ETCP has fundamentally changed rigging instruction and how universities are preparing aspiring technicians. During my freshman year of college, my parents gifted me with what came to be a life changing experience—tickets to *Phantom of the Opera* in its first year on Broadway at the Majestic. The moment the show began, I was fascinated by the various technical effects used in the production, particularly the rigging effects. After the show, I told my roommate, a lighting design major and member of the school theatre club, I wanted to learn everything about how I could have a career in technical theatre.

My first professional experiences after college were working as a carpenter at Juilliard, the Berkshire Theatre Festival, and the George Street Playhouse. These experiences reaffirmed and fueled my passion for entertainment engineering, leading me to secure an MFA in structural design for technical production from ETCP rigging certification in an educational setting
Winter 2018

Boston University. I never received formal rigging instruction during my performing arts education. Rather, this training and education was received informally during load-in. Structural engineering courses taught math, physics, and truss design, however, they were not rigging specific and text books were merely provided as supplemental reference materials. The custom was: Learn on the job.

After graduate school, I spent years working at some of the top theatres, venues, and event companies in the country. I learned safety and rigging techniques from a variety of experienced professionals. From Broadway-style theatre to arena concerts, everyone had their own idea of what was safe and acceptable. As much as I respected those I learned from, I observed that experience does not necessarily mean expertise. Once ETCP came onto the scene, the training I received from ETCP certified IATSE professionals was the exception to this. Eventually, I became an IATSE Journeyman and those IATSE ETCP certified members helped cultivate my interest in achieving certification.

ETCP has made a definite impact in my current role at San Diego State University School of Theatre, Television and Film (SDSU TTF). More rapidly than ever, the advancement of technologies seen in high-end professional productions are making their way into university settings. Modern technical elements help captivate and draw audiences, creating the desire for increasingly complicated and sophisticated design and technical components. Complex rigging is now the norm, requiring an advanced skill set. As an example, the SDSU TTF has started to produce concert-style productions that require arena-style rigging. Simultaneously, SDSU installed a new automated rigging system. The ETCP program gives me a comprehensive standardized way to approach each unique set of these production demands. Consequently, my certifications have become crucial components in both how I perform my work and train the next generation of technicians.

ETCP certification provides me a sense of professional accomplishment, yet the level of recognition of my achievements has been unexpected. I am instantly regarded as an expert in my field. My ETCP certifications garner increased recognition by students, industry experts, and the University. To illustrate, the University of California (UC) Regents are standardizing theatre safety practices across all UC and Cal State campuses. Once they learned of my certifications, both the SDSU Office of Environmental Health and Safety and the UC Regents Safety Commission approached me to act as an advisor to this initiative. These policies affect a countless number of future entertainment professionals, and because of my ETCP certifications, I will now be part of this legacy.

The OSHA, ANSI, and ESTA standards incorporated into the ETCP program, and the guidelines set by the ETCP Subject Matter Experts allow me to easily institute
new safety protocols as a basis for all work that is sponsored by the SDSU TTF. In contrast, college and university faculty and staff across the country have shared with me the challenges they face gaining consensus on even small changes to their programs. I do not encounter the same difficulties, because my ETCP certifications are documented evidence that my requests are based on nationally recognized standards of best practices and therefore, my suggestions are more quickly accepted. Case in point: We implemented a new requirement that no rigging is to be done at any event associated with the SDSU TTF without the direct supervision of an ETCP certified rigger. We have two certified riggers, so while this could have presented an issue from a workflow scheduling perspective, I had the full support of my faculty and staff to implement the requirement. There have been zero rigging accidents or mishaps since implementation of the rule, attesting to the soundness of the policy.

Students are also required to prepare a rigging plan for each production that is verified and approved by an instructor who is ETCP certified. Students start with safety instruction, setting the safety groundwork before any skilled tasks begin. This is the fundamental basis for all work going forward. As part of safety training, students are required to pass OSHA10 along with first aid, CPR, and defibrillator training within six months of their first day of class. OSHA30 training is optional, but highly recommended.

Production graduate students are required to complete a semester-long course focused on rigging taught by an ETCP Certified Rigger. Students participate in all production rigging under the supervision of a certified rigger. Students are also required to prepare a rigging plan for each production that is verified and approved by an instructor who is ETCP certified. Additionally, student attendance is mandatory at all rigging inspections. Graduate students are strongly encouraged to take a structural engineering course to strengthen their in-depth physics and math knowledge to apply the correct science in each rigging situation presented. Throughout their graduate program, certified riggers work intensively with these students during every class and each production to help them learn industry standards and professional best practices as
defined by the ETCP program.

The ETCP website provides a list of training programs and Recognized Trainers intended for renewal credits. Outside training is encouraged and students are provided time and assistance to attend conferences like USITT and LDI, which are a great way to gain exposure to industry professionals and methods used worldwide.

Relationships fostered with ETCP Recognized Employers promote on-the-job training for students by certified mentors. Internship and fellowship opportunities provide necessary hours of professional experience. Introducing qualified and competent students to the IATSE Local Referral Hall encourages them to sign up and take calls with experienced Journeymen. IATSE Local 122 in San Diego, for instance, has twenty-one certified ETCP professionals. IATSE offers students access to a variety of trainings, workshops, financial compensation, and on-the-job instruction at different venues. In addition, IATSE offers a wide range of experience, knowledge, and networking opportunities. Local 122’s Referral Hall labor calls vary and are a great way for students to work professionally while allowing flexibility to manage course work expectations.

Social activities can help solidify learned skills and knowledge. Student participation in in-person ETCP study groups and in social media groups help evaluate their accuracy, get a fresh perspective from other ETCP candidates, and fill in any learning gaps. Activities like rock climbing, canyoneering, sailing, and slack-lining are fun and social ways to enhance their training in a casual environment as well.

Investing in a formal rigging curriculum makes acquiring experience and knowledge for the ETCP exam manageable within a relatively short time. Students begin rigging with the benefit of knowing the rules and regulations immediately instead of having to learn piecemeal on the job. Based on this consistent pedagogy, the students are taught everything they need to know once they have the necessary requirements to take the ETCP exam and become part of a nationally recognized family of top tier qualified and competent professionals as they move into the workforce.

Andrew Young holds an MFA in Structural Design for Technical Production from Boston University. He is ETCP Certified in Theatre and Arena Rigging. He is an active Journeyman with IATSE Local 122; the ATD, Shop Foreman, Safety Coordinator, and Rigger for the San Diego State University School of Theatre, Television and Film; and the Technical Director for The Diversionary Theatre and The Playwright’s Project in San Diego, CA.