

## **GUIDELINES FOR KCACTF RESPONDENTS**

### **THE GOALS FOR RESPONDING TO PARTICIPATING ENTRIES:**

- To choose the best work to represent the region at the Regional Festival, so the National Selection Team can evaluate it for the National Festival.
- To choose the best and most interesting work for the benefit of all who attend the Regional Festival.

### **THE GOALS FOR RESPONDING TO BOTH ASSOCIATE AND PARTICIPATING ENTRIES:**

- To celebrate and explore the theatrical process through the benefit of a response from a reasonably objective colleague.
- To recognize excellence in college theatre by providing opportunities for showcases, commendations, fellowships, and competitions for both student and faculty theatre artists.

### **A BASIC MODEL FOR YOUR RESPONSE:**

- Find out what you can about the show before the performance. It's great if you can have dinner with the director before the show and just let them talk about their program and their production. It's important for you to just listen and find out what they want you to know. If they have a very young cast whose members are inexperienced and eager, that could color the tone of your response. If they have a well-seasoned cast of graduate students doing their MFA final projects, that might affect your response in a very different way. If you can't get together with the director for an extended conversation before the show, you should try to do it on the phone or via e-mail. The more you know before you begin, the more appropriately informed your response can be.
- It's good to re-identify yourself as a representative from KCACTF, and thank the company for participating. Many of the students you'll be talking with have probably never attended (and may never attend) a Regional Festival. While it's great to encourage them to attend the Regional Festival, remind them that they're vital participants in the Festival even now, by virtue of being involved in an entry at their own school. Your being there, seeing their show in their space and giving them an immediate response IS the heart of the Festival.
- It's good to remind the company that you are not more knowledgeable about their production than they are; you simply have the advantage of seeing it with fresh eyes. They are to understand that yours is only one opinion, and that they shouldn't listen to your response as any kind of final word. Remind them not to "change" anything based on what you say, unless their director instructs them to do so.
- Be sure you specifically discuss all of the following topics, and not necessarily in this order:
  - Direction - topics might include: concept, overall stylistic choices in acting, pacing, staging, overall production unity, etc.
  - Acting - topics might include believability, honesty, listening, technical skills such as vocal production, movement, stylistic choices, interpretation of character, sense of ensemble
    - Some respondents make it a point to specifically mention every actor in the production. While this is often considered courteous and appropriate, it may not be feasible in a show with a very large cast. Do specifically discuss all the actors in major roles.
  - Design - topics might include contribution to, and integration with the overall production concept, artistic excellence. Be sure you cover all areas of design: scenic, costume, lighting, makeup, sound, properties.

- Technical Elements - topics might include execution of designs, attention to detail, completion of design, stage management and running crew assignments.
  - Additional Elements - these might include (but are not limited to) original music, front of house operation, lobby display, program/program notes.
- It's a good idea to ask for questions or comments from the group. Encourage them to ask for clarification if they didn't understand something you said, or to ask about a topic you neglected to mention specifically. *Really* encourage questions and comments; if you can get the company talking, it helps to diminish the sense that you're there to pass judgment, but encourages them to see you as a peer who is interested in what they are doing.
  - Be thorough, but don't be long-winded. It's very possible to do a complete response in 30-40 minutes. It's fine to go longer if you perceive that everyone is really "with" you, or there's a lively dialogue going on. 15 minutes is definitely not long enough and 90 minutes is way too long!
  - Do your best to remain positive about the work you've just seen. Egos are always very fragile immediately following a performance when everyone is sometimes still on an adrenaline/applause "high." Your goal is to celebrate and explore the work; try to approach the task as a collegial colleague rather than a judge. Your words are not carved in stone, and you should remind everyone of that. Never intentionally embarrass or offend or demoralize a faculty member or student during the process.
  - Work from positive statements, and be specific and thorough in your praise. Ease into negative aspects carefully; it's sometimes good to couch them as questions, rather than definitive judgments. Remember that for many people any negative comment resonates much more loudly than a positive one. Some respondents seem to be in too big a hurry to get to the problems; don't forget to elaborate and celebrate what worked well in the production.
  - However, don't let the encouragement to emphasize what is positive be misconstrued into an instruction to remain superficial or patronizing in your comments. Be sure you are honest and thoughtful and thorough. A common complaint from schools about respondents is that "They talked for quite a while, but they didn't really *say* anything."
  - Always do your best to be gracious and cool; you are representing KCACTF, and we appreciate your being able to "sell" the Festival, even as you are giving an honest and specific response.

**AVOID THESE "GUARANTEED-BAD" OPENING STATEMENTS:**

"Well, that was fun!"

"You were all just great."

"How was it for you?"

"The biggest problem was..."

"I just directed/acted/designed this show and..."

"When they did this show in New York/London/Kalamazoo..."

"I've always taught this play as being an example of..."

"God, this is the sixth production of this show I've seen this year."

"This has always been one of my least favorite plays/playwrights/styles."

"Why in the world would you guys attempt this play?"

## PLEASE REMEMBER:

- Don't redirect the play. Avoid your personal perspectives. This is not about you, or about your history with the play. It's about the production you just saw. Respond to what you actually experienced. Offer opinions and questions, not judgments and credos. Avoid conjecture. Talk about what really happened in the performance.
- Don't be clever for the sake of being clever. You're not doing an on-stage performance. Be sincere, thoughtful, honest, encouraging, even humorous - but don't "perform."
- Avoid personal criticisms of students (i.e. "you're too heavy for that role," or "you're just the wrong type for this")
- Work to use a vocabulary you believe is both appropriate and will be accessible for the students involved.
- Don't spend a lot of time addressing a playwright who isn't there. While it's fair to mention that you have some questions about the text itself, don't spend the majority of your time discussing textual issues apart from the acting, directing, design, and production choices that were made with the script (unless it's an original play and/or the playwright is present). If you have some problems with the script by Edward Albee, or Moliere, or Arthur Miller...mention them and then move on.
- The three most common complaints about responses are:
  - *Design and technical elements are glossed over, ignored, or merely an afterthought.* It might be a good idea to START with them.
  - *Nothing of substance is really offered.* The response was merely a bunch of platitudes: "Gosh, it was great and I really liked it." Even if the show was terrific, be sure you are specific and give them something of substance to consider and talk about later.
  - *The respondent acted like he/she hated the production, was terribly bored, and/or was in a hurry to leave.* Occasionally, you will see a production that seems greatly flawed. Don't feel that you need to articulate every negative aspect of the production. Pick the key points you wish to make, and focus only on those. Remember, you're there to *celebrate* theatre—these folks worked hard and are proud of their production. Your task is not to teach the company everything there is to know about theatre in your response. Nudge them to the next level, and then call it a day.

*Please try to avoid these three recurring problems!*

## KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN FOR THE FOLLOWING:

1. **Meritorious Achievement Awards:** Be on the lookout for ANY areas that are worthy of a special "Meritorious Achievement Award" from the Region to be given out at the Festival. This can be a very good way to recognize exceptional production work of any kind, whether it is by faculty or student. And don't just think acting, directing, designing. Was there excellent original music? Notable achievement in props construction? Terrific ensemble acting? Knockout lobby display? Keep your eyes and ears open for excellence in any area of production.

It is possible to give too many of these, however. We encourage you to recommend these on your screening reports when you see something that is truly outstanding. . If you're regularly recommending 3 or 4 for EVERY show you respond to, that's probably way too many. Let's save them for truly OUTSTANDING accomplishments.

2. **Exemplary student directors:** look for outstanding student directors who we can invite to enter our SDC event at the Regional Festival.
3. **Exemplary stage managers:** look for outstanding student stage managers who we can invite to enter our DTM Stage Management event at the Regional Festival.
4. **Outstanding teaching artists:** We should keep our eyes open for possible candidates for the following fellowships:
  - O'Neill National Critics Institute Fellow
  - Actors Center Teacher Development Workshop Fellowship
  - Kennedy Center Faculty Summer Fellowships In: Costume, Scenery & Lighting
  - KCACTF National Festival Faculty Fellowships

#### **A WARNING:**

You are NOT doing official peer review for use in retention, promotion and tenure procedures unless you are formally asked to do so, and you agree to this role (and you understand the liability you engender). Even if this is the case, KCACTF and the Kennedy Center are never involved in this process. Any written report you create for KCACTF must have the appropriate disclaimer stating such.

#### **RESPONSE FORMS:**

It's very important that you SUBMIT to the Regional Chair your electronic screening report on the Monday or Tuesday after you've seen a production, so that it's fresh on your mind, and so that we can keep up to date on our list of commendations. PLEASE remember to ask which members of the production team are students. It's ESPECIALLY important for you to send screening reports in early for PARTICIPATING entries, so we have a sense of what shows are being "held" for possible Festival consideration.

#### **IRENE RYAN NOMINATIONS**

Each associate entry receives two Irene Ryan nominations; one made by the respondent and one by the director. Each participating entry receives three nominations; one each from both of the respondents, and one by the director. It is EXTREMELY helpful if respondents will consult with the director immediately after the performance about Ryan nominees. Respondents need to have as much autonomy as possible in choosing the person they think is the most deserving of the nomination, but PLEASE work within whatever guidelines the director may give you.

For example, if you're seeing a show in the spring semester, then the school may not want to nominate graduating seniors who will be unable to attend the Regional Festival the next January. Or some students in the cast may have been nominated from an earlier entry; if the school would like you to nominate someone else, so as to spread the nominations around, PLEASE do so. Finally, be sure that the actor you're thinking of nominating is in fact an eligible student. It is your responsibility to make sure the school knows who you are nominating ASAP, preferably before you leave the theatre after the show.

## **ELECTRONIC REPORT TO THE REGIONAL CHAIR ON PARTICIPATING ENTRIES**

Those of you who serve as a member of the **selection team** (Selector) or the (Respondent) who gives the oral response and also weighs in on whether the show is in contention, (in fact, most of the time the selector and respondent provide a joint response in our region), both **MUST FILE AN ELECTRONIC SCREENING REPORT** to the Regional Chair.

So, to reiterate: **ALL** respondents, of both associate and participating entries, must file **ELECTRONIC** screening reports to the Regional Chair on the Monday or Tuesday after they've seen the show.

### **FINALLY:**

Do your best to "give them their money's worth." For many schools who bring few or no attendees to the Regional Festival, the experience of receiving an oral response is their sole contact with KCACTF. Let's make it an experience they can remember as valuable, and one they'll consider again in the future.

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Region VII

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