

Adjusted Faculty Workload College of Performing Arts
Progress Report
COVER SHEET


Name Tom Fusco Department Theater and Dance

PROPOSAL TITLE: Stage Rats

(1) Please indicate the purpose for which the academic teaching load adjustment was requested:

Research/Scholarship	()	Creative Activity	()
Instructional Improvement	()	Scholarship of Teaching and Learning	()
Extraordinary service activities/projects	(X)	Other (please describe below)	()

(2) Please write a report to describe the activities for which the reassigned time was requested of 300-500 words. Attach this with supporting documentation for the activities if applicable. –See Attached

Signature  Date: March 6, 2016

Report on Adjusted Work Load

Stage Rats L.L.C.

“A leading public institution, Rowan University combines liberal education with professional preparation from the baccalaureate through the doctorate. Rowan provides a collaborative, learning-centered environment in which highly qualified and diverse faculty, staff, and students integrate teaching, research, scholarship, creative activity and community service. Through intellectual, social and cultural contributions, the university enriches the lives of those in the campus community and surrounding region. “– Rowan University Mission Statement

The ongoing mission of Stage Rats is to provide apprenticeship style learning for Rowan’s students while providing quality scenic production services for our clients. This program addresses the university’s mission of providing a “ liberal education with professional preparation” by providing mentorship and guidance as the student prepares to leave the academic world and enter the trade.

The very nature of building scenery and providing production services is a living, working example of a collaborative environment. Stage Rats is unique as a production company in that each project is used as an opportunity to teach the apprentices how to interact with clients, organize the work flow and to a safe, successful completion. This program is a direct extension of the Stage Craft Cohort Sequence, the Design/Tech track program of the Department of Theater and Dance. The Sequence is centered on collaborative project based learning where research, and creativity are combined with skill based learning to realize the ideas of directors and designers. Stage Rats is the last link between the educational and professional world, the point when the successful student has started their career. This report will detail the scope of work that entails running a productions company, plans for the future and a list of projects completed and ongoing.

Each contract has a number of meetings and steps that have to be followed. The first of these involve the initial design meetings, site visits, drafting, budgeting and purchasing. As the Technical Director of Stage Rats I take on all of these roles. On average each meeting takes 3 hours and site visits 4 hours. This includes preparation, travel and follow up calls. The amount of time it takes to draft and budget a show is variable, depending on the complexity of the show. The minimum time is 8 hours over two weeks, the maximum time I spent drafting the Opera was 16 hours over four weeks. The reason for needing the stretch of time is provide back and forth communication with the designers, technical director and producer.

Purchasing logistics vary from contract to contract and is complicated by the various ways in which theaters and school are allowed to pay vendors and purchase goods. With several schools the only way they pay their over hire is by making them actually employees. This means that I have my fingerprints registered with the state, submit to drug testing and TB tests. As I tell my workers it is do that or walk away from the money. Another time consuming issue is that most of these are non-profit organizations and are tax exempt. In order to take advantage of the tax exempt status purchases of materials happen in one of there ways, the purchases come directly from the school or theater in coordination with Stage Rats, Stage Rats purchases the materials using their Employment Identification Number, or Stage Rats purchases items after securing a resellers permit from the state. All of this results in a lot of time is spent on purchasing materials and the logistics.

The next phase in the project is the build and load in. This is where the apprentices spend a majority of their time learning. Each project is unique and provides its own set of challenges. From building a 14' free standing bridge for Les Mis, or creating six clouds that average 16'x 18' in size or even down to a proper working door. One unexpected aspect was the education that the clients go through when Stage Rats comes in and starts building. Most of these institutions are surprised at the modern techniques and methods that Stage Rats uses, from the proper size lumber to proper execution of platforming and the re- use of existing materials. One reason we can accommodate a low budget is that we make up for lack of money with efficient building practices, proper use of materials and the introduction of new methods. Building railings out of reclaimed lumber, using 5/4 stock instead of 2x for framing platforms and having the proper number of skilled workers on a work call are some examples.

The apprentices are involved with the building and implantation of the designs. I work closely with them in creating working drawings and overseeing their building and loading in of the set pieces. Recently some of the more advanced apprentices have become skilled enough that they can be trusted with entire projects, building four flats or legging up all of the platform for instance. I am pleased with their progress and now Stage Rats is poised to start on another phase of its programming.

Stage Rats is well placed in the market and is beginning to form a steady pool of clients. The apprentices are also gaining experience and are ready for the next level of professional development, becoming journeymen. At this phase Stage Rats will provide the resources needed for the qualified apprentice to step up and be in charge of an entire contract. I will provide mentorship, quality control and supervision. Stage Rats will provide insurance and workmen's comp. The journeyman will be responsible for drawing, budgeting, purchasing, overseeing the build and load in.

The last phase in this program will deal with the logistics of being a small business owner, whether that is a self-employed contractor or Limited Liability Company. Taxes, insurance, payroll and best practices are all part of running a company. On average I spend 18 hours a month handling these logistics and it is just complicated enough and takes so much time, that it is hard to find the mechanism to teach this to an enrolled college student. In the future I may have some of the seriously interested students take an independent study or internship with Stage Rats to provide the time needed to teach these things.

At this point marketing and publicity have been left to word of mouth. The main reason for this is that business is at a manageable rate and I do not want to get into a position of having too much work to do in a short period. This keeps our motto true to form "Quality Scenic Services." If there are enough qualified journeymen than I can begin on marketing Stage Rats in earnest. This has a huge potential for growth, it is feasible for Stage Rats become a regional industry leader in the region.

Since last year we have fulfilled several contracts and are currently working on three more. For several years we have been building and managing the scenic operations for Gloucester County Institute of Technology's Academy of the Performing Arts. The shows were As You Like It, Legally Blond and Cheaper by the Dozen.

Jenna Kurza and Joe Napolitano, two alums from Rowan, contacted me about building the set for Audobon High's production of Les Mis. Duane Trowbridge, the producer, was impressed with our quality and budget minded-ness that he offered an open ended agreement for Stage Rats to continue to build

his scenery indefinitely. This led to the current work we are doing on Audobon's production of "Urine Town".

Mathais Fruzia, another recent graduate who is now the lead designer for Bush Gardens in Florida, contracted us to build the Rowan Opera Company's production of "The Magic Flute". This set was a huge challenge, the size and amount of scenery were massive, and there was a relatively small budget for such an undertaking. It was with the help of US Lumber who donated the wood and the assistance of Bob Thorpe and Bart Healey in the scene shop that we were able to pull it off. The results were well worth the effort. In my opinion the scenery for the "Magic Flute" was the most complicated, large and beautiful set that Rowan University has ever seen. The fact that it was done for less than \$10,000 is astounding.

A cornerstone of the Stage Rats business philosophy is to always strive to be aware of the environment and the local community; to be grateful for and give back to the businesses and citizens who we work for. Bob Thorpe was contacted by the Girls and Boys Club of Gloucester to provide lighting and help decorate the Glassboro Garage for a fund raising event. In need of labor and expertise for the event, he asked if Stage Rats could donate the monies (and incidentally make sure everyone was covered by insurance and workmen's comp) to hire some workers. We were happy to help out and the event was huge success. Theresa Dipietro, the organizer, has put us in charge of this year's event.

My wife is the Owner and C.E.O. of Synergixx, a marketing company that creates infomercials. During the summer she needed to have a set built for a new product. Since she knows my work she asked if Stage Rats would be available to build her set for Omax3. This was a great opportunity for the apprentices because it was a different type of industry than theater, it was film and TV. The commercial was shot in the Invincible Sound Studios in Philadelphia. The time frame was quick, three days in and out. What really impressed the workers was the budget, \$12,000. More money than most schools spends on 8 sets. It was a prime example of the production triangle, money, quality, time. You get two out of three. In this case no time is compensated for with lots of money. As I told them after a long day, film and TV rely on greed to keep people happy, \$35 an hour is a decent wage for someone still in college. Three of the workers have been back to Invincible as over hire, as the Production Manager told me we have "good workers with less attitude".

Not all contracts are building scenery, we also provide consulting services for installations. In this case Nick Rossi, another alum, needed some help with purchasing a Main Curtain and Border for his school's theater. This sort of job does not create a lot of revenue, but it does keep the local network of theater professionals and educators fresh.

During the Fall my wife was named one of the top 40 under 40 business executives in the region by South Jersey magazine. She also moved her offices to a new larger space which needed to have 200 cubicles assembled. While not related to theater per se it was related to making money building things. One of the most valuable skills is the ability to be flexible and generate revenue when you get a chance; also you never know where it can lead too. In this case it was a sudden opportunity that arose when the small low key opening of the new office turned into a huge grand opening with two mayors, an assembly person, the Gloucester County Chamber of Commerce, the press and over 200 local business people. Synergixx hired Stage Rats to create a video studio with a grid and a reception area. Stage Rats workers were hired by Synergixx to work as crew during the event. This turned out to be helping out with the catering, which was a surprise, but they got a free meal as well as a check.

During the Department of Theater and Dance's workshop day I met Sarah Mickle, the drama producer for Clayton High. She hired Stage Rats to build the set for Bye Bye Birdie. What is interesting about this contact is that Clayton is in the process of building a new performing arts center for the community and the high school. It looks like Stage Rats will be building one of the first sets for this new facility.

At the end of this period I am well pleased with how things are going. Stage Rats is in the black and doing well. The apprentices are happy and getting hungry for more work; their confidence is building to the point where they want to strike out on their own. The use of AWL has made all of this possible and I appreciate the College's support. I strongly believe that continued in this endeavor will result in us fulfilling the Rowan mission of enrich(ing) "the lives of those in the campus community and surrounding region." It will also produce some of the best trained, well rounded and professionally prepared theater technicians in the region.

Addendum:

In response to the committee's request for an overview of what projects Stage Rats has planned for the future; I submit the following:

This May Stage Rats received a drafting package from Matheus Fruzia,, a former student and lead designer for Busch Gardens in Florida. As a group we bid on the project, a process that takes around 16 hours. The set itself was not that complicated, but due to our totally inadequate facilities we cannot weld aluminum. Also we do not have the space for and c and c router, a standard piece of equipment that is necessary for the accuracy and speed needed to build scenery of this caliber. Sadly we have to let this project go. (fyi –this project would have brought in \$120,000, employing 8 people over the entire summer and giving Rowan some incredible publicity for recruiting.)

Currently Bruce Curliss from the Ritz Theater has reached out to Stage Rats to build some sets over the summer. We have two standing contracts with Audubon High School and Clayton High School. We will start in November in planning and designing their spring musicals. Building of the scenery will happen in January with load in and around March.

Based on an idea that the Associate Dean had, Stage Rats will create an internship program for Theater Students and also in collaboration with the College of Business. We will start on branding ourselves and creating a solid marketing plan.

Appendix I
Selected Pictures

The Magic Flute
Rowan Opera Company, Spring 2015
Scene Design Mathias Fruiza
Technical Director Tom Fusco



Mass production of flats for the clouds.



Each Cloud was projected, drawn and cut out.



Bart Healy helping out with the painting of the clouds.



Several clouds were loaded on line sets so they could move independently and change the space.



Forgot to mention the 18' high smoking dragon that rolled around.



The end result with the Dragon



Same set, different look. All units performed smoothly and reliably from tech. through the run

Appendix 1

Info sheet about Stage Rats

What is Stage Rats?

- ② Stage Rats is a scenic services and production company that specializes in working closely with small theatre companies and educational institutions who have limited resources and money.
- ② Hires established professionals, recent grads and student apprentices.
- ② Provide a mechanism for students to bridge the gap between educational and professional worlds
- ② Formed to address the need for an affordable and reliable stage production company with the appropriate corporate structure as suggested by the Administration
 - o Limited Liability Corporation with Sole Proprietorship
 - o Full General Liability insurance
 - o Full Workman's Comp insurance
 - o Uses Payroll Solutions to handle all payroll and tax filing duties
 - o Current Scheduled Projects: GCIT full season, Rowan Opera Company Spring production

Mission

- ② Stage Rat's existence is inspired by the University mission: "To provide a collaborative, nurturing, learning-centered environment to educate students with an excellent liberal education and professional preparation to meet the challenges of the future" and "to be valued for partnership with the community and regional industry for providing opportunities."

Stage Rats Services

- ② Small scale theater productions in the region that need quality goods and services within a constrained budget.
- ② Students gain several key opportunities with Stage Rats such as:
 - o Field work experience with professionals
 - o Networking for future employment opportunities
 - o Provide opportunities to establish professional credentials and images for resumes and portfolios

Value Propositions

- ② Through a combination of experience, resourcefulness, networking and applied creativity, Stage Rats is able to build quality sets and installations and remain within budget.
- ② Brings established professional and student apprentices together in the field.
- ② Brings value to the local community.
- ② The benefits for Rowan students are professional experience, networking, resume building, and skills that cannot be taught in a classroom.
- ② Benefits for the University include recruitment, local community relationships and affordable set construction for University productions.

Appendix 2

Current Curriculum Vitae

EDUCATION

Boston University	M.F.A. in Technical Production	1996	Boston, Massachusetts
University of Massachusetts	B.A. in Theater	1990	Amherst, Massachusetts

ACADEMIC WORK EXPERIENCE

1999-present	Rowan University Department of Theater and Dance	Glassboro, New Jersey
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Associate Professor and Technical Director for the Department of Theater and Dance. Class load has included teaching Stagecraft sequence, Living Theatre, Technical Production, Drafting and Model Making and various independent studies. Responsible for overseeing and managing student workforce in building four Mainstage shows a year. Also consult with and help the student run Lab Theater club as it produces four shows a year.

Committee and Related Work:

I have been an active participant in several committees at all three levels of organization. A partial list includes; Co-Chair Provosts Taskforce on the Lap Top Initiative, University Tenure and Recontracting, College of Fine and Performing Arts Promotion Committee (two years). AFT Representative 2007 – 2010, three Search committees for the Department of Art, three search committees for Instructional Technology, Department Production Planning Committee, Department Curriculum Committee (chair 2006-2007), Department Tenure and Recontracting, Faculty Liason with Center of Excellence (20012-present)and University Learning Outcomes and Assessment Committee .

1994-1996	Boston University Theater Department	Boston, Massachusetts
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As part of my graduate work I was assigned classes of approximately 20 to 30 students to supervise, instruct, and evaluate in theater arts. The classes were assigned specific

sets and required to aid in their construction, painting, and loading-in. My major responsibilities were to teach stagecraft fundamentals, building procedure, and safety. During this period I also acted in the following capacities:

Technical Director for the shows: Translations and The Country Wife

Assistant Technical Director for the shows: Balm and Gilead, The Illusion, Count Ory, and The Devils

Carpenter for the shows: Marriage of Figaro, Romeo and Juliet, and Major Barbara

Research Interests

Since I began teaching I have been interested in how technology could be utilized to change the paradigm of current teaching styles. The internet, digital media, apps and social networking have barreled through our society and show no sign of slowing down. The impact on the field of education has not stopped and will result in a new way of teaching and learning. This new digital pedagogy is in its infancy, with a limitless range of possibilities and potential. We are fortunate to be in the position of exploring this undiscovered country which will totally, irrevocably revolutionize how we learn, teach and experience our world.

The practical applications of this philosophy began with the creation of a website and an a concept I called E-Stagecraft. This has led to the following grants, presentations, workshops and University level committees and task forces:

2001	Provost's Task Force on Information Literacy
2001	Separately Budgeted Grant – Creation of Stagecraft Website
2001- 2003	University Task Force on Technology
2003	Teaching Innovations Grant Tablet PC?
2003	USITT national presentation of E-Stagecraft, panel member
2003	Consultant University Massachusetts on web based tutorials
2001 – 2005	Senate Committee: Research and Technology
2006-2007	University Senate Task Force on LapTops
2008	Presenter NJ Edge State Wide Conference
2008	Member of the Lap Top Initiative Group
2008	Innovations in Teaching Grant-tablet PCs in the classroom
2008	Presenter International Ubiquitous Learning Conference
2008	Co- Chair Provost's Task Force on a Laptop Initiative
2009	AWL to be Director of the Digital Pedagogy Club and Tech. Boot Camp

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR EXPERIENCE

2012 – present **Sole member Stage Rats L.L.C.** **South Jersey Region**

Stage Rats L.L.C. was incorporated in the February of 2012. As the sole member of the corporation I am in charge of bookkeeping, sales, project management, and human resources. I also am the Technical Director of most projects. Current clients are Audubon High School, Friends School of Mullica Hill, Gloucester County Institute of Technology's Performing Arts Academy and the Rowan Opera Company. Past projects have included installations of a stage floor and lighting grid for Burlington County Institute of Technology's Theater Program, Pig Iron Theater Company, Theater Exile, and Haddonfield's Plays and Players Children's Theater Program.

2011 **Luna Theater Company and RU StageRats** **Philadelphia, PA**

Technical Director and Manager of StageRats

StageRats is a group of advanced students who have shown an interest in working in the field in a professional setting. The work is extracurricular and for a stipend. This project was a set construction and load for Luna Theater Company's production of Blasted by Sarah Kane. Set designer Dirk Durossette, Director/Production Manager Greg Campbell

2010 **Melanie Stewart Dance Company and RU StageRats** **Philadelphia, PA**

Technical Director and Manager of StageRats

Technical Director and Manger for set construction and load in for MSDT's production of Kill Me Now, an original piece. Set Designer Hiroshi Iwasaki, Director Melanie Stewart.

2008-2010 **Learning Stages** **Glassboro, NJ**

Technical Director

Worked and volunteered for this summer youth theater program. Helped facilitate in moving the program to Rowan University.

- 2006** **Square Peg Productions** **New York, NY**
- Technical Director
- Over saw build and load in of the set for The Atheist by Ronan Noone, an off Broadway production starring Chris Pine (Kirk from Star Trek Enterprise)
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- 2001-2003** **Bob Clapp Theater Consultants and Associates** **Pitman, New Jersey**
- Consultant and Drafts Person
- I worked for this Consulting firm, which specializes in renovating and updating theaters in schools, as a researcher and CAD draft person.
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- 2000-2002** **Wide Open Arts** **Lambertville, New Jersey**
- Technical Director, Designer, Member of the Board
- Wide Open Arts produced "Love After Death, an original collaboration which premiered in July and was presented at the 2000 Philadelphia Fringe Festival. As a result of my work I was asked to join the Board of Directors by artistic director Julia Ritter
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- 1998-1999** **Out of Cake** **Portland, Maine**
- Technical Director
- Out of Cake is a production company that creates a wide variety of works, ranging from stage plays to independent film production. Primarily I acted as the company's Art Director and Technical Director overseeing all of the productions.
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- 1996-1999** **The Portland Stage Company** **Portland, Maine**
- Technical Director
- Portland Stage Company runs an 8-show season with a house capacity of 250. Primary responsibilities include budget, drafting, organization and supervision of all technical crews, and the instruction of resident technical interns.
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- 1996-Present** **Talk America** **Portland, Maine**
- Technical Director
- Talk America runs a multi-operational production company that designs, produces, and distributes cable network infomercials. Primarily, I design commercial sets for the camera. As technical director I am required to create sets that provide varied mobility for the camera, and are simple to breakdown and store for repeated use.
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- 1996-1999** **Spiral Arts** **Portland, Maine**

Technical Director

Spiral Arts is a community based arts education program that uses a variety of approaches in its teachings. I have been an instructor for summer workshops, and was a co-designer and technical director for the Deering Oaks Park Art Summer Festival.

1994-1995 Yantra Productions Boston, Massachusetts

Technical Director

Offered unique theater production services throughout the Boston area. Its credits include installations in The House of Blues, The Liberty Cafe, and the making and operating of street sized puppets for the annual event First Night of Boston. Responsible for company's financial and technical matters, as well as company sales coordinator.

1990-1993 The White River Theater Festival White River Junction, Vermont

Technical Director and Master Electrician

Worked as a Technical Director during the 1993 season and served as Assistant Technical Director for all other shows. During my three-year tenure at the festival, I served as Master Electrician and Properties Carpenter.

SET AND LIGHT DESIGN

2001-2002	<u>Medea-Love is The Devil</u>	M.S.D.C.,Wilma,Etc
2001	<u>Hard Candy</u>	Melanie Stewart Dance Co., Philly Fringe
2000	<u>That School Down in Glassboro</u>	Rowan University
1997	<u>The Viewing</u>	Out of Cake
1997	<u>A Christmas Carol</u>	Portland Stage Company