

Title IX Considerations for Theatre Productions and Activities

Students participating in Theatre productions may refer to the following website for information regarding Sexual Discrimination and Assault under the provisions of Title IX: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/qa-201404-title-ix.pdf>

Other important resources include:

www.notalone.gov

www.knox.edu/titleix

Theatre is by nature an environment that can be confrontational, disturbing, and cause people to feel uncomfortable. Theatre is a social force for change, dialogue, commentary, and critique. As such, theatre deals with topics that are controversial, complex, and even provocative: theatre examines the human condition in all of its nobility and all of its ugliness: that said, those who work in the theatre have a right to be free of the threat or presence of sexual discrimination or assault.

Because the topics of physical violence and sexual assault as they might be treated thematically or enacted in a given play can cause personal distress, it is the obligation of those with responsibility for productions and the conduct of rehearsals, production work calls, and other company interactions to assure that all persons party to a given production understand and agree to the parameters of the content of the play, the approach to the work, and the general atmosphere of the work setting. Though a given play might examine sexual assault or violence, no member of the production team should feel personally at risk or targeted by other members of the production team. To assure that all members who agree to work on a production do so with a clear understanding of the expectations of the production and integrity, the director must clearly communicate the themes that collectively will be explored, the approach that will be used to achieve the performances and the production values, and everyone's role in assuring a safe and non-threatening environment.

The following guidelines should be considered and implemented as they apply to a given production in order to assure informed agreement regarding participation.

1. Directors should include in all audition information a statement that addresses themes of violence or sexual assault present in a given play. This is commonly considered a "trigger warning."
2. Directors should verbally convey to all auditionees the thematic nature of the play and the degree to which violence or sexual assault will be enacted.
3. Directors should verbally convey to all auditionees the degree of physical contact and intimacy that will be expected as part of the behavior of the characters and as part of the rehearsal process.

4. Directors should verbally convey to all auditionees the nature of ensemble or physical theatre rehearsal processes and the likelihood of the prevalence of significant, non-sexualized physical contact between actors and/or simulated sexualized physical contact that will of necessity exist between characters as part of the action of the play.
5. Audition sheets should include a sign-off statement that the auditionee has been apprised of potentially disturbing themes and practices associated with physical or sexual violence, and that acceptance of a role constitutes agreement to work under the specified conditions.
6. Directors should discuss comfort parameters with cast members and establish protocols for dealing with physical contact and emotional thresholds and assure a means of conveying the need to temporarily step out of a given exercise.
7. Directors should lead a discussion with cast members and members of the production team that establishes company protocols for safeguarding one another and establishing an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust. Non-verbal communication is a key feature of theatre performance and all members of the production should be encouraged to be sensitive to signals that persons experiencing distress might be sending without direct verbal communication.
8. Directors should urge company members to refrain from mocking or lampooning the serious or controversial themes or action of the play. Though humor can be a means of releasing tension, it can ignore different personal thresholds relative to the themes and action of the play.
9. All members of the company should be familiar with the tenets of the Office of Civil Rights and the college as they pertain to Title IX. The director should urge all company members to review the documents found on the websites above.
10. If any member of a production has reason to think that they or any other member of the production is being transgressed against or is a transgressor, that individual should convey his or her concerns to a member of the theatre faculty or to the College's Title IX Coordinator, Kim Schrader (kschrade@knox.edu or 309-337-6536).