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More Than Just Events: Students Gain Valuable Skills Through Stage Crew Work

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More Than Just Events: Students Gain Valuable Skills Through Stage Crew Work

In addition to learning how to set up concerts, dance shows and poetry slams, the members of RWU’s stage crew develop skills that can transfer to any position after graduation.

BRISTOL, R.I. – The lights are down, the stage is illuminated by spotlights and music booms from the speakers while students sing and dance along to the music of Jesse McCartney and Lupe Fiasco at this year’s spring concert. However, just 12 hours before, the same space looked drastically different.

Earlier that morning numerous black cases filled with wire, lighting, sound and stage equipment littered the Field House floor. Quickly, the RWU Stage Crew got to work constructing the stage, arranging the lights, connecting the sound system and hanging curtains.
“We start at 7:30 and we’re usually done by 2 or 3 o’clock to start sound check. So in that small amount of time, we have everything up, everything’s running,” said senior Amanda Catania, who also manages all the pipe-and-drape work for events. “It’s a long process for these types of events. We come in, people know what tasks they’re assigned to and what people they have to follow. We divide and conquer until we’re done. Then, we have a few hours to watch the show, then we come back to take it all down and go home.”

Stage Crew, one of the university’s payroll positions offered to students, is responsible for setting up and breaking down all university events. From small ones like the poetry slam and wine and paint night to much larger and more involved events like the annual dance club show and spring concert, the crew is behind the scenes for them all.

On any given day, working around class schedules and homework assignments, the crew works to hang curtains, rig and design lighting and sound systems, design seating and tables for various campus spaces, utilize projection and visual equipment and train on CCTV camera equipment. And with on-the-job training offered, students don’t need to come with any previous experience.
But the benefits of being a member of stage crew goes beyond attending all the events held around campus. The students gain skills that can apply to jobs that extend further than event operations.

“The biggest transferrable skill the students get is the ability to work within a team so they can work well with others,” said Gordon Wood, RWU’s manager of event operations. “We hope to also instill in them a strong work ethic. We try to treat it pretty much like a real job, so there are certain expectations we require of them.”

And while she may not be entering into a career in event operations, Catania, a psychology and criminal justice double major, says being on stage crew for her four years at RWU has given her numerous benefits that can apply to her post-college career.

“Research teams within psychology is the same idea [as stage crew]. Where everybody has a job that needs to get done and there’s this idea of having to work together, direct things, separate it out and put it together in the end,” Catania said. “But it’s a lot of hours. So you have to figure out when am I free and when can I get work done, what can I do. It comes down to balancing acts and figuring everything out in the long run, which is always very nice to have.”

With a variety of events happening each week, the hard work and dedication from the students in stage crew can’t go unnoticed. Whether it’s an area you have prior experience or interest in or maybe you’re looking to explore and find something new, stage crew is always looking for a helping hand.

“It’s an interesting dynamic because it really takes a certain type of person to do this work, but we always seem to get the right people,” Wood said. “We need leaders but we also need people who are willing to do the smaller tasks in addition to the larger stuff. We have different levels of involvement, but there’s no hierarchy. It’s all one crew getting the job done.”

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