

The Department of Communication Studies
Performance Studies Area

Performance Studies Black Box Handbook

Contents

Introduction	1
Selection of Shows	1
The Performance Studies Black Box (PSBB) Advisory Board	2
Scheduling	2
Use of the Black Box	3
Production Staff and Support	4
Production Elements	6
Production Budgets	8
Box Office	8
Publicity	9
Request to Direct Application	10
Black Box Manager Position Description	11

Introduction

The Department of Communication Studies—Performance Studies Black Box (PSBB) is a laboratory theatre and classroom used by Performance Studies (PS) faculty, graduate and undergraduate students, and guest directors and performers. If the PSBB has a mission it is to provide a performance space where (PS) faculty and students can stage material of their choice in ways that intrigue and challenge them and promote creative research and scholarship.

Selection of Shows

The Performance Studies Black Box is a laboratory theatre used by Performance Studies Faculty, Performance Studies graduate students, and “directed study” undergraduate students to stage creative research and scholarship. The staging may range from “works in progress” to “performance hours” to more formal productions; from “installations” to “one person shows” to small and large cast shows.

To direct in the Black Box, faculty and students are required to submit a *Request to Direct Application* the spring semester prior to the academic year in which they want to direct. All proposals are reviewed by the Black Box Advisory Board.

Interested parties should complete their Request to Direct Application for the Spring semester by September 15th and for the Fall semester by April 15th and turn in a hard copy to the main departmental office, GAB 309. An electronic copy should be sent to the departmental administrative specialist Kara Ottinger at kara.ottinger@unt.edu.

Selection is based on the following criteria:

- a. The applicant offers a specific, detailed, and clear description of the proposed show;
- b. The applicant is in good academic standing as determined by the board;
- c. The academic year of the applicant;
- d. The directing/performance experience of the applicant;
- e. How the proposed show might fit into the overall season—e.g., variety; and
- f. Production and scheduling aims –e.g., Will the proposed show work given the Black Box Facility, its resources, equipment, staff and scheduling?

The selection policy privileges the requests of COMM-PS faculty and graduate students. The PSBB actively encourages undergraduate participation and students who major in COMM and show a concentration in PS are also privileged in the selection process. Within that group, the PSBB Advisory Board tries to handle the proposals in an equitable manner. Since COMM-PS graduate students submit the bulk of the proposals, the seasons tend to feature their work.

The Performance Studies Black Box (PSBB) Advisory Board

The PSBB Advisory Board is largely a decision-making body. It addresses past, present, and potential issues regarding the Black Box facility and the public performances that occur there. Board members understand that they represent the Department of Communication Studies and particularly the faculty and students that concentrate in Performance Studies. They make decisions that are in the best interests of the larger community(-ies), and aim to be efficient, creative, consistent, yet flexible and fair in the decisions they make and activate.

The PSBB Advisory Board consists of five voting members: A PS faculty member that serves as chair, the Black Box Managing Director, an undergraduate student (usually, the President of the Performance Interest Group), a graduate student (who serves as secretary and also serves as PIGS ambassador), and an alumnus of the program. Board members serve for a full academic year.

Typically, the board meets annually to establish the season and conduct any other business associated with the Black Box. The board may convene on an *ad hoc* basis to address issues as they arise. Although the roles and responsibilities of the members vary year to year, the chair sets the agenda and assigns duties.

AS A DIRECTOR OF A PSBB SHOW, your dealings with the Board are largely indirect at this point *except* in two key ways:

First, should you have a grievance or problem related to your show, contact the chair. After your show closes, feel free to provide advice or suggestions regarding PSBB policies, procedures, and/or this handbook.

Second, the PSBB Managing Director supervises your access to the Black Box and its storage rooms, equipment, tools, and other inventory. (For a complete understanding of the roles of the Managing Director see the appropriate section of the Handbook below.)

Scheduling

Production Scheduling

The PSBB Advisory Board selects shows, and in conjunction with the PSBB Managing Director schedules the season calendar. All major productions are expected to have a five night run. Once the dates are confirmed, directors must meet with the PSBB Managing Director to establish the rehearsal schedule for your run. Directors are expected to open and run their shows on the scheduled dates. Keep in mind that there may be two shows in rehearsal at any given time,

which means the space must be shared and directors must be flexible. Productions have two weeks guaranteed exclusive time in the PSBB prior to the date the show opens (the final week of rehearsals and a tech week). The agreed upon rehearsal schedule will be posted online on the department website.

Scheduling the Black Box for Class Projects/Performances

Students registered in Performance Studies classes may reserve the space for rehearsals. In order to reserve the space, students must consult the online calendar located on the UNT Department of Communication Studies Black Box page on facebook and submit a formal request for available time to the PSBB Managing Director (blackboxunt@gmail.com).

Scheduling the Black Box for Student Organizations and Outside Groups

Although the PSBB is primarily used for creative scholarship in the Department of Communication Studies, the space can be reserved by student organizations or outside groups based on availability and pending approval of the performance studies faculty. Fees for the use of the space are as follows: \$10.00 per hour for student organizations; \$25.00 per hour for groups not affiliated with the university. A \$50 deposit is required for non-comm groups and there is an additional \$25 food and beverage fee. Additional fees may apply for technical staff and equipment. For more information, contact the PSBB Managing Director (blackboxunt@gmail.com).

USE OF THE BLACK BOX

Policies for Use of the Performance Studies Black Box

- A. Priority for use of the Performance Studies Black Box (PSSB) is as follows:
1. Performance Studies classes claim priority
 2. Public Performance of PSSB shows
 3. Rehearsals for PSBB shows
 4. Rehearsals for Performance Studies classes
 5. Outside Performance Studies-inside Communication Studies Department use
 6. Outside Communication Studies Department use
- B. One exception in the priority for use concerns the tech week and run of a PSSB show.

Two weeks prior to “opening,” the physical and technical set-up of a show claims priority. Although classes may meet and other rehearsals may continue to take place in the Black Box, faculty and students are not to alter the physical or technical arrangement of the space.

- C. Time is reserved in the Black Box as follows:
- Classes are pre-scheduled by the COMM Department;
 - Production dates for PSBB shows are scheduled by the PSBB Advisory Board in cooperation with the directors; and
 - Rehearsals for PSBB shows are scheduled by the directors and the PSBB Managing Director.
- D. Anyone using the PSBB is responsible for ensuring that the space remains clean. Specifically,
- All garbage must be picked up and disposed of properly.
 - The floors, walls, and set pieces are clean—i.e., swept or mopped as necessary.
 - Any and all costumes or props are removed or neatly stored.
 - All equipment is returned to its proper place in the AV/Tech closet.
 - All technical equipment is shut off, covered and, as applicable, locked or returned to storage.
 - The Black Box is rearranged for subsequent class or rehearsal use (i.e., the chairs are in order, the playing area is free from clutter, and all platforms, flats and rehearsal blocks are returned to the prop room).
 - If used, the Prop/Green Room is clean and tidy.
 - All doors are closed and locked.
- E. According to UNT policy, smoking and the consumption of alcohol is not permitted in the Performance Studies Black Box.

Production Staff and Support

Directors' Responsibilities

Directors assume responsibility for seeing that their production demands are met. Typically, these demands include:

- a. Generating schedules & preparing for rehearsals, tech week, run & strike
- b. Arranging/building the set
- c. Collecting/building props & costumes
- d. Setting up, cueing, running lights, sound, & any AV equipment
- e. Publicity
- f. Upkeep of the Black Box and its equipment
- g. Procure keys for the space

Key Expectations:

All directors must run tech for another director within the same season.

All directors must participate in the two Black Box clean-up days (two per season determined by the Black Box Manager).

To procure keys for the space visit Amy or Kara in the Comm office to fill out a key form with a \$10 cash key deposit. You will be responsible for returning this key to the department after the show or there will be a \$10 key replacement fee.

All directors must completely strike their sets and clean up the space within 24 hours, including the publicity board. All costumes, props, set pieces, lighting, sound, and AV equipment must be removed from the Black Box and Green Room and/or returned to their proper place at the conclusion of the run.

All directors must be light-board and tech certified.

All directors are expected to adhere to PSBB guidelines regarding production bookkeeping.

All student directors must work closely with their faculty advisors.

Role of the Faculty Advisor

Each spring as the performance studies faculty frames the Black Box Season for the following year, we create a list of show advisors. Where possible, we assign advisors based on common interests, previous or current working relationships, who the potential director has consulted while working on the show proposal, etc. Often, we have to work around sabbaticals and other commitments. Your faculty advisor is a primary “point person” for concerns, assistance, advice in rehearsal, and so on. This doesn’t mean you can’t talk to anybody else about your show or invite another faculty member to rehearsal at some point, too.

As a general rule, the sooner you begin conversation with your advisor, the better. While the advisor must see the show prior to opening, s/he can be of little assistance if you wait until tech week to extend an invitation to rehearsal. After your show has been approved, schedule three times for your advisor to attend and provide feedback. We recommend meeting with your advisor at least once before the actual rehearsal process begins, one in the middle of your rehearsal process, and one towards the end before the actual run of your show. Prior to the invitation, talk with your advisor about the best use of that/those visit(s) for you, your cast, and your show. It can be very helpful to talk directly about questions you have, inviting the advisor to look for specific things.

As you develop the show, your advisor can assist you in conversation about audition practice, creating the script, directorial relations with cast and rehearsal strategies, staging ideas, negotiating the securing of rights, interpreting campus policies or laws that might pertain to the show, scheduling a talk back session, etc.

As you begin rehearsal, you can talk to your advisor about things that may not be working as you had hoped, brainstorming other aesthetic possibilities, responses to cast tensions, emerging concerns about controversial images/choices, and so on.

Your advisor can also help you think of ways you might help frame the critique session/talk back in order to get feedback about issues of concern to you. The talk back should always allow community members to respond in ways that aren't entirely prefigured or constrained, but part of the time can be devoted to focusing conversation in ways that respond to the nature of your inquiry, thesis research questions, etc.

It's also good to talk in advance about what happens after the run the advisor sees. It may be that you need some "back up" with a cast, in which case having the advisor offer a response to the whole cast may be best. If you need them to hear something from someone with a different authorial presence than just your own tell the advisor. Others prefer to talk individually with the advisor about the response. Sometimes people dismiss the cast right after a show the advisor sees, so that they can talk to the advisor one-on-one right away. Others prefer to go ahead and give notes that night, and then meet the advisor the next day to talk about the show in conversation in the office or over coffee. It's perfectly okay to talk with the advisor about what you think would work best under your circumstances.

While it's the faculty advisors' responsibility to help guarantee the best work we can in the Black Box season, and we don't want to underplay that important function, we believe it's best performed as dialogically as possible. As you think about the possibilities outlined here—and others that may come to your mind as things you'd like to help shape—please don't hesitate to talk to your advisor about what you need and prefer. But know that your advisor is just that, an advisor with a wealth of experience to help you create and execute a successful artistic vision. Your advisor is not in charge of running tech, doing your publicity, staging your production, managing your cast, or doing the required reading and research that is needed. When we selected your proposal, we had confidence in your work. The advisor is a partner in helping you bring your vision to fruition, navigate those moments when disruptions occur, and construct talk-back experiences that meet your research and writing needs in ways that also allow others to respond to elements of the show that they think are important.

PRODUCTION ELEMENTS

Inventory

All props, costumes, etc. purchased with allocated funds become the property of the PSBB. At the conclusion of your show, directors should add any new props, costumes, and/or set pieces to the inventory list.

Use of existing props, costumes, and set pieces must be checked out of the inventory and returned at the conclusion of your run.

Any items altered (e.g., repainted), including the floor, flats, set pieces, must be returned to their original condition.

All costumes must be cleaned and returned to the inventory. It is the director's responsibility to be aware of which costumes should be dry-cleaned.

Arranging the Black Box

Directors may arrange and connect the platforms, risers, flats, and stair units (etc.) in whatever way they would like as long as:

1. Both doors are physically accessible.
2. The audience has safe access to seats on all riser levels and the top most risers have a backstop.
3. All units are restored to their original condition at strike.

Set Construction

1. Directors may build whatever they would like
2. Directors may rebuild and/or repaint all the platforms, risers, flats, stair units, clocks (etc.). Should you paint the basic units a color other than black, you must repaint them (black) at strike.

Flooring

If you want to retain the black color but due to classroom and rehearsal use, the flooring has become scarred, please make time in your tech schedule to re-paint it. In other words, don't settle for a crummy looking black floor. See the Managing Director for information on where to find paint and painting supplies.

AV/Tech & Prop/Green Room Inventory

1. You may use whatever construction tools and supplies you find; likewise painting supplies in lighting equipment and supplies, sound supplies and the "older" sound equipment.
2. You may purchase any construction and paint supplies you need as well as home lighting sources and supplies.

Prop, costume, and Furniture Inventory

Basically, you can use and do whatever you want with the props, costumes, and furniture pieces you find. If you want to alter pieces (e.g., glue a fur hat to a baseball bat and paint it pink), and you're not sure whether you should, just ask the Managing Director.

Once again, please return old, new, and amended times to GAB 321 during strike and store them neatly where they belong.

PRODUCTION BUDGETS

The Black Box, its inventory, and the slate of the public performance we offer each year are financed, in part, through the *Performance Studies Development Fund*. Monies in the fund derive from event receipts and, occasionally, through donations.

The COMM department contributes to the financial health of the Black Box by covering the printing and reproduction of standard-size programs, posters, tickets, and publicity mailings. As “roll-up” monies permit, the department also sends equipment and supplies our way.

In short, each faculty and student directed performance in the season (showcase performances excluded) will receive a budget to defray the cost of items and supplies they need to realize their production goals. The Black Box Advisory Board will determine the amount of funding per production at the time they announce the season.

BOX OFFICE

Directors are responsible for making certain their Box Office needs are covered. Directors must:

1. Ensure that his/her Box Office Volunteers arrive at least 90 minutes before the show
2. Ensure the accurate and safe handling of ticket stubs, records, and revenue,
3. Ensure that the audience's first impression of the PSBB is professional and efficient, and
4. Be able to cover for box office volunteers should they be late or not show up.

Tickets

Working in conjunction with the office staff, the director will produce tickets commensurate with the size of the house, and make tickets available in advance from the main office (GAB 309A). The office staff needs show title, dates of show, time & seating capacity a month before the show starts.

1. We cannot charge an admission **price**. Instead, we request a **donation** or **contribution**. All publicity must carry a statement to the effect of “A donation of \$5 will be accepted at

the door.” And, at the door, box office staff must allow audience members to donate whatever amount they desire or have available.

2. The PSBB Advisory Board determines the suggested donation for each show each year.
3. Tickets must be made available in advance for students through the main office during the week prior to and the week of the production. In order to reserve a ticket, individuals must make their donation in advance.
4. No complimentary tickets are allowed. Cast and directors may reserve tickets for family members but in order to reserve a ticket, PAYMENT IS EXPECTED AT THE DOOR.

Box Office Volunteers

Those who volunteer to staff the box office are asked to:

1. Arrive 90 minutes before show time.
2. Communicate with the director re: the number of available seats; whether standing room will be allowed, and whether late-comers will be admitted.
3. Set up an attractive (or thematic) ticket table in the hallway, and also chairs or benches for those patrons who want or need to sit down.
4. Open the box office one hour before the shows begins.
5. Instructions for handling tickets:
 - Double-check the amount of petty cash in the “bank” to start. It should be \$50.
 - If patrons ask how much a ticket costs, tell them the suggested amount.
 - Allow/encourage patrons to donate the amount they desire or have available.
 - Checks must be made out to “Communication Studies PSD Fund.”
 - Hand out programs.
6. Remain outside the door until 30 minutes into the show to handle late-comers.
7. Once the box office is closed, note on an envelope (contained in the cash box):
 - The title of the show and the date.
 - Tally the total number of tickets disbursed, and the total revenue.
 - Put all revenue in the envelope and seal it.
 - Put the envelope, any remaining (unsold) tickets, and \$50 in small bills in the cash box and lock it.
8. The box office volunteers and the director will consult with the BBM & office staff as to where to put the cashbox and money at the end of each night of the run.
9. The box office volunteers will need to submit their euids to the office staff and are responsible for the pickup and drop off of the computer/cardswipe for extra credit students.

Director’s Additional Responsibilities

Unless other arrangements have been made, directors are expected to:

1. Get the cash box from the Administrative Specialist prior to the opening of the show. Be sure there is \$50 petty cash in small bills in the cash box.

2. When the box office volunteers arrives, clarify the number of available seats; whether “standing room” will be allowed and “late-comers” permitted to enter; and verify the suggested donation.
3. Oversee the proper handling of monies each night.

PUBLICITY

The Display Case

The display case designated for Black Box productions should be decorated at least two weeks (or as soon as possible) prior to the opening of the show or immediately following the previous production. We have butcher paper and cardstock in various colors, and the Cricut machine to use to decorate this with. At the beginning of the semester the first director is responsible for the display case on the first day of school. After the show, the director is responsible for striking the display case and the next director is responsible for putting up the display case within the next two days.

Show Posters/Fliers

Show posters and fliers must be submitted to the faculty and office staff for approval and production at **least one month prior** to the opening of the show. Department branding must be approved by the college before they can be printed. Each poster must include the following information:

1. Title
2. Location
3. Time
4. Date, including year
5. Donation statement
6. University and department branding

Request to Direct Application Due – September 15th or April 15th

Your application must cover all the following points:

1. Your name, address, work & home phone numbers, & email addresses.

2. Academic Status
 - Indicate your major area of study
 - Indicate your academic year (MA/MS or UG- senior, etc.)
 - Indicate if you will seek credit for the project (e.g., Special Problems, Problem in lieu of thesis, show thesis, etc.)
 - Indicate if you currently have any academic “incompletes” or are on “academic probation” (Your response will be kept confidential.)
 - For undergraduates, indicate your GPA
3. Past Experience for Graduate and Undergraduate Students. Please include a list of any directing-performing experience you have had at UNT or elsewhere.
 - Include the title, location, and date of any.
 - Shows you have directed;
 - Shows in which you were a cast member;
 - Performance courses you have taken
 - Any other performance-related experience INCLUDING technical experience
4. Specific Description of the Show or Project
 - Title of the show/project
 - A concise synopsis of the text(s)
 - A description of the guiding theoretical concept(s) informing your production
 - An estimation of technical requirements, including set, lights, & sound
 - Estimated cast size
 - Information regarding “rights” should you plan to use or adapt copyrighted material(s). You are advised to begin your inquiries well in advance of submitting this petition.
 - Any further information you feel will contribute to a precise understanding of the show/project including how you feel the project will exemplify or extend creative academic scholarship within the discipline of performance studies.
5. Schedule Preferences
 - Indicate a FALL or SPRING semester preference;
 - Indicate a first, second, & third preference re: EARLY in the semester, MIDDLE of the semester, LATE in the semester;
 - Indicate if there are specific dates you would like to request, and why;
 - Indicate if you would like your show to run longer than 5 nights and why [Due to schedule & staff constraints, shows rarely run longer than a two weekend night schedule that usually goes from Thursday-Saturday the first weekend and Friday and Saturday the following weekend]
6. Signature

Provide your signature or craft a statement indicating that you have read the entire Black Box handbook along with this application.

BLACK BOX MANAGER POSITION DESCRIPTION

Administrative Responsibilities

1. In conjunction with the decision of the PSBB Advisory Board, the Managing Director writes or revises and distributes PSBB policy statements and procedural guidelines to all those they impact – e.g., PSBB directors, teachers of PS courses, PS students, COMM administrative staff, and so forth. Policies and guidelines are contained in the *PSBB Director's Handbook* and are posted in the Black Box facility and storage areas.
2. THE PSBBM is responsible for working closely with the department Administrative Coordinator to keep accurate and current account of all expenditures and revenue, as well as the balance in the *Fund*.
 - All forms and receipts that account for PSBB-related purchases, and all box office records (ticket stubs and tally forms) and revenue (cash), are channeled through the PSBBM, who works in conjunction with the department Administrative Coordinator to verify, copy, and record the information.
 - Working together the PSBMM and the Administrative Coordinator work to insure that: (1) all UNT regulations regarding PS Development Fund monies are met; (2) PSBB expenditures do not exceed the balance in the Fund; (3) the Administrative Coordinator is aware of all PSBB financial matters that relate to her responsibilities; and (4) to produce a year-end financial report for the Black Box Advisory Board.
3. As supervisor of the Black Box facility and storage rooms, the PSBMM communicates pertinent policies and procedures to all those who use the spaces. S/he posts (and maintains) printed rules and guidelines in prominent places in each space. The PSBMM inspects the PSBB a number of times each week. Should the PSBBM find the teachers, directors, and/or students are not following the rules and guidelines as posted, s/he may ask the PSBB Advisory Board to take action, issue a general statement him or herself, or contact and speak directly to teachers and directors.
4. To manage the scheduling of the Black Box, the PSBBM generates and posts a calendar online that clearly indicates when the space is reserved for classes and the rehearsals, tech, and runs of scheduled shows. The calendar also includes “instructions” regarding how students can reserve the space for course-related rehearsals.
5. Responsibilities for the planning and coordinating of special PSBB events (e.g., festivals, guest artists, honorariums, “talk backs”), are determined by the Managing Director, the PSBB faculty coordinator, and the PSBB Advisory Board v/v the demands of the season.

6. The PSBBM serves as the liaison between the PSBB Advisory Board and the larger COMM community, and insures that PSBB finances are relayed to the Administrative Specialist in an efficient and accurate manner. As supervisor of the Black Box facility, the PSBBM mediates between many groups who use or want to use the Black Box. The Managing Director also serves as the initial contact between PSBB directors and the administrative staff; s/he clarifies general expectations and responsibilities of both parties, and prompts direct communication.

Technical Responsibilities

1. The PSBBM is well acquainted with the Black Box facility, the adjacent AV/Tech Room, the Prop/Green Room, and the technical equipment, tools and materials, and other inventory contained in these spaces.
2. The PSBBM communicates the policies and procedures for use of the PSBB equipment to others by means of printed guidelines, hands-on teaching at the PSBB “Orientation” held at the beginning of the semester, and tech-related meetings with directors.
3. The PSBBM is NOT required to “run” tech for any of the scheduled shows. Rather, s/he double-checks that the director has generated the tech/production staff that s/he needs; and that the staff understands and follows through on the policies and procedures for use of the PSBB spaces and equipment.
4. The PSBBM is in charge of the PSBB “Orientation” held at the beginning of fall semester. At the “Orientation,” she/he teaches PSBB directors and other PS faculty and students how to use the technical equipment.
5. The PSBBM is in charge of the PSBB “Clean-up” days held at the beginning of fall and spring semester.
6. The PSBBM coordinates the purchase the supplies needed for general maintenance of the Black Box facility, its equipment, and for above-noted “Clean-up” days.
7. The PSBBM periodically checks the equipment to insure that it is in good working order and ready for use.

Copy finalized and approved March 2015.