

Concealed Carry Best Practices | KU Department of Theatre | July 1, 2017 |

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The Department of Theatre is an educational performance laboratory that trains scholars, actors, directors, designers, and technicians the theory and practice of making live theatre. We educate student majors and non-majors about the history of theatre and its relationship to the humanities and social sciences. On the performance side, our work is based on rehearsing daily in performance spaces using our bodies and voices to animate texts in performance. This work requires close physical contact between students and faculty. Actors must wear clothing that allows them to understand their bodies as instruments of performance. Faculty touch actors to make adjustments in physical exercises and also assign partner work (students working together) that is very physical, including but not limited to dance, yoga, stage combat, mime, clown work, commedia, and/or physical comedy (this includes pratfall work, etc.). For an actor to be armed with a weapon during this physical work would be dangerous and would inhibit trust between students and faculty. Having a gun on the body in these performance scenarios would be potentially fatal if the weapon accidentally fires. If students were to store their weapons in backpacks, they would not be able to complete the work of the courses in the performance labs without leaving them unattended for hours at a time. This laboratory work occurs in daily classroom practice and in rehearsal times for our shows on a regular basis.

On the production side of our unit, our technical production labs are also precarious spaces for firearms. Our directors, designers and production teams work to build sets using blow torches, saws, electrical outlets, flammable materials, and/or combustible chemicals. Moreover, students, faculty, and staff must climb into fly spaces (theatre rafters) and the like to secure sets, install and adjust lights, etc. If a student, faculty, or staff member is armed during these daily procedures, we cannot tell students that our learning spaces are safe for all. If a gun goes off accidentally, is improperly secured, and/or drops from a secured holster in these spaces, we cannot guarantee that there will not be injuries or

potential fatalities. Furthermore, in preparation for, and during the performance itself, weapons pose a risk. In costume fittings, actors remove clothing and costumes are fitted to their bodies. During performances, actors store backpacks and everyday clothing in dressing room lockers. During performances themselves, the play may require the use of prop guns, including those that are equipped to mimic the sound of a shooting gun. An armed actor, stage-hand or audience member may mistake the sound for a real gun. As a unit, we fear that we cannot teach, serve, or protect our students in their pursuit of a theatre degree (as it is currently articulated in the curriculum) without fundamental safety and performance protocols put into place before we end this semester. In addition to these vital concerns, our theatres hold patrons that have an expectation of safety when they come to see our shows. Without metal detectors screening the public, we have no guarantees of safety for audience members or students performing and crewing our shows.

On a national level, the accrediting body for schools of theatre, NAST (National Association of Schools of Theatre) states in its 2016-17 handbook that “All instructional and production preparation facilities shall be accessible, safe, and secure, and shall meet the standards of local fire and health codes” (66). In addition, this same handbook recommends that “All facilities and equipment should produce an environment conducive to learning and be sufficient to enable faculty and students to focus on academic and artistic endeavors” (67).

In Texas, where laws permit firearms to be openly carried, the Alley Theatre in Houston has nevertheless determined that firearms are not permitted. As they state: “The Alley Theatre is firearms-free. Firearms, including without limitation handguns, shotguns, and rifles (whether concealed or openly carried) are prohibited on the Alley premises.” See: <https://www.alleytheatre.org/plays/what-you-should-know>

Action Items Completed to date in the Department of Theatre

- Faculty, students, and staff have been informed about the concealed and carry law on our campus.
- Discussion about safety have been held in faculty meetings. Information has been distributed via email to the unit.
- The Department will secure active shooter trainings and safety training for the faculty, staff and students in our unit for Fall 2017

Dedicated Performance and Production Spaces

- All acting studios—3 (Murphy 356, 354, 209)
- Theatres- 2 (C&P, Inge)
- Production labs- tech and costume shops (2)

While the following list is not comprehensive, this list states the kinds of “Best Practices” that will have to be adopted in theatre to secure the safety of students and audience:

Acting Studios

1. Students wearing weapons may not participate in physical warm-ups in acting class, nor any exercises involving falls, tumbles, jostling, close contact with another actor
2. Theatre faculty will no longer be permitted to make any physical adjustments to actors

Rehearsal and Performance

1. There will be no use of prop guns until final dress rehearsal. Realistic guns will not be permitted
2. The sound of a gunshot is not permitted in the theatre, neither during rehearsal nor during performance. Directors are asked to find another way of representing gunfire.
3. Backpacks containing weapons will not be permitted in the actors’ lockers. An actor wishing to wear a firearm must keep their weapons with them throughout performance.

Costumes and Costume Fittings

1. An actor at a costume fitting may not wear a gun, but must have it in their backpack and with them per university policy.
2. If an actor plans to wear a firearm during performance, the designer can attempt to create a costume fitted to accommodate it or the director may reassign the student to another role where a costume can be made.

Production Lab

1. Students wearing firearms must not work with flammable materials such as blow torches. To fulfill their lab requirements, they will be reassigned to different duties.
2. Similarly, students wearing firearms are not be permitted to climb ladders or work in the fly spaces.