

WKU Department of Theatre and Dance
House Management
Manual

(Revised 8/19/11)

Fundamental responsibilities of the House Manager are:

- To ensure the safety of the audience and all front of house personnel.
- To ensure that the needs of the audience are looked after.
- To enforce theatre policies that relate to the box office, theatre, lobby, fire safety, building security and front of house.
- To control audience traffic and manage patron problems before, during and after each performance.
- To contact, train, schedule and supervise volunteers/ushers for all performances or special events in the theatre.
- To coordinate the activities of ushers, ensuring that tickets are collected and patrons counted, programs distributed, audience members are seated comfortably and cleaning of the auditorium is complete after the show.
- To check with stage management whether any warning notices are needed (special effects, gun shots, etc.) and see that such warnings are communicated clearly to the audience prior to seating.
- To communicate with the stage manager/house technician for the timing of the show's start and conclusion of the intermission.
- To coordinate safe and non-disruptive entrance of latecomers to the theatre.
- To be prepared for and keep records on first aid emergencies, patron accidents or occurrences.
- To inform the department administration about any first aid emergencies, patron accidents or occurrences.
- To evacuate the audience in case of an emergency.
- To be familiar with fire regulations, safety regulations and liquor control board regulations and to ensure that all front of house personnel and patrons are abiding by these regulations.

Pre-production planning

I. Securing, scheduling and training house crew

Russell Miller Theatre:

There should be 7 ushers for each Mainstage performance: one to check tickets at each door, two seating assistants (handing out programs) for each door, and one runner to assist the House Manager.

Gordon Wilson Lab Theatre:

There should be 4 ushers for every performance: one to hand out programs for each side of the entrance into the Lab Theatre, one to monitor the back hallway and entrances and one runner to assist the House Manager.

Securing Ushers

Ushers will be secured by the Rehearsal & Production (Prod) course instructor. Be sure to get their contact phone numbers –preferably a cell phone. In the event the Prod course cannot supply a sufficient number of ushers for a run, a sign-up for ushering will be posted outside FAC 121 all semester.

Overview of the usher's responsibilities.

The usher controls unauthorized entrance to the auditorium, limiting access to approved staff and patrons with correct tickets. The usher greets the patrons, making them feel welcome and comfortable. Since food, beverages and cameras are not allowed in the auditorium it is the ticket takers responsibility to inform patrons of this restriction. Ushers distribute programs and welcome patrons and determine if any need assistance in finding their seats, directing them as necessary. They also monitor the auditorium during the performance, anticipating for potential patron problems (talking, cameras, food) and have an important share of the responsibility for the safety and security of theatre patrons.

Dress Code.

All house management staff must dress well to represent the University well. The object is to look nice, and yet not be a distraction moving around in the house during a performance. Ushers should do the same, allowing them to be distinguishable from audience members.

Schedules & Calls.

Ushers should arrive one hour before the house opens for Russell Miller shows and one half-hour before the house opens for Gordon Wilson shows. If an usher does not arrive on time, it is the House Manager's responsibility to contact that usher to determine why they are not present.

The House Manager should arrive 15 minutes prior to the usher call, to open doors, check in with the box office and SM for introductions, information on running

time and expected situations that might have an impact on the orderly management of the performance.

Training, safety and security. When all are assembled, the house manager distributes usher checklists and instructs new personnel on policies and emergency procedures and briefs them on the performance.

All members of the front of house team should be aware of what to do or who will take charge in the event of medical emergencies (stage manager), fire evacuation, power failure, accident/incident reporting, discovery of fire, latecomers, babes in arms, robberies, lost and found articles, disruptive patrons in the audience, other audience safety issues, ambulance refusal and patrons requiring assistance taking medication. A tour of the theatre should be given to highlight and demonstrate the theatre's emergency procedures and fire exit routes.

Even if all ushers working a particular show are experienced with procedures, the house manager should still go over expected attendance, length of show, intermissions for the performance.

After this has been finished, the remainder of the time should be used to take the ushers in to the house and check for and pick up any garbage and familiarize themselves with the space.

Ushers obtain flashlights from the house manager prior to opening the house. Please return them to the house manager after the performance. Flashlights should be used when directing patrons to their seats for all latecomers and if there is low lighting in the theatre. Flashlights must be regularly maintained, so as to be ready for service, especially in the event of an emergency. The Stage Manager or House Manager should make sure that flashlights have batteries.

Key collaborators

- *Stage Manager*- always keep in touch with the SM to assure that everything happens on time and in sync with the cast and crew.
- *Box Office Manager*-always keep in touch with the BO Manager in order to prepare for a hold of house or with customer problems involving tickets.

Pre-show: Before the Audience arrives

Lobby, House and Program Preparation The house and lobby should be inspected for trash, missing or broken equipment, and unanticipated obstructions to seating. Garbage bags in the lobby should be changed before every performance. Programs and ticket collections boxes are put into place. The house manager receives programs from the box office manager. If there are inserts, the programs are stuffed. If there are any significant problems or issues that require greater authority, the house manager notifies the Stage Manager. When the SM “gives” the House to the House Manager at about 30 minutes before curtain, the auditorium doors will open.

Opening the House: Seating & Customer Service The house is opened only at the consent of the stage manager. The house is opened to patrons approximately a half-hour prior to curtain time. If there is to be a substantial delay beyond that time, the house managers and ticket takers should inform patrons (particularly those near the house doors) of the delay, including a simple explanation of the cause.

Seating. If patrons are familiar with the auditorium and their seat locations (if seats are assigned for the performance), they should still be directed towards them by the ticket-checkers as accurately as possible. If they are unfamiliar with the facility, they are led to their row and directed to the correct seats. Always offer to assist patrons and be aware of persons already seated who may be having a problem. When there is a question or problem about seating (two people wanting the same seat, etc.), the usher asks to see both parties' tickets. Improperly seated patrons are directed to the right seats politely. Duplicate tickets or other more complicated problems are handled by the house manager, working with the box office.

Closing the House & Starting the show. The house manager coordinates the actual curtain time with the box office manager and stage manager. Although it is a policy to start promptly, lines at the box office, technical or artists' problems backstage or inclement weather and parking problems may require a delay. The stage manager, in consultation with the house manager, makes the final determination when to begin the performance. The house manager flashes the lobby lights 5 minutes prior to curtain and again 2 minutes prior to curtain. Announcements should be made in the restrooms that house is closing. As curtain time approaches, ushers inform patrons moving about or leaving the auditorium that the show is starting. When the house lights go to half, the main doors are closed. From this point, all patrons are considered latecomers. They will be admitted as soon as possible.

The doors into the house from the lobby will remain unlocked, with the ticket takers monitoring for unauthorized access. Once the performance ends, the house manager returns the stanchions and ticket collection boxes to their proper storage place and programs to the Box Office.

Latecomer Seating

The house manager remains in the lobby to take care of latecomers. Avoid interrupting quiet musical or dramatic moments; seat latecomers between musical pieces or at movement breaks. Latecomers are seated in the closest available sections to the door. Inform them they can move to their reserved seats at intermission. Because of unfamiliarity with the campus or trouble parking on week nights, people may be legitimately late through no fault of their own. Patrons, even ones in error, are treated with courtesy and politely. If latecomers are to be held for a significant time, make them comfortable, offer programs to read, or allow them to stand near the closed door to hear the performance. If patrons are standing by doors, advise them not to talk loudly and to be prepared for the possibility of exiting audience members.

Flashlights

The house manager and usher teams on both sides of the auditorium must have flashlights accessible for emergency use and to assist seating latecomers in a dark theatre. When using a flashlight, keep it pointed at the floor in front of the patron so they may see where they are going while minimizing distraction.

Intermission

The house manager establishes the intermission length with the stage manager. As the intermission ends, the house manager flashes the lobby lights in the same sequence as before the performance. Polite reminders to stragglers may be necessary. The lights should be flashed at 2 minutes until house closes and announcements made in the restrooms again.

Post-show: Preparing for the next performance

The House Manager should take down all signs and put them in the Box Office, and should check the house and lobby for lost items (they are taken to the main theatre office). If it is the last night of the show, the house and lobby should be cleaned up, and the garbage taken out. Once the House Manager is finished, he or she must check out with the SM to make sure that they do not require anything else of them.