versus oversight that a

student needs. A mentor may provide a student new to prop management with a great deal of oversight and guidance on how to spend a budget and how much time to spend on research and shopping. On the other hand a mentor may require only a few research images and a price range from a student who has had plenty of experience with shopping.

Regardless of whether the prop educator has assigned a student as prop manager on a show or is managing the show his or her self, their level of involvement with the show does not change. In other words, just because a prop educator isn't managing a show does not mean they have less work to do. The students still need oversight and mentoring. The prop educator must guide the student in developing their management skills. To do this he or she must know the task at hand as well as the student manager, or possibly even better than the student manager. Prop educators are also called upon to build items for shows which they are not managing, either because they have a higher degree of craft skill than the students or because the show needs them to act as extra labor in the prop shop. In the survey educational prop managers showed a higher average level of involvement in a student's show than a student's involvement in the prop manager's show. It is not that the level of commitment to a show changes for the prop educator; it is his or her role changes from administrator to mentor and craftsman.

Chapter 10: Educational Outreach

Many of the professional institutions I have worked for, and others I have visited or spoken with, include educational outreach as part of their mission statement and incorporate it into their regular business activities. The difference between this and the education performed at a school or university is demonstrated in the name “outreach.” The education is performed for groups and individuals that are not part of the institution. At educational institutions, both the instructors and the learners are members of the institution. Doctorial and graduate students, like myself, are members of the educational institution who fill both roles as instructor and student. No member of a professional institution is considered to be a student, although some interns could be considered to be learners. That is why the professional institutions need to reach out to other institutions to perform any educational part of their mission.

As part of educational outreach, professional theaters might produce a small show with educational value that tours to schools in the region, they might reserve special performances of a show for school groups, hold “talk back” sessions with audiences or host backstage tours for board members or donors. A prop manager and their personnel might be asked to participate in any or all of these kinds of activities. This means the staff of the prop shop should be prepared to talk with members of the public about their work, both in general and about specific shows. Because of the institutional involvement in educational outreach some prop managers will put together a package of props and other demonstrational material. This kit might include material that demonstrates typical prop work, props that are well known from popular shows and props that are unique and exciting or perform an unexpected trick. The kit, often referred to as a “dog-and-pony show,” helps to generate excitement about the work done in a prop shop as well as educate the public about the work most frequently performed. As part of the “dog-and-pony show” the prop manager or designated staff person will need to have a practiced demonstration and explanation of the items as well as be prepared to answer a multitude of questions. “Talk back” sessions are another instance where the prop manager will need to answer a multitude of questions from the public. These usually occur before or after a special performance that has been arranged for a specific audience. These are all situations where a professional prop manager will need to schedule time and devote personnel to the institution’s educational outreach.

In addition to classroom instruction, prop educators will need to devote similar time and personnel towards similar activities. A prop manager at an educational institution may have a similar “dog-and-pony show” to take into a classroom, but rarely would he or she be called upon to make the demonstration to members of the general public. “Talk back” sessions may also happen for the props manager either in conjunction with a performance or in a classroom setting, but again these are usually only with students of the institution and not with other groups. This means that the students may be more familiar with the specific show or general production process and may have different types of questions. The “outreach” for an educational institution has the goal of recruiting new students and a prop manager’s involvement with it usually means that they are involved with a committee outside of the prop area. The prop manager’s presence on such a committee is part of a secondary responsibility to the institution outside of their production responsibilities. The extra educational activities that a prop manager undertakes are similar in both types of institutions. The difference is that in a professional institution the audience for the extra educational activities are members of the public, in an educational setting the audience is students who are members of the institution.

Chapter 11: Conclusions

Having completed this study, I have created what I believe to be an accurate picture of prop management at two different types of institutions. This study has shown that differences between prop management in professional and educational institutions tend to be much smaller than what common opinions might imply. Most of the differences in personnel and financial management arise from the larger more complex administrative structure that educational institutions have. The differences in scheduling the production calendar stem from the difference between professional contracts and season length versus the school year calendar and labor commitments of students. Overall, the work executed by prop managers working at both educational and professional institutions is very similar.

Many prop managers working primarily at educational institutions work at professional summer stock theaters during months that they are not on contract with the school. Some of the schools that retain a prop manager on staff also have a professional theater that is intertwined with the educational department, in which case one or both institutions could be an URTA associated theater. At some institutions, this accounts for the similarities in management between working professionals and educators, because one manager is being asked to fill both roles at once. Managers who work in either of these ways will bring their practices back and forth between the two types of institutions. In general, much of the similarity is intentional on the part of the prop educators both for the sake of the manager and for the sake of creating a training opportunity for students. This also means that educators are bringing their goals and tactics into the professional work place. This can be an advantage to a work force that might be weighted towards interns and entry level positions because the manager will be able to help develop the employees further and help to ease a younger employee from the education mindset into the professional workplace. Summer stock theaters are examples of institutions where the work force is weighted towards young people beginning their career, and as I just stated this is where many prop educators work when not on contract with colleges and universities.

Chapter 12: Areas for Further Investigation

The idea of a single prop manager serving both an educational and professional institution simultaneously is intriguing. According to their respective websites this kind of relationship exists between Louisiana State University and Swine Palace Productions, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Playmakers Repertory Theater, Yale School of Drama and Yale Repertory Theater, The University of Delaware and The Resident Ensemble Players (LSU, UNC, Yale, UD). These are just a few examples of partnered institutions; other examples of such partnerships can be found in the constituent members of The University/Resident Theater Association. The nature of each of those relationships is different for each institution. Prop managers operate in different ways respective to the nature of the relationship between the institutions, which raises questions about management styles. Does a prop manager working in this situation take different approaches to the shows for each institution? If students are working on shows for both institutions, is there a difference in the expectations of production quality from the students? There are answers here that could be sought using further studies, questionnaires and interviews.

Another area which I have begun to touch on is the pedagogy of props. Props education in a classroom setting requires a larger study and discussion of teaching practice and means of education. Course work focusing on prop production and management can and often does exist completely outside of the production of a realized show. In this work I have looked at the management of a shop producing realized shows that has students as its primary work force. For the sake of clarity of purpose within this document I have not investigated how instructors teach props management.

In addition to the way prop instructors teach their subject it would also be interesting to look at student success in prop classes. It would be good to have a deeper understanding of why students take the classes and understand how instructors approach students who might be taking a class primarily for degree fulfilment versus those who are taking the class because they have a genuine interest in the subject. In the section on personnel management I mentioned that prop managers at educational institutions often cannot pick their student labor because of how students sign up for classes that provide the labor. From a management perspective it is tempting to not invest in the student labor that is not interested in the work, but an educator has an obligation to the students taking a course to help them succeed. It would be good to understand how one justifies these two opposing viewpoints, if such viewpoints exist among educators.

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Appendix 1: Props Production Thesis Survey

M. Duvall Props Production Thesis Survey

Thank you for coming here to take my survey. The information gathered here will contribute to my graduate thesis. The focus of my thesis is a comparison of common practices and unique challenges of prop shop management in universities and how this compares to professional theaters and other props producing organizations. My goal is that this information can be used by classroom instructors seeking to expand their resources, students and researchers seeking a better understanding of professional and educational practices, and working individuals who may be seeking a change in employment. Your responses will be helpful in building a large set of data from which I will glean some general trends. Because I want to compare universities to professional organizations, it is of vital importance to have responses from those working as props managers both inside and outside of educational institutions. Please note that your response is completely anonymous, I will never be able to see your name or contact information nor will anyone else. Also I will not be releasing any of the raw data as part of my finalized thesis; I will only be publishing trends and statistics. Participation in this survey is completely voluntary, you may decide at any time to end the survey and your answers will not be recorded.

For the purposes of this survey, the term “institution” refers to a professional company, producing organization, university, college or educational department. The term “area” refers to the props department which you manage. There are four sections of questions, general Information about the company you work for and the shop that you manage, Financial and Budgetary Information, Personnel Information, Scheduling Information. Should you choose to complete the survey, it should take 20 minutes or less.

Please feel free to answer as honestly as you are able. In questions which ask for comments or "other" information, please do not give information which might identify your institution, yourself or any other individuals. In questions which ask for a number, time or dollar amount, please give your answer in the form of a whole number.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about this specific survey please contact me at duvallmatthew@yahoo.com

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about your rights as a survey respondent please contact Dennis Landin, Chairman,
Institutional Review Board, (225)578-8692, irb@lsu.edu

Thank you.

-Matthew Duvall

* Required

Once you have read and understand this page please select one of the following. *

You may choose to exit this webpage instead of answering this question.

- I agree to participate in this survey. Overall: 100% - I agree to participate in this survey.
Professional: 100% - I agree to participate in this survey.
Educational: 100% - I agree to participate in this survey.
- I do not agree to participate in this survey. Stop filling out this form.

General Information about your institution and area

The following questions are aimed at getting an overall picture of your workplace and the shop that you manage. This will allow for an "apples to apples" comparison of survey results. Subsequent sections will be customized based on your answers.

What type of institution do you work for? *

- University or College Overall: 26.47%
- Regional Theater Overall: 61.76%
- Summer Stock Overall: 0%
- Production House or Rental Warehouse Overall: 0%
- Independent Contractor/Self Employed Overall: 0%
- Community Theater Overall: 0%
- High School or Grade School Overall: 0%
- Road House or Rental Space Overall: 0%
- Other: Opera: 5.88%, Children's Theater: 2.94%

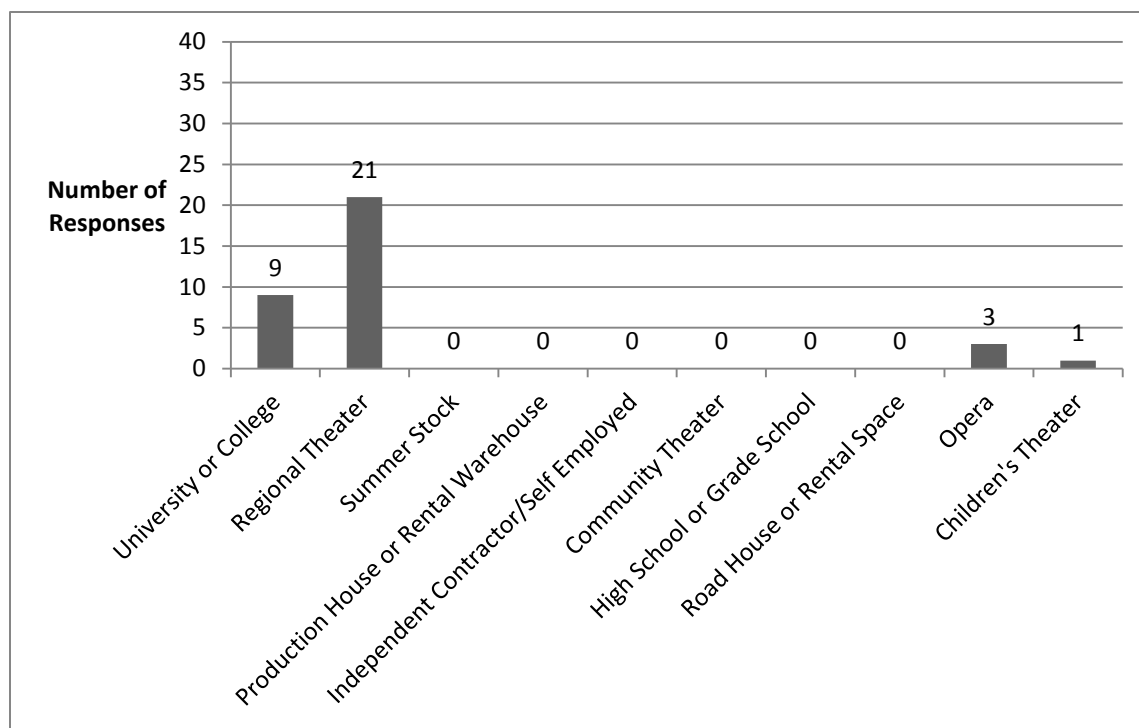


Figure 13: Types of Responses to Survey

What types of performances are produced by the institution you work for? *

Check all that apply.

○ Plays

Overall: 85.29% Professional: 80% Educational: 100%

○ Musicals

Overall: 85.29% Professional: 92% Educational: 66.67%

○ Opera

Overall: 29.41% Professional: 12% Educational: 77.78%

○ Dance

Overall: 8.82% Professional: 0% Educational: 77.78%

○ Children's Theater

Overall: 35.29% Professional: 40% Educational: 22.22%

○ Film - Movies or Television

Overall: 11.76% Professional: 0% Educational: 44.44%

○ Other:

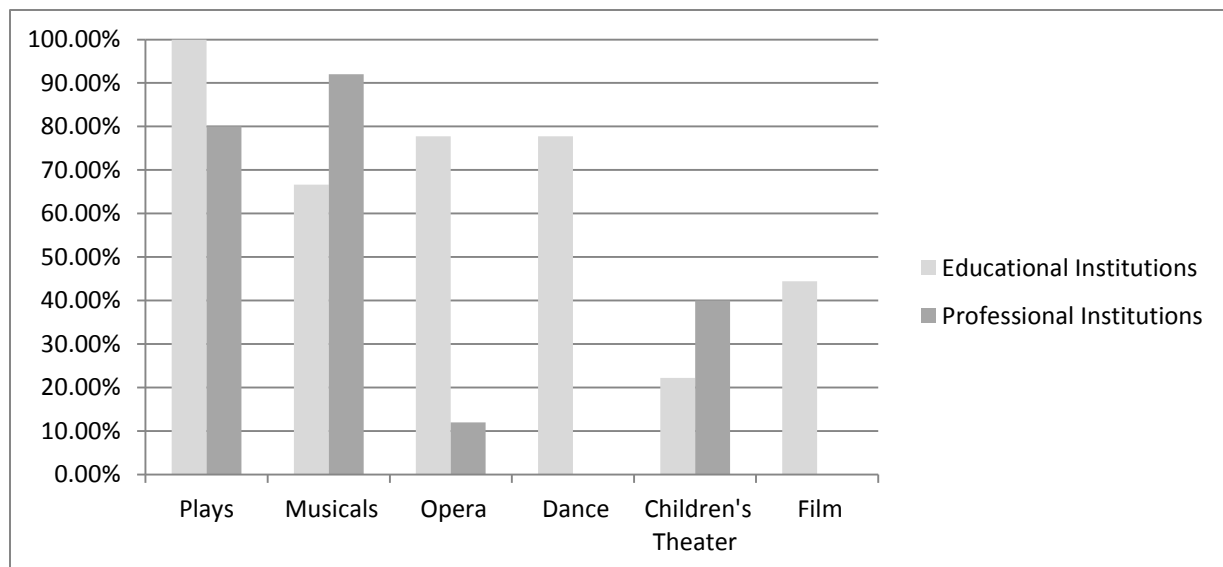


Figure 14: Types of Productions Performed at Each Institution

How many months long is your season? *

Overall Average: 9.7 Months

Professional Average: 9.9 Months

Educational Average: 9.11 Months

○7 Months	Number of responses
	Overall: 2
	Professional: 2
	Educational: 0
○8 Months	Number of responses
	Overall: 6
	Professional: 5
	Educational: 1
○9 Months	Number of responses
	Overall: 10
	Professional: 4
	Educational: 6
○10 Months	Number of responses
	Overall: 7
	Professional: 5
	Educational: 2
○11 Months	Number of responses
	Overall: 1
	Professional: 1
	Educational: 0
○12 Months	Number of responses
	Overall: 8
	Professional: 8
	Educational: 0

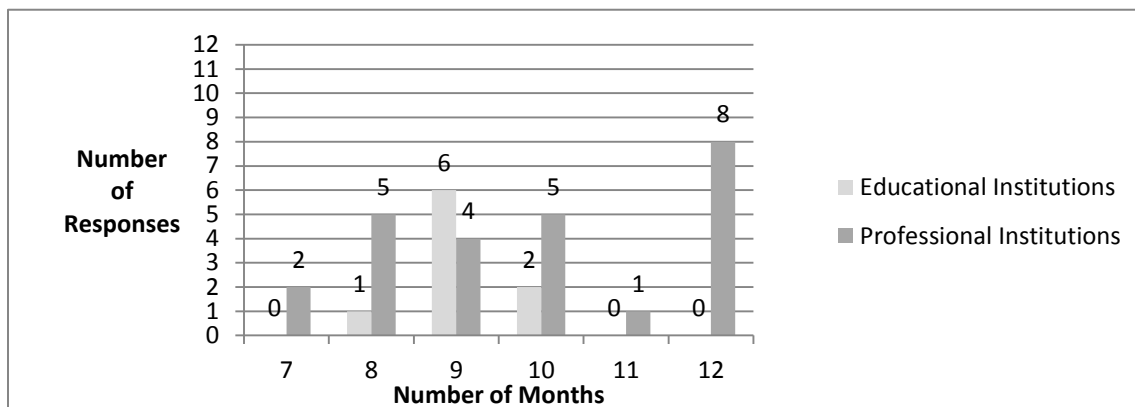


Figure 15: Length of Season

On average how many hours a week do you as a props manager spend acquiring and producing props*

Examples might include: shopping at local stores, shopping online, pulling items from stock, building props

Overall Average: 28.79 Hours
Professional Average: 30.36 Hours
Educational Average: 24.44 Hours

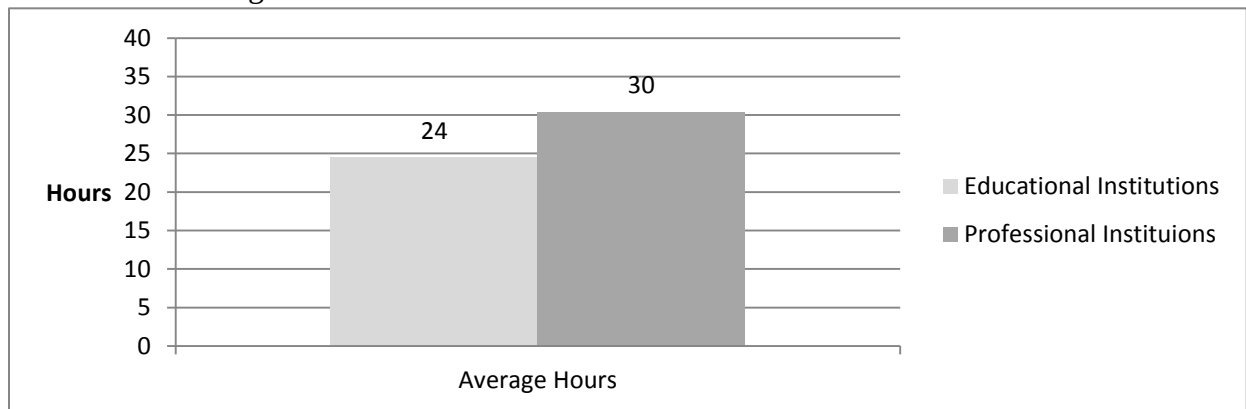


Figure 16: Number of Hours Spent Acquiring Props

On average how many hours a week do you as a props manager spend on tasks that are not directly involved in the acquisition or production of props? *

Examples might include: research on the period or style of shows, creating construction drawings for employees to use, planning and budgeting for future shows, maintenance of tools and workspace organization, rentals to outside institutions.

Overall Average: 19.09 Hours
Professional Average: 19.08 Hours
Educational Average: 19.11 Hours

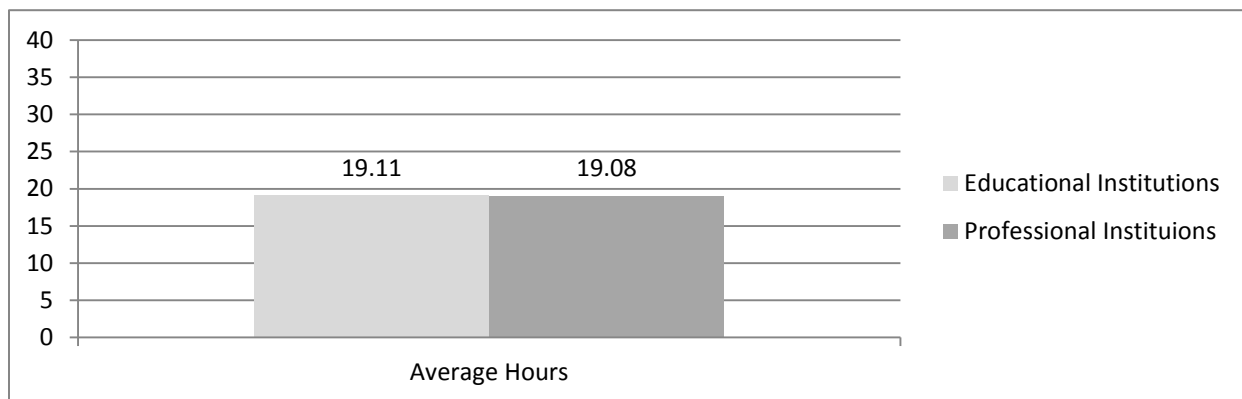


Figure 17: Number of Hours Spent on Administrative Tasks

Personnel Information (Professional Institution):

The questions in this section are in regard to the people that work in your shop and how you are involved in their employment. Please include yourself among the employees in your area when considering your answers.

How many people are employed full time in your area? *

Overall Average: 2.67 People

Range: 1 – 12 People

Professional Average: 2.96 people

Range: 1 – 12 People

Educational Average: 1.89 People

Range: 1 – 4 People

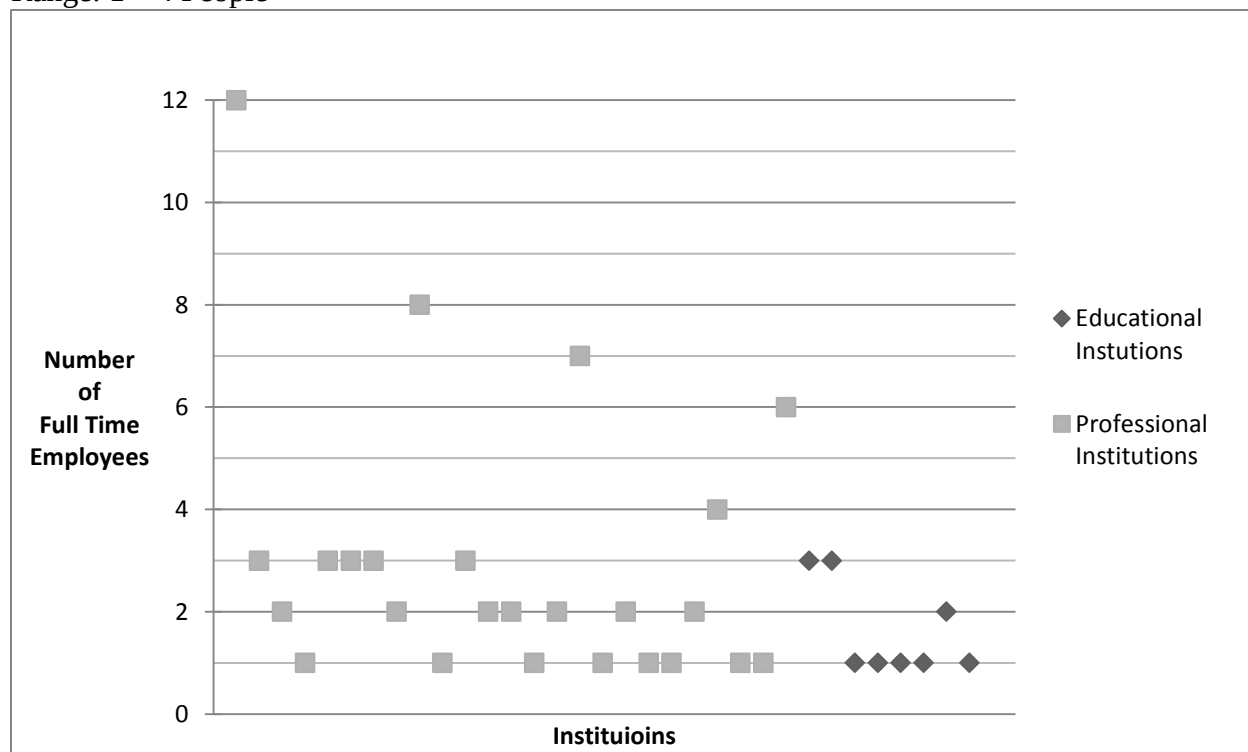


Figure 18: Number of Full Time Prop Shop Employees

How people are employed part time in your area? *

Overall Average: 1.35 People

Range: 0 – 7 People

Professional Average: 1.36 People

Range: 0 – 7 People

Educational Average: 1.33 People

Range: 0 – 6 People

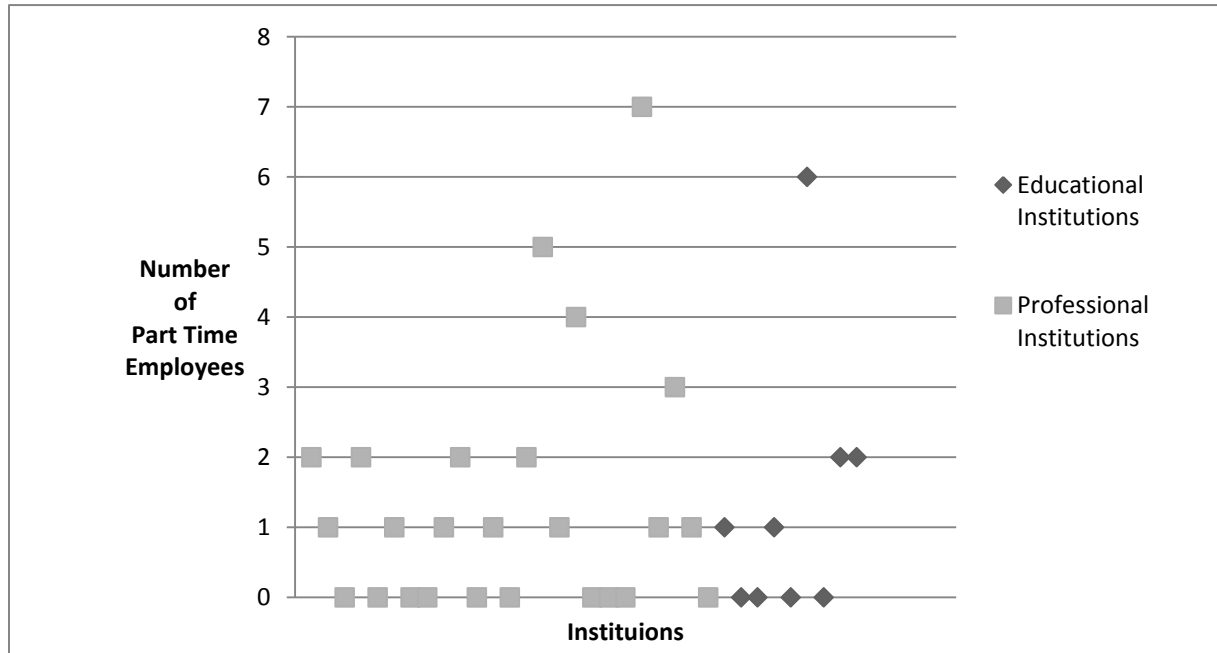


Figure 19: Number of Part Time Prop Shop Employees

For how many hours a month do you over hire workers in your area?

Overall Average: 30.33 Hours Range: 0 – 160 Hours

Professional Average: 27.96 Hours Range: 0 – 150 Hours

Educational Average: 36.67 Hours Range: 0 – 160 Hours

Only 11.77% of Educational Institutions over hire any workers. Among those that do over hire workers the average number of hours is 82.5 Hours

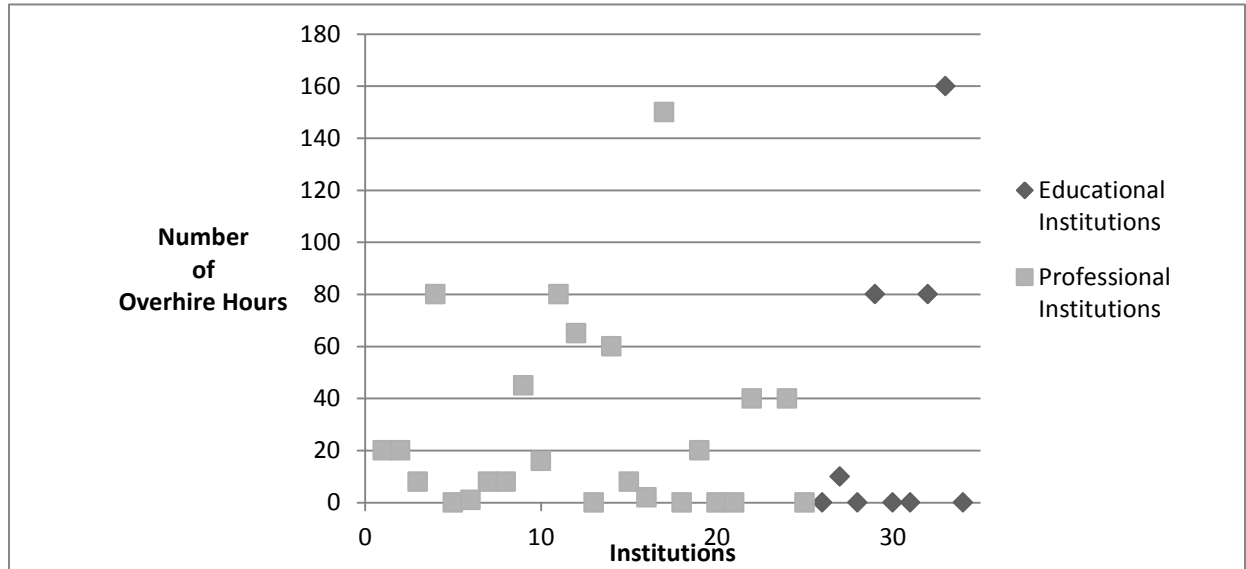


Figure 20: Number of Over Hired Hours per Month

For how many hours a month do volunteers work in your area?

Overall Average: 5.94 Hours

*One answer is exceptionally high, 95 hours/month. Adjusted average is 3.16 Hours/month.

Professional Average: 1.48 Hours

Educational Average: 19.88 Hours

*One answer is exceptionally high, 95 hours/month. Adjusted average is 9.14 Hours/month.

How many interns work in your area?

Overall Average: 0.41 Interns

Professional Average: 0.3 Interns

Educational Average: 0.4 Interns

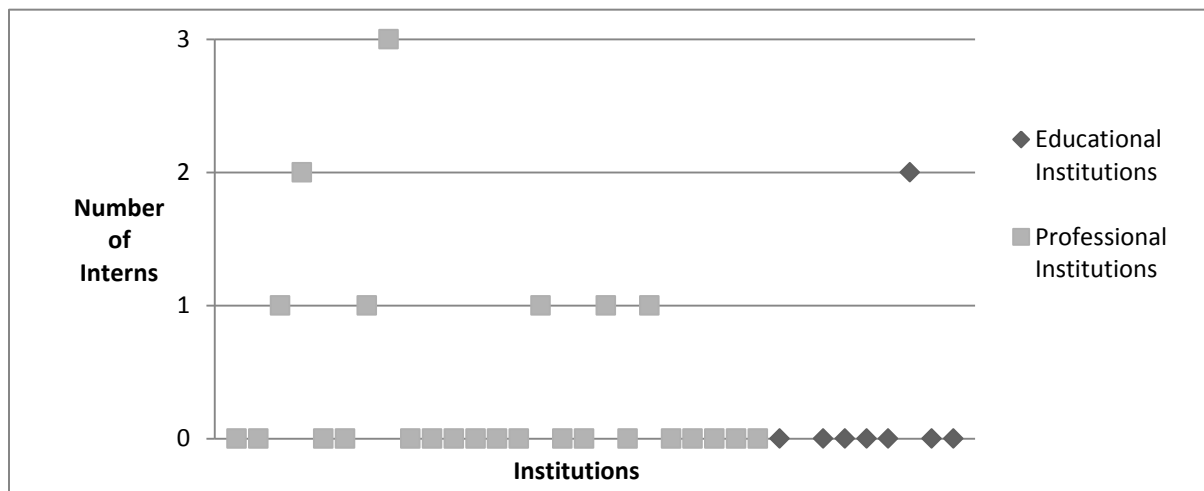


Figure 21: Number of Prop Shop Interns per Institution

Are you involved in the decision to select and hire paid employees and interns in your area? *

○ Yes

Overall: 88.2%

Professional: 88%

Educational: 88.8%

○ No

Overall: 8.82%

Professional: 8%

Educational: 11.11%

○ Abstaining:

Overall: 2.94%

Professional: 4%

Educational: 0.0%

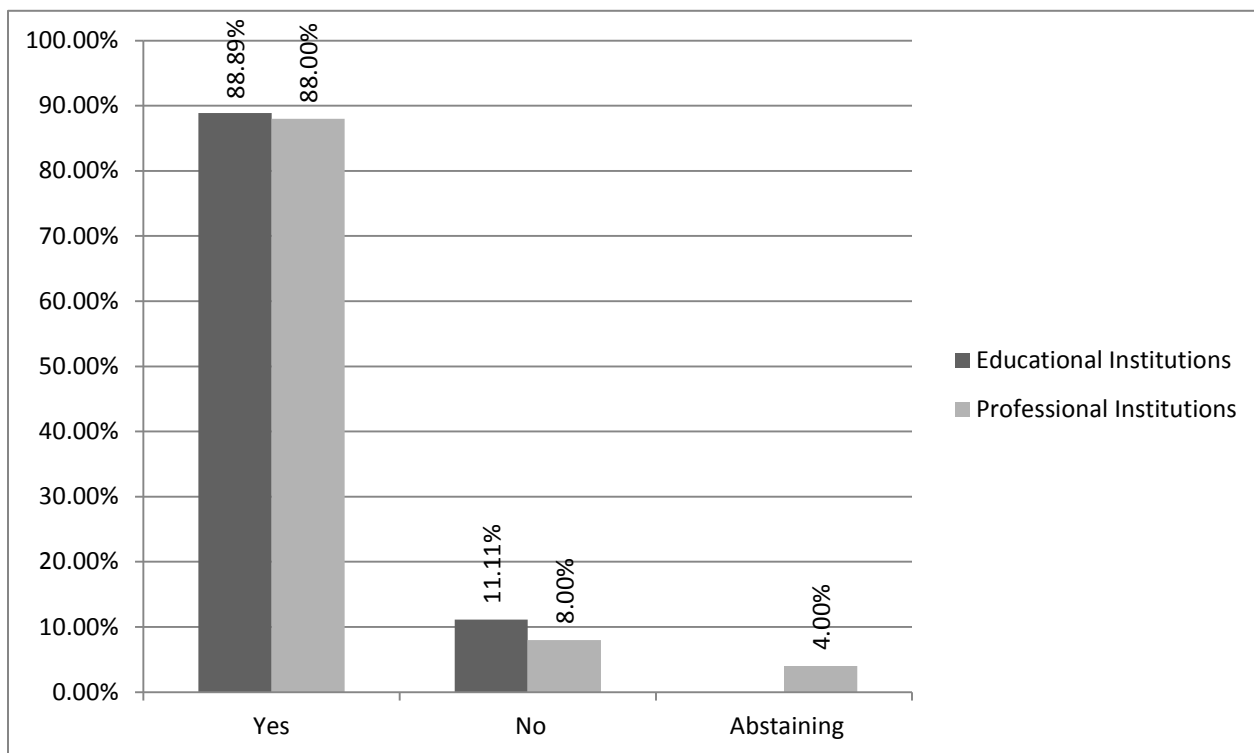


Figure 22: Percent of Prop Managers Involved in Hiring Employees

Are you involved in the decision to retain, reprimand or promote the paid employees and interns in your area?

- Yes
  - Overall: 82.35%
  - Professional: 80%
  - Educational: 88.89%
- No
  - Overall: 14.71%
  - Professional: 16%
  - Educational: 11.11%
- Abstaining:
  - Overall: 2.94%
  - Professional: 4%
  - Educational: 0.0%

Are you involved in the decision to terminate, layoff or furlough the paid employees and interns in your area? *

- Yes
  - Overall: 67.65%
  - Professional: 68%
  - Educational: 66.67%
- No
  - Overall: 29.41%
  - Professional: 28%
  - Educational: 33.33%
- Abstaining:
  - Overall: 2.94%
  - Professional: 4%
  - Educational: 0.0%

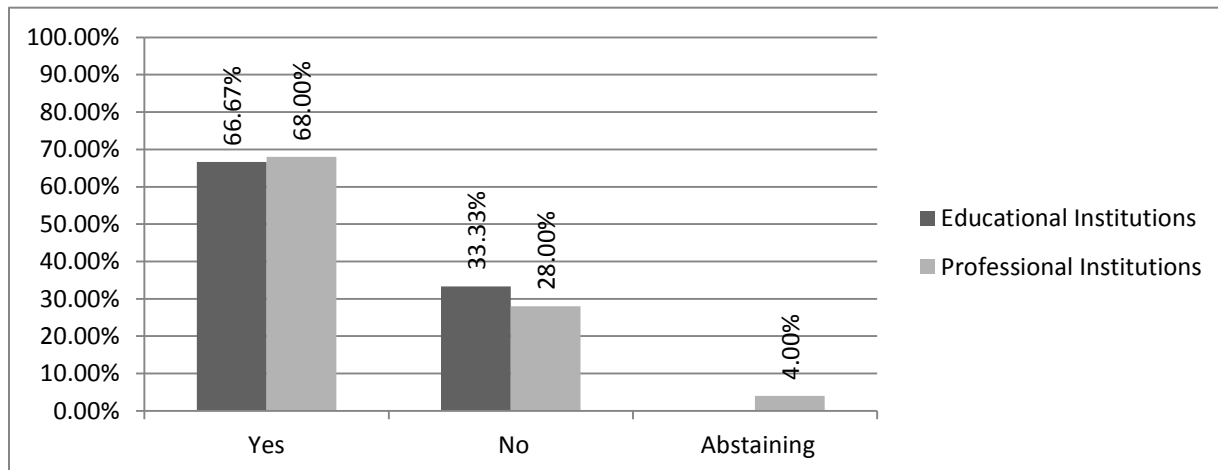


Figure 23: Percent of Prop Mangers Able to Terminate Employees

Are you involved in determining pay and benefits for the paid employees and interns in your area? *

○ Yes

Overall: 23.53%

Professional: 24%

Educational: 22.22%

○ No

Overall: 79.41%

Professional: 72%

Educational: 77.78%

○ Abstaining:

Overall: 2.94%

Professional: 4%

Educational: 0.0%

Are you involved in determining vacation time for the paid employees and interns in your area?

○ Yes

Overall: 20.59%

Professional: 28%

○ No

Overall: 50%

Professional: 60%

○ Abstaining:

Overall: 2.94%

Professional: 12%

Any comments on the types of personnel in your area and your management of them?

[Individual comments omitted]

Personnel Information (Educational Institution):

[Duplicate questions have been omitted. The following questions were not asked of respondents who work for professional institutions with no affiliation with an educational institution.]

The questions in this section are in regard to the people that work in your shop and how you are involved in their employment. Please include yourself among the employees in your area when considering your answers.

How many graduate workers are paid to work in your area?

Average: 0.0 Graduate Workers

How many undergraduate workers are paid to work in your area?

Average: 3.6 Undergraduate Workers

Range: 0 – 7 Undergraduate Workers

How many graduate students work in your area for class credit?

Average: 2.5

How many undergraduate students work in your area for class credit?

Average: 13

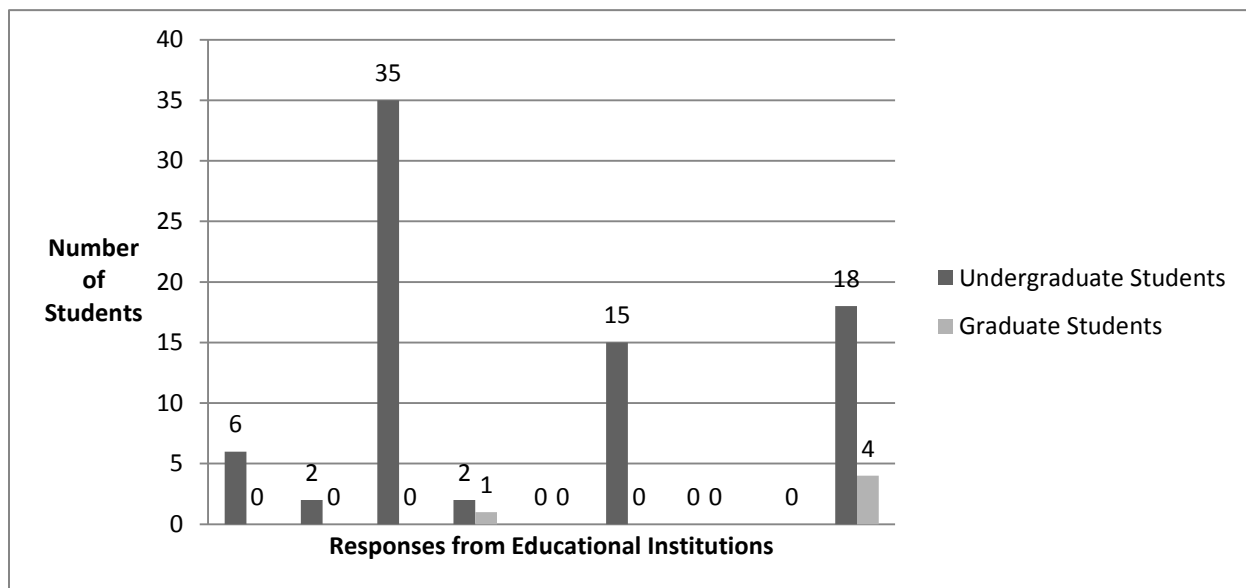


Figure 24: Number of Undergraduate Students Working for Class Credit in Prop Shops

Does your institution have a graduate training program with a props focus? *

If the answer is "Yes" please tell the number of students enrolled in this program in the "Other" box.

- ☐ Yes Educational: 11.11%
- ☐ No Educational: 66.67%

Abstaining: 22.22%

Does your institution have an undergraduate training program with a props focus? *

If the answer is "Yes" please tell the number of students enrolled in this program in the "Other" box.

- ☐ Yes Educational: 22.22%
- ☐ No Educational: 55.56%

Abstaining: 22.22%

Are students whose education is focused on props required to work as props managers on shows?

- ☐ Yes Educational: 44.44%
- ☐ No Educational: 11.11%

Abstaining: 44%

On a scale of 1 to 5, when a student is the props manager on a show, how involved are you in their process?

Circle only one. 1= Advice only when the student seeks you out, 5= The student must have your approval on all decisions

1   2   3   4   5

Average: 3.6

Range: 2 - 5

On a scale of 1 to 5, how involved are students in the acquisition and production of props for shows which you manage?

Mark only one oval. 1= Students acquire and produce no props for your shows, 5= Students acquire and produce all of the props and you act in a managerial capacity only

1   2   3   4   5

Average: 2.83

Range: 1 - 5

Any comments on the types of personnel in your area and your management of them?

[Individual comments omitted]

Finances and Budgetary Information:

The questions in this section regard only budgets and spending in your area on shows. When considering your answers please exclude maintenance and improvement budgets, salaries, operating costs, and other non-show related expenditures, except when specifically asked.

What is the average props budget for a show at your institution? *

Please put your answer as a dollar amount rounded to the nearest \$100

Overall Average: \$4,827.27 Range: \$15,000 - \$1,000

Professional Average: \$5554.17 Range: \$15,000 - \$1,000

Educational Average: \$2,888.89 Range: \$9,000 - \$500

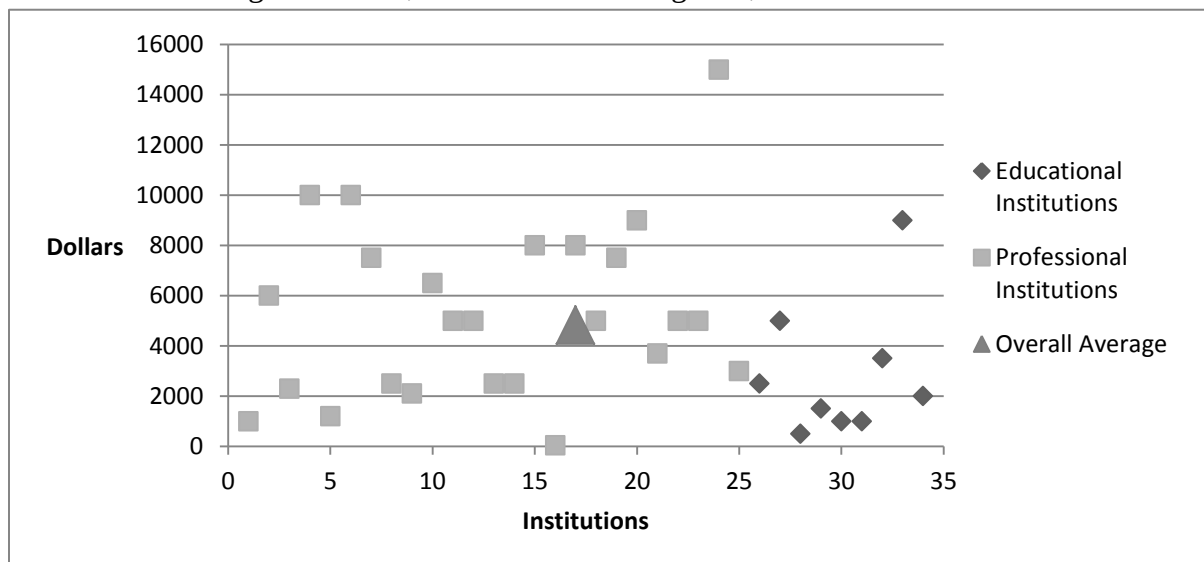


Figure 25: Average Prop Budgets for Shows

What is the highest props budget for a show at your institution?

Please put your answer as a dollar amount rounded to the nearest \$100

Overall Average:	\$8,259.09	Range: \$23,000 - \$1,200
Professional Average:	\$9526.04	Range: \$23,000 - \$2,000
Educational Average:	\$4,458.25	Range: \$9,000 - \$12,000

What is the lowest props budget for a show at your institution?

Please put your answer as a dollar amount rounded to the nearest \$100

Overall Average:	\$1,443.24	Range: \$5,000 - \$0
Professional Average:	\$1,657.38	Range: \$5,000 - \$0
Educational Average:	\$872.22	Range: \$2,000 - \$1,000

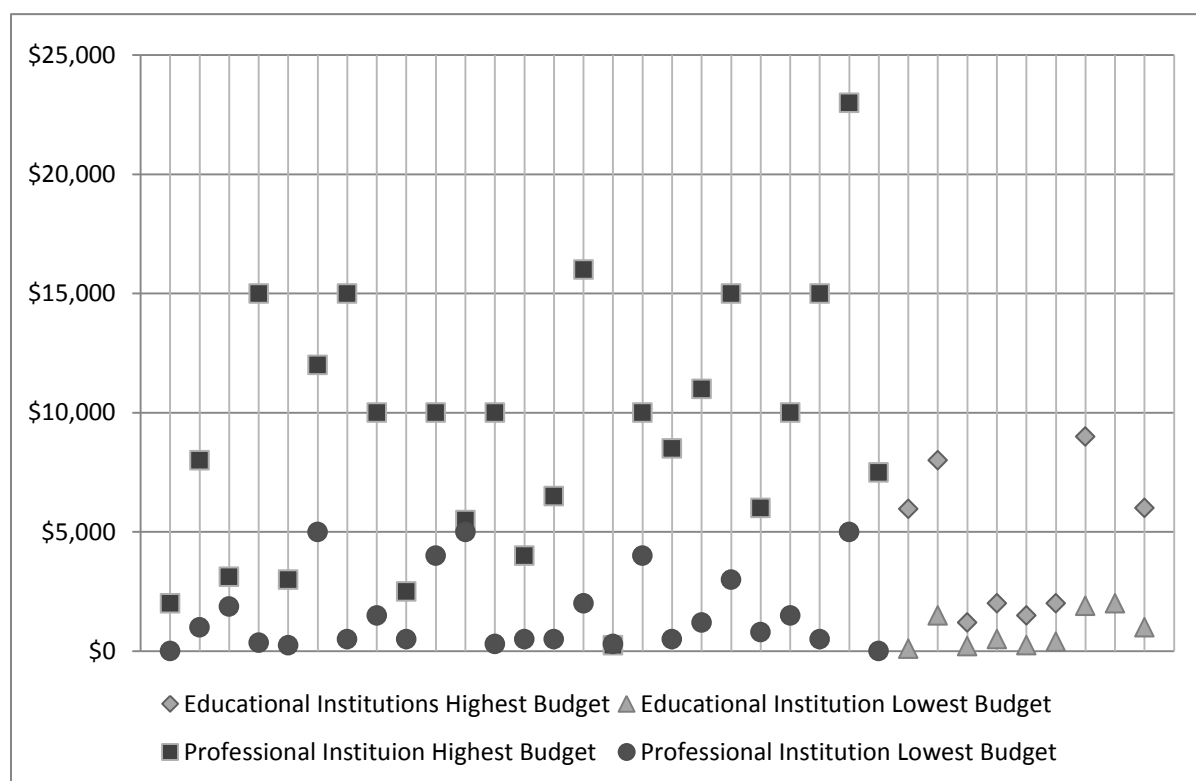


Figure 26: Highest and Lowest Prop Budgets for Shows

In the chart above each vertical division is a single institution. Note the ranges within each institution.

When there is money left over in a props budget for a show, are you allowed to spend the excess money on non-show related items? *

○ Yes

Overall:	44.12%
Professional:	52%
Educational:	22.22%

○ No

Overall:	55.88%
Professional:	48%
Educational:	77.78%

When the props budget is insufficient for a show, where do the needed funds come from? *

○ Props budgets from other shows in the season

Overall:	44.12%
Professional:	44%
Educational:	33.33%

○ Other area's budgets on the same show

Overall:	41.18%
Professional:	40%
Educational:	33.33%

○ A general fund managed by the institution

Overall:	23.53%
Professional:	16%
Educational:	55.56% *1 Response: Scholarship Funds

○ Unknown

Overall:	14.71%
Professional:	20%
Educational:	0.0%

Which of the following methods do you use to purchase props and supplies? *

Check all that apply.

- Petty Cash Supplied by the Institution
  - Overall: 79.41%
  - Professional: 80%
  - Educational: 77.78%
- Institution Backed Credit Card
  - Overall: 82.35%
  - Professional: 88%
  - Educational: 66.67%
- Institution Backed Debit Card
  - Overall: 5.88%
  - Professional: 8%
  - Educational: 0.0%
- Institution Backed Prepaid Debit/Credit Card
  - Overall: 0.00%
  - Professional: 0%
  - Educational: 0.0%
- Institution Backed Procurement Card
  - Overall: 11.76%
  - Professional: 4%
  - Educational: 33.33%
- Institution Backed Paypal Account, or other online purchasing accounts
  - Overall: 35.29%
  - Professional: 44%
  - Educational: 11.11%
- Personal Paypal Account, or other online purchasing accounts
  - Overall: 38.24%
  - Professional: 40%
  - Educational: 33.33%
- Vendor Charge Accounts
  - Overall: 79.41%
  - Professional: 92%
  - Educational: 44.44%
- Personal Accounts & Reimbursement by the Institution
  - Overall: 50.00%
  - Professional: 52%
  - Educational: 44.44%

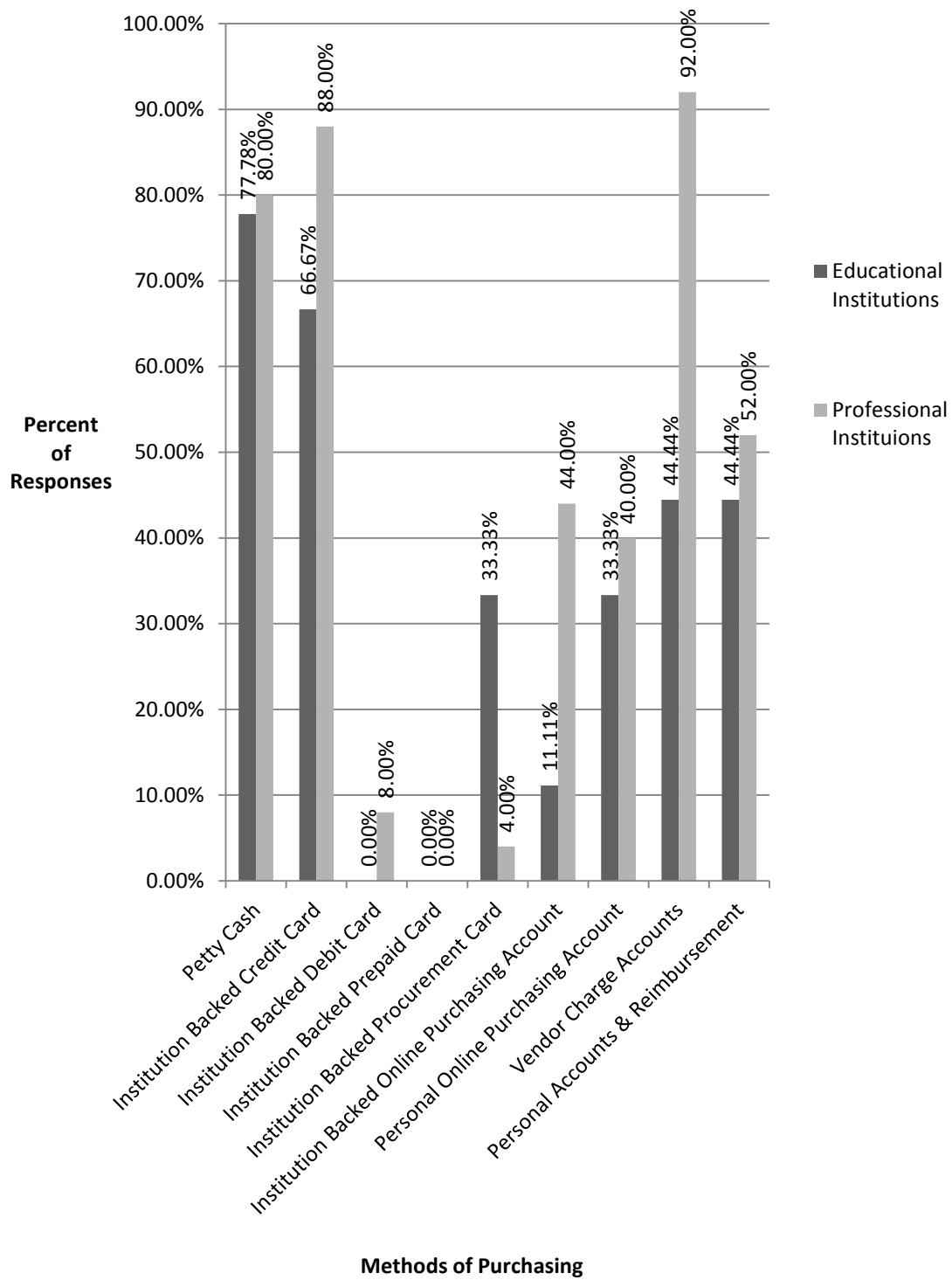


Figure 27: Percent of Institutions Using Each Method of Purchasing

In your area, who else is allowed to make purchases? *

Check all that apply.

- No one
  - Overall: 17.65%
  - Professional: 16%
  - Educational: 22.22%
- Assistant
  - Overall: 61.76%
  - Professional: 60%
  - Educational: 66.67%
- Shopper
  - Overall: 35.29%
  - Professional: 44%
  - Educational: 11.11%
- Artisan or Carpenter
  - Overall: 41.18%
  - Professional: 44%
  - Educational: 33.33%
- Intern
  - Overall: 5.88%
  - Professional: 0%
  - Educational: 22.22%
- Student Worker
  - Overall: 8.82%
  - Professional: 0%
  - Educational: 33.33%
- Student Props Master
  - Overall: 11.76%
  - Professional: 0%
  - Educational: 44.44%

If someone else is allowed to make purchases, which of the following methods are they allowed to use?

Check all that apply.

- Petty Cash Supplied by the Institution
  - Overall: 70.59%
  - Professional: 72%
  - Educational: 66.67%
- Institution Backed Credit Card
  - Overall: 61.76%
  - Professional: 72%
  - Educational: 33.33%
- Institution Backed Debit Card
  - Overall: 0.00%
  - Professional: 0%
  - Educational: 0.0%
- Institution Backed Prepaid Debit/Credit Card
  - Overall: 0.00%
  - Professional: 0%
  - Educational: 0.0%
- Institution Backed Procurement Card
  - Overall: 8.82%
  - Professional: 4%
  - Educational: 22.22%
- Institution Backed Paypal Account, or other online purchasing accounts
  - Overall: 14.71%
  - Professional: 16%
  - Educational: 11.11%
- Personal Paypal Account, or other online purchasing accounts
  - Overall: 14.71%
  - Professional: 12%
  - Educational: 22.22%
- Vendor Charge Accounts
  - Overall: 52.94%
  - Professional: 64%
  - Educational: 22.22%
- Personal Accounts & Reimbursement by the Institution
  - Overall: 35.29%
  - Professional: 36%
  - Educational: 33.33%
- No One else is allowed to make purchases
  - Overall: 5.88%
  - Professional: 8%
  - Educational: 22.22%

Excluding internet purchases, do you make any purchases that are tax exempt? *

- Yes

Overall: 82.35%

Professional: 80%

Educational: 88.89%

☐ No

Overall: 17.65%

Professional: 20%

Educational: 11.11%

Do you pay sales tax or other tax on any purchases? *

- Yes

Overall: 41.18%

Professional: 52%

Educational: 55.56%

☐ No

Overall: 32.35%

Professional: 48%

Educational: 44.44%

How many weeks in advance of the first rehearsal do you begin budgeting a show?

Insert 0 if you budget as you work or you operate under a sliding scale budget for a season.

Overall Average: 14.84 Weeks

Professional Average: 18.30 Weeks

Educational Average: 4.88 Weeks

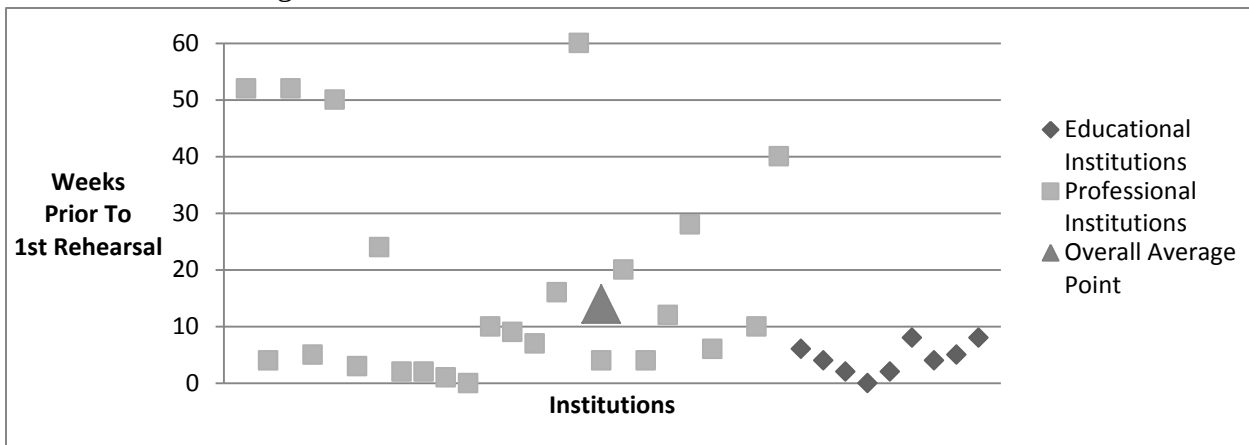


Figure 28: Advanced Budget Planning

Does your institution have a budgeting process prior to starting work on a show involving all production area managers?

○ Yes Overall: 64.71%, Professional: 60%, Educational: 88.89%

☐ No Overall: 29.41%, Professional: 40%, Educational: 11.11%

How Many hours a week do you spend on budgeting and financial paperwork required by your institution?

Overall Average: 5.37 Hours

Professional Average: 5.70 Hours

Educational Average: 5 Hours

How many hours a week do you spend on budgeting and financial paperwork required by yourself?

Overall Average: 5.09 Hours

Professional Average: 5.43 Hours

Educational Average: 4.25 hours

How often are you required to reconcile your receipts against your institution's records?

○ Never

Overall: 20.59%

Professional: 20%

Educational: 1.11%

○ Once a week

Overall: 23.53%

Professional: 36%

Educational: 33.33%

○ Once a month

Overall: 44.12%

Professional: 36%

Educational: 33.33%

○ Once every three months

Overall: 8.82%

Professional: 4%

Educational: 22.22%

○ Once every six months

Overall: 0.0%

Professional: 0%

Educational: 0.0%

○ Once a year

Overall: 2.94%

Professional: 0%

Educational: 11.11%

○ Other:

Overall: 14.71%

Educational: 0.0%

1 Professional Response, 2.94%: "Approximately every 2 weeks"

1 Professional Response, 2.49%: "1 month after show closing"

3 Professional Responses, 8.82%: Every time a purchase is made.

Do you maintain a minimum amount of petty cash on hand for use in your area?

○ Yes

Overall:	61.76%
Professional:	64%
Educational:	55.56%

○ No

Overall:	38.24%
Professional:	36%
Educational:	44.44%

When requesting petty cash are you required to designate a specific item and price on which the cash will be spent?

○ Yes

Overall:	14.71%
Professional:	20%
Educational:	0.0%

○ No

Overall:	82.35%
Professional:	68%
Educational:	88.89%

○ Other:

Overall:	8.82%	3 Responses: Do not use petty cash at all
Professional:	8%	2 Responses: Do not use petty cash at all
Educational:	11.11%	1 Response: Do not use petty cash at all

Does your area take in money from other institutions?

If yes, please explain for what services this money is paid in the "other" section. Examples might include: Sale or Rental of props in stock, props built for other institutions, sale of recyclable scrap metal

○ Yes

Overall:	76.47%
Professional:	80%
Educational:	77.78%

○ No

Overall:	17.65%
Professional:	20%
Educational:	22.22%

If your area does take in money from other institutions, where does that money go?

- Stays within the area
  - Overall: 26.47%
  - Professional: 16%
  - Educational: 55.56%
- Goes towards the general institutional budget
  - Overall: 41.18%
  - Professional: 56%
  - Educational: 0%
- Goes towards a specific institutional budget line
  - Overall: 14.71%
  - Professional: 8%
  - Educational: 22.22%
- the area does not take in money from outside institutions
  - Overall: 0.0%
  - Professional: 0%
  - Educational: 0.0%
- Abstaining:
  - Overall: 20.58%
  - Professional: 16%
  - Educational: 22%

Any comments on finances and budgeting in your area?

[Individual comments omitted]

Scheduling Information:

The goal of the following questions is to get a general picture of a work day in your area and an overall idea of how you schedule work to be done on a show. If you work for an educational institution please do not include class time as part of the operation of your shop.

On a typical day, how many hours is your props shop in operation, including breaks and meals?
*

For example if you and/or others are working in your shop from 8:00AM until 5:00PM with a one hour lunch and two 15 minute breaks, then your shop is in operation for 9 hours. As another example if you are working in your shop from Noon to 6:00PM with one 30 minute break, then your shop is in operation for 6 hours.

Overall Average:	8.61 Hours
Professional:	9.04 Hours
Educational Average:	7.22 Hours

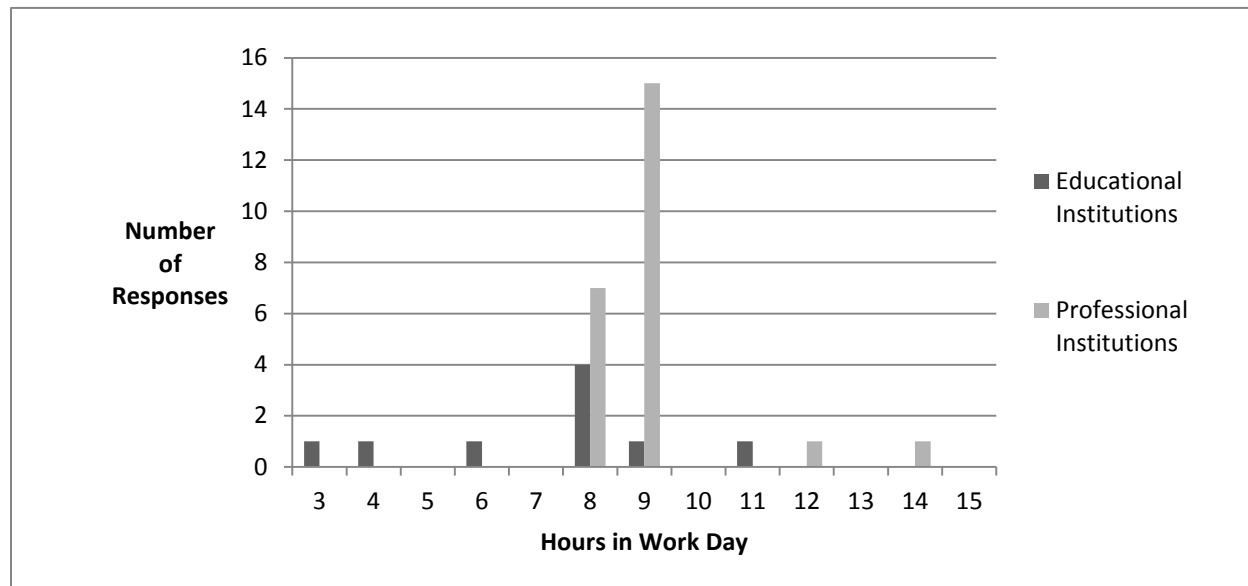


Figure 29: Prop Shop Operation Hours

Who sets the operating hours in your area? *

- You, as the area manager
  - Overall: 82.35%
  - Professional: 80%
  - Educational: 88.89%
- Your production manager or supervisor
  - Overall: 8.82%
  - Professional: 12%
  - Educational: 0.0%
- The institution you work for
  - Overall: 0.0%
  - Professional: 8%
  - Educational: 0.0%
- Operating hours are set by the availability of workers
  - Overall: 2.94%
  - Professional: 0.0%
  - Educational: 11.11%
- A union
  - Overall: 0.0%
  - Professional: 0.0%
  - Educational: 0.0%

Who sets break times (including meals) during your operating hours?

- You, as the area manager
  - Overall: 52.94%
  - Professional: 52%
  - Educational: 55.56%
- Your production manager or supervisor
  - Overall: 2.94%
  - Professional: 4%
  - Educational: 0.0%
- The institution you work for
  - Overall: 0.0%
  - Professional: 0.0%
  - Educational: 0.0%
- Breaks are set by the workers
  - Overall: 26.47%
  - Professional: 0.0%
  - Educational: 33.33%
- A union
  - Overall: 11.76%
  - Professional: 16%
  - Educational: 0.0%
- No breaks are provided or taken during operating hours
  - Overall: 2.94%
  - Professional: 4%
  - Educational: 0.0%

How are tasks assigned to workers in your area?

- You assign daily tasks
  - Overall: 41.18%
  - Professional: 28%
  - Educational: 44.44%
- You assign tasks and workers self-schedule completion of the tasks
  - Overall: 50%
  - Professional: 48%
  - Educational: 22.22%
- You maintain a list of tasks from which workers self-assign Overall:
  - Overall: 11.76%
  - Professional: 8%
  - Educational: 11.11%

Do you make time estimates for the acquisition and production of props prior to beginning work on a show?

- Yes
  - Overall: 82.35%
  - Professional: 84%
  - Educational: 77.78%
- No
  - Overall: 17.65%
  - Professional: 16%
  - Educational: 22.22%

If a show is behind schedule, how do you make up the time? *
Check all that apply.

- Work more hours yourself
  - Overall: 85.29%
  - Professional: 84%
  - Educational: 77.78%
- Call in regular employees for more hours
  - Overall: 58.82%
  - Professional: 68%
  - Educational: 33.33%
- Over hire additional workers
  - Overall: 70.59%
  - Professional: 76%
  - Educational: 44.44%
- projects to other areas within your institution
  - Overall: 35.29%
  - Professional: 32%
  - Educational: 33.33%
- Send projects to other institutions
  - Overall: 8.82%
  - Professional: 8%
  - Educational: 11.11%
- Select projects to reduce in scope or to cut from the show
  - Overall: 38.24%
  - Professional: 32%
  - Educational: 44.44% ,

How many months in advance of a show opening do you begin planning work hours for a show?*

Overall Average:	2.11 Months
Professional Average:	4 Months
Educational Average:	3.24 Months

How many month in advance of a show opening do you begin acquisition and production of props for a show? *

Overall Average:	2.36 Months
Professional Average:	2.58 Months
Educational Average:	1.78% Months

At what milestone is it your goal to have the acquisition and build of the furniture props for a show complete? *

○ First Table Reading	Overall: 2.94%,	Professional: 0.0%,	Educational: 0.0%
○ First Blocking Rehearsal	Overall: 17.65%,	Professional: 20%,	Educational: 11.11%
○ Designer Run	Overall: 17.65%,	Professional: 12%,	Educational: 33.33%
○ First Technical Rehearsal	Overall: 55.88%,	Professional: 56%,	Educational: 55.56%
○ Final Dress Rehearsal	Overall: 0.0%,	Professional: 0.0%,	Educational: 0.0%
○ First Preview	Overall: 2.94%,	Professional 4%,	Educational: 0.0%
○ Opening	Overall: 0.0%,	Professional: 0.0%,	Educational: 0.0%
○ Other:	Overall: 2.94%,	Professional: 4%,	Educational: 0.0%
	1 Professional Response, “during blocking rehearsals”		

At what milestone is it your goal to have the acquisition and build of the hand props for a show complete? *

○ First Table Reading	Overall: 0.0%,	Professional: 0.0%,	Educational: 0.0%
○ First Blocking Rehearsal	Overall: 2.94%,	Professional: 4%,	Educational: 0.0%
○ Designer Run	Overall: 26.47%,	Professional: 16%,	Educational: 44.44%
○ First Technical Rehearsal	Overall: 61.76%,	Professional: 64%,	Educational: 55.55%
○ Final Dress Rehearsal	Overall: 5.88%,	Professional: 12,	Educational: 0.0%
○ First Preview	Overall: 0.0%,	Professional: 0.0%,	Educational: 0.0%
○ Opening	Overall: 0.0%,	Professional: 0.0%,	Educational: 0.0%
○ Other:	Overall: 2.94%,	Professional: 4%,	Educational: 0.0%
	1 Response: “During Blocking Rehearsal		

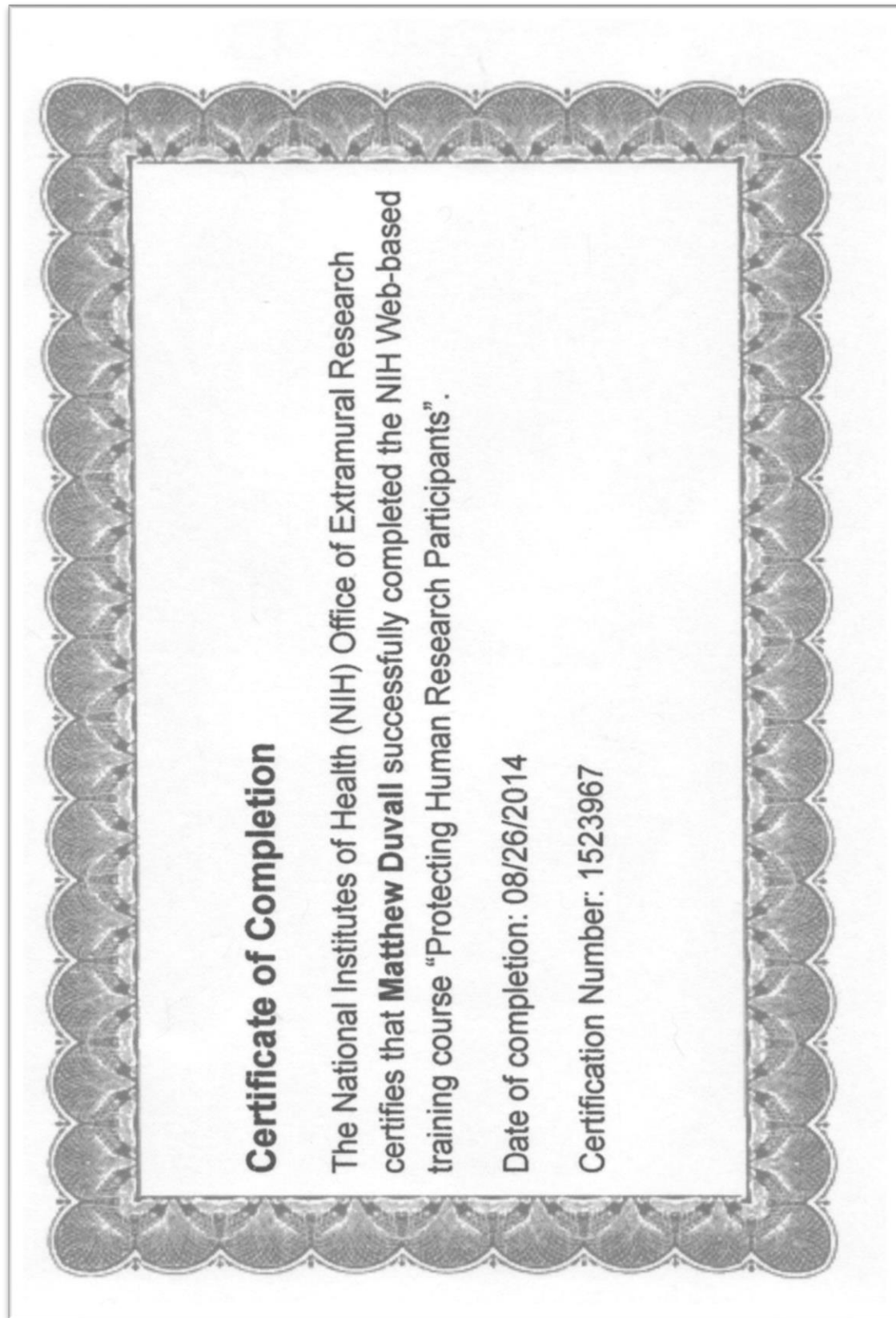
At what milestone is it your goal to have the acquisition and build of the set dressing for a show complete? *

○ First Table Reading	Overall: 0.0%,	Professional: 0.0%,	Educational: 0.0%
○ First Blocking Rehearsal	Overall: 0.0%,	Professional: 0.0%,	Educational: 0.0%
○ Designer Run	Overall: 2.94%,	Professional: 4%,	Educational: 0.0%
○ First Technical Rehearsal	Overall: 61.76%,	Professional: 32%,	Educational: 88.89%
○ Final Dress Rehearsal	Overall: 26.47%,	Professional: 52%,	Educational: 11.11 %
○ First Preview	Overall: 8.82%,	Professional: 12%,	Educational: 0.0%
○ Opening	Overall: 0.0%,	Professional: 0.0%,	Educational: 0.0%
○ Other:	Overall: 0.0%,	Professional: 0.0%,	Educational: 0.0%

Any comments on scheduling in your area?

-Individual comments omitted

Appendix 2: Institutional Review Board Documentation



Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that James Murphy successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 07/30/2014

Certification Number: 1511152

ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST



Institutional Review Board
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair
130 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.8692
F: 225.578.5983
irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb

TO: Matthew Duvall
Theatre

FROM: Dennis Landin
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: October 28, 2014

RE: IRB# E9060

TITLE: Matthew Duvall Graduate Thesis on Theater Properties Production Management

New Protocol/Modification/Continuation: New Protocol

Review Date: 10/27/2014

Approved X Disapproved _____

Approval Date: 10/27/2014 Approval Expiration Date: 10/26/2017

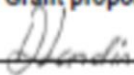
Exemption Category/Paragraph: 1; 2a,b; 3

Signed Consent Waived?: Yes

Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable): _____

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable) _____

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman 

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –

Continuing approval is **CONDITIONAL** on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.

8. **SPECIAL NOTE:**

*All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at <http://www.lsu.edu/irb>

Vita

Matthew Duvall was born and raised in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. In 2008 he graduated from The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, cum laude, earning a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theater Design and Technology with a minor in Religious Studies. After graduation he worked as the prop assistant at Arkansas Repertory Theater from 2008 to 2012. He left Arkansas to attend Louisiana State University and earn his Master of Fine Arts in Properties Technology, where he is a member of the class of 2015. Matthew has worked professionally with a number of theaters including The Theater 232 Festival, Seaside Music Theater and The Glimmerglass Festival, Playmakers of Baton Rouge among others.[s](#)