Managing Student Based Lighting Designs

This document is intended to provide teachers, supervisors, and advisors a high level outline of how to manage a group of students that are trying to create a theatre or entertainment lighting design. The origins of this were from the author's trying to manage a high school lighting club that was tasked with doing their own design instead of just being "tech support and console operation".

Here are the suggested operational steps in managing student based lighting designs:

1) Students should first read the scrip and extract all documented light cues and create a document called a "Lighting Synopsis" – this is a spreadsheet type document that lists each scene with the needed "look" that will be generated by the lighting. It will also have any specific intra-scene lighting cues such as "lights dim for song #3".

2) Students handle all the meetings with directors, tech directors, etc. and to come up with their own lighting concepts that meet the director's needs.

3) From the meetings outlined in (2) above, they should then attempt a design on paper. They should feel free to ask the director or lighting technical advisor/mentor while they are working on the design.

4) When the design is largely completed on paper, the lighting technical advisor/mentor should then like to be invited to a meeting hosted by the lighting students where they review their design and we can talk about problems they need help with, or suggestions the mentor may have based on experience. This way it's more clearly a student managed design, and it gives them practice at "presenting" materials for review.

5) A specific date for "hang and focus" needs to be set. This is a time when only lighting is to be worked on. Sharing the stage with tech crew, set crew, and/or painting crews does not work, as lighting people need the ability to have all pipes down on the stage, full access to the house and any people lifts required, and capability of making the stage dark. In student lighting, several knowledgeable adults MUST BE PRESENT for "hang and focus". The lighting mentor should be invited to serve as a helping hand and to troubleshoot issues on-site.

6) The students should arrange for "cue to cue" rehearsal with the director and artistic staff. This is then the console is rough programmed and basic scene-by-scene looks are determined. The technical lighting mentor should be invited.

7) Starting with cue-to-cue, students lighting staff who are running lights need to attend all technical and dress rehearsals, as well as all performances. Setup the operating assignments ahead of time, and ensure a given student can attend ALL tech and dress rehearsals, as well as all performances. Have a substitution plan if someone is ill, so make sure there is some cross training on console operation and critical spotlights.

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8) Suggested companion documents:
(published at: http://www.windworksdesign.com/lighting_whtpapers.html)

"Basic Steps to Theatre Lighting Design"
This document describes the lighting design process at a modestly high level to allow students to grasp the basics of crafting the design. It includes planning how each scene looks, drafting the physical stage, and creating the light plot.

"A Basic Introduction to Theatre and Entertainment Lighting Equipment"
This document describes the basic types of lighting equipment used for plays and concerts, including PAR cans, ellipsoidals, moving lights, and control consoles.