

## ETCP certification for faculty takes you beyond teaching

University theatre departments can benefit from ETCP

THE PATH TO CERTIFICATION WAS, SHALL WE SAY, a long and winding road. Although it seemed like a no-brainer, the potential for embarrassment and a bruised ego was stuck in my mind, and I could not shake it loose until I got the test result. I passed! But why did I ever decide to go through this in the first place? I'm an academic; I don't need to prove my worth to anyone anymore, right? I already have the power to tell these kids pretty much anything I want and it is believed unconditionally. Well, **most** of the time.

Ever since I left grad school, rigging has been my life. I spent three great years working at Flying by Foy and then another three years as a Lead Rigger for Maintenance at O in the Bellagio. When I decided to move to academia I continued to freelance for Foy (I continue to today) and managed to land a couple gigs with Cirque du Soleil as a fly-in rigger on *Corteo*. It has always been very important to me to stay current in my field for the benefit of my students, my program, and my professional and artistic growth.

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Bingo! How can I tout that as my mantra without ETCP? I finally realized that I could not. ETCP certification is not for everyone. It was designed for the more experienced third in our industry. Just because you are a university professor does not mean you will qualify to take the exam. Conversely, you don't have to pass the exam to teach rigging. But imagine if you could teach rigging **and** be an ETCP Certified Rigger? Now that would be something!

ETCP is here to stay and it's going to take a larger foothold every year. Those of us in academia can no longer turn a blind eye and wait for a particularly curious student to ask why we are qualified to teach rigging or electrical theory. "Cause I said so," might be good for my kids, but it won't hold water in a university classroom for very long. It seems to me that if you have the ability to amass the number of points needed to take the exam then you should. You don't even have to tell anyone . . . until you pass, that is!



Penn State students Kevin Donnelly, Mary Yukevich, Jacob Grupp, Elizabeth Kline, and Katy Morgan surround their professor, Eric Rouse, in their booth during USITT.

So what are the benefits of being an ETCP Certified anything in academia? I believe there are several, and they affect students and faculty alike.

The most obvious is safety. Universities are creating and using safety plans and policies. It used to be that "those theatre people" were generally left alone on campus to do all those weird things that we do. Not so much the case anymore. ETCP Certified personnel in your department can carry a lot of weight when working with the university's risk management team.

ETCP certification looks very good on a tenure dossier or CV. For the most part, administrators and faculty members from other disciplines don't really understand what we do. They haven't a clue what being a TD, ME, or PM for a show or facility means. They do, however, understand acronyms. They love them; the more letters after your name the better! Seriously, having ETCP after your name will help prove you are at the top of your game and doing everything you can to remain that way. In my dossier I provided a breakdown of how ETCP works, why it was developed, and who is typically certified. This proved to be a very valuable part of my tenure package.

I have often found department heads and college administrators are willing to commit financial resources for training towards certification if you ask—again, **if you ask**. It is up to you to start the conversation and press the issue to make it happen. Smart administrators realize a well-trained staff and professors make a more appealing department to prospective students and for potential professional partnerships. Future benefits that stem from these are endless. If you are an assistant professor on a tenure-track line then this could potentially be a very big part of your professional development. This certainly held true for me.

Many schools are willing to help invest in your growth. My university contributed towards a rope access class at Ropeworks in Reno (which I highly recommend) that led to a Level 1 certification and to many ETCP recognized courses by the esteemed Jay Glerum and Bill Sapsis among others. It's good all around. I gained a ton of knowledge, and the benefits of taking knowledge from quality seminars to my classes and everyday contributions at work should be obvious. All the while these seminars helped give me the wide-ranging knowledge and confidence to take and pass the ETCP exam.

While tenure may guarantee employment, ETCP certification guarantees you are continuing to develop your skills and knowledge. To maintain your certification, you have to recertify every five years. Whether you take or teach an ETCP recognized course or help a student on the rail you are accruing points towards that recertification. In the process you are keeping your hands in the mix, creating and maintaining contacts, and keeping yourself relevant. You are also teaching in more ways than one. If you take a class, hopefully there will be something new you will bring home to share with your students. This keeps you focused on current and new advances in safety and technology; two areas of paramount importance when teaching the 18-22 year old market.

The benefits of having ETCP Certified faculty and staff are far-reaching for students.

Being part of ETCP is like a little club without the silly handshakes. If you have a faculty or staff member who is certified sometimes your students get access to that club. The club is great for work contacts or for answering a question where we academic types might not know the answer (it has been known to happen . . . a few times). Of course you don't need to be a member to get access to the club, but it helps.

ETCP also provides students something to strive toward. Several of my students have expressed a desire to become certified technicians and have begun sculpting their education and job interests to further that goal. I make it very clear to students in our BFA program that they will most likely not be prepared to take these exams for several years. They still have to take all that material they learned in the classroom and during internships and put it to work in real world situations on the job. That official transcript, though, has value because it is worth seven points toward taking the exam if

the undergraduate degree is in the entertainment field.

Ultimately, one of the best things is that students realize there is a standard that they need to work within and towards. If they work within the framework of what we know to be safe, efficient, and accepted practice, then they could become very desirable employees, colleagues, and/or artistic partners. In turn, they help make that next generation of stagehands, designers, and technicians much more knowledgeable and safety conscious.

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In my mind it is the best result of all. Not to get too corny, but if we can continue to improve our industry collectively it will always outweigh the impact of a couple tiger blooded rock stars with Adonis DNA. Sorry—I couldn't help it. ■



**Eric Rouse** is currently an Assistant Professor of Theatre and Interim Head of the BFA program in Design and Technology at Penn State University where he is head of the Technical Direction curriculum. Eric's professional credits include working for Flying by Foy, Cirque du Soleil, Central City Opera, and over-hire work for Sapsis Rigging. He is a Recognized Trainer and teaches rigging seminars for Columbus McKinnon and Mountain Productions.

## ETCP exams at LDI2011

All three ETCP examinations will be given at the October LDI2011 event in Orlando, FL. The entertainment electrician exam is scheduled for Friday, October 27; the arena rigging exam is to be given the morning of Saturday, October 28; and the theatre rigging exam is scheduled for that afternoon. Interested applicants must submit their application, along with supporting materials and fee, to the ETCP office no later than **September 29**.

Candidate information, including eligibility requirements and applications, is available on the ETCP website at <http://etcp.plasa.org>, or if you would like the information mailed to you, please contact Meredith Moseley-Bennett, ETCP Certification Manager, at +1 212 244 1505 or [etcp@plasa.org](mailto:etcp@plasa.org).

For those who are already ETCP Certified, don't forget to check the LDI or The ESTA Foundation websites for renewal credit opportunities!