

Norris Theatre Guidelines

For Theatrical Productions in McCormick Auditorium and the Louis Room at Norris.
Updated November 2023

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Reservation Process

Reservations can be made in-person, by phone, by email or online at:
<https://www.northwestern.edu/norris/events/>

Production Timeline

Up to 1 Year in Advance – Advance Scheduling

Up to 1 Quarter in Advance – Schedule Pre-Production Meetings

Use the [Student Theatre Pre-Production Intake Form](#)

6 weeks before load in – Pre-Production Meeting #1

3 weeks before load in – Drawings submitted.

2 weeks before load in – Pre-Production Meeting #2

Week of show (assuming 7-day reservation*)

Sunday – Load In (typically 4pm)

Monday – Technical Orientation with Norris Technical Services, Power and Sound connections, if needed

Thursday – Dressing Room Access

Saturday – Final Show

Sunday – Load-Out. Space must be completely vacated by 2pm on the following Sunday. Two group representatives must meet with Norris staff for a venue walk-through at 2:00pm on the Sunday of strike.

*Productions are typically (but not always) granted a 7-day reservation. Confirm your dates with your event planning representative.

Theatre Dashboard

For helpful documentation and links, please check out the [Student Theatre Dashboard](https://app.smartsheet.com/b/publish?EQBCT=0a208ab3d5fb4db484584d4dc2649128)
<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/publish?EQBCT=0a208ab3d5fb4db484584d4dc2649128>

Pre-Production Meetings

In order to plan for a successful and safe production, you are required to schedule two mandatory pre- production meetings with the Norris Theatre Team. **It is the responsibility of the Director, Producer, Production Manager, and/or Stage Manager to schedule these meetings. If the meetings are not scheduled with our team, your reservation is subject to cancellation.**

Meeting #1

- Timeline: Approximately six (6) weeks before load-in.
- Required to Attend: Director and Producer
- Typically attending from Norris: Event Planner, Performance Production Manager
- Purpose: To review the production aspects of the show. It is the responsibility of the Director and Producer to disseminate the information contained in these policies to anyone working on the production.

Between meetings, the following materials should be submitted to staff as PDFs:

- Scenic Ground plan
- Scenic Section view (if you have it)
- Scenic Renderings
- Lighting Plot
- Power needs
- AV needs

Meeting #2

- Timeline: Approximately two (2) weeks before load-in.
- Required to Attend: Director, Producer, Lighting Representative, Scenic Representative, Sound Representative, Technical Director, and Stage Manager.
- Typically attending from Norris/Northwestern: Event Planner, Performance Production Manager, Facilities Representative, Environmental Health and Safety Representative
- Purpose: To finalize the production aspects of the show. At the second pre-production meeting, the following items will be covered:

- A review of the theatre guidelines
- Safety and fire code
- Venue access procedures
- Load-in/out procedures
- Revisions of any submitted materials
- Any questions about submitted materials.

Rates and Fees

Rental Fee: Norris may assess a nominal fee to cover expenses related to upkeep of the venue and AV equipment.

Technical Orientation: Norris Technical Services will provide a technical orientation to the venue, which includes assisting with tying into in-room systems, reviewing cable management plans and techniques, providing venue-specific technical information and support, etc. This is to ensure safe and effective practices are being used while also equipping groups with the resources to best execute their productions and artistic visions. 2 hours of professional technician labor will be charged to the group, which covers this orientation and support throughout the week.

Theatre Cable Bin: Norris Technical Services has put together a bin of cables to help supplement rented cable from external vendors. This includes Edison power and XLR cables. Please contact Norris Technical Services for the most up-to-date inventory.

Extension of Hours: With advance approval, groups may be allowed an Extension of Hours when performance times and audience egress will extend past ordinary building hours. Fines and further sanctions may be implemented for Unplanned Extension of Hours.

Dumpsters: A dumpster can be arranged with Norris staff for scenic and other large materials to be disposed of. This is paid for by the chartstring of the student organization that is sponsoring the production. A plan for trash disposal must be discussed at the Final (2-Week) Production meeting.

Current Rates: Current rates are available under the Rates and Fees section of the [Norris Event Management Policies website](#).

Building Operations

EMERGENCIES: For all serious or life-threatening emergencies, call 911 from the nearest phone.

On 2nd Floor, Phone can be found in Louis Lobby

On 1st Floor, Phone can be found at Center Desk

Subsequently (and for all minor injuries where 911 is not called) students must inform the Norris Center Manager, who will document the incident.

Role of Center Manager: The Norris Center Manager is empowered with the responsibility for the safe and efficient operation of the facility and events. Specific questions during rehearsals and performances should be directed to the Center Manager.

Role of the Center Desk: The Center Desk can be a resource for basic questions, and to contact the Center Manager, Event Operations team, or Technical Services team. The Center Desk also serves as a source of information for community members attending your event.

Event Operations Team: Please call or visit the Norris Center Desk for any room setup needs or adjustments (seating risers, tables, chairs, lobby signage, etc.). The Event Operations team via the Center Desk will be your main contact for any setup needs.

Elevators: When loading and striking sets within Norris, the freight elevator and stairways are to be used. Do not use the passenger elevators.

Shop Access: Norris Maintenance Shop is typically staffed from 7:30am-3:30pm, Monday through Friday. Access to the shop without proper staff supervision is prohibited. The Center Manager is not authorized to access the shop. Please contact the Norris Facility Manager to coordinate access. The intent here is to provide space for a last-minute repair or project that cannot be worked on in the Norris performance spaces (i.e., the repair requires cutting with a power saw). This is not intended as a build space or a storage space, rather as an option to remedy last-minute issues without having to move the project back out of Norris. Groups utilizing this option must communicate in detail with the Norris Facilities Manager and adhere to the agreement reached about the use of the shop.

Trash Disposal: Small items can be disposed of in trash cans around the building, or in the Norris trash compactor at the loading dock. For scenery and other large items, please request a dumpster. See “Paint” section for information on paint disposal.

Space Layout and Egress

Layout

- Your event planner will assist with creating a seating layout that meets your requirements.
- Risers may be available upon request. Risers significantly cut down on the capacity of the space.
- Occupancy can be roughly determined by the following:
 - With Chairs: 1 person per 7 net square feet
 - With Chairs and Tables: 1 person per 15 net square feet
- No overselling and no standing room.
- Equipment, props, road cases, sets, etc. are not permitted in the hallways or lobby areas outside venues.

Exits/Entrances/Access

- There must always be aisle ways of at least 44 inches of clear space for exits.
- No blocking of any exit or fire extinguishers
- All exit signs should be visible from all seating angles. Exit signs shall never be covered, obstructed, or dimmed.
- Every occupant should be able to see at least two means of egress from any place in occupancy.
- Emergency lighting units shall not be covered or obstructed.

Scenic

Any complex or unusual scenic requests should be presented to the Norris team as early as possible to ensure adequate time for review, approval, and modification if necessary.

No cutting is to occur in the space. The only construction onsite should be with screws and bolts.

Rigging

- No scenic items may be hung from the ceiling in McCormick or Louis.
- It may be possible to hang softgoods from the Louis Catwalk, with prior approval.
- All structures and hard scenery must be ground supported.

Platforms

- All platforms should be constructed securely, using accepted theatrical construction techniques.
- Platform height should not exceed 35”.
- Platform legs should be padded, to protect the floor.
- Platforms must be free standing and cannot be connected to the building.
- Legs are to be secured to platforms using at least 2 bolts inserted and tightened at intersecting angles. Decking screws may be used with advance permission from the Production Manager and a safety plan.

Stairs and ship ladders

- All stair units and ship ladders should be built to acceptable theatrical standards.

Walls and Flats

- All walls should be constructed securely, using accepted theatrical construction techniques.
- Vertical structures cannot be connected to the building and must be self-supporting.
- All walls and flats should be properly supported, bracing with jacks or attaching to other wall units and platforms.

Paint

- All scenery must be painted prior to bringing it into Norris. Please plan accordingly, especially in the winter, so that it has time to dry before bringing it into Norris.
- No painting can occur within Norris event spaces, including McCormick Auditorium and Louis Room.
- Small touchups should be returned to the Theatre Garages, or you may arrange for time in the Norris Facilities Shop or ARTica Studios.
- All wood stain, spray paint, aerosols and other potentially flammable chemicals require special storage procedures. Work with Norris team to determine proper use, storage, and disposal.
- All spray paint should be done outside. Please put tarps down and/or take other precautionary measures to ensure that paint does not get on the sidewalks, roads, or exteriors of any building
- You may dispose of paint yourself, or you may utilize Norris' FREE paint disposal service. Contact the Norris Facilities Manager, Tom Szymanski (tszymanski@northwestern.edu), in advance with the quantity of paint to coordinate a drop off at the Norris loading dock. Paint cans should be well sealed, and not be wet or leaking paint, and should ideally be placed in a bag to avoid leaks.
- Please note that disposing of paint down drains is harmful to the environment and damaging to plumbing. If you choose to dispose of excess paint on your own, you should use a [product to harden the paint](#) (available at hardware stores, or use cat litter), and then, after the paint has solidified, dispose of the re-sealed paint can in a dumpster. The Norris Theatre Cage may not be used to store or solidify paint for theatre group disposal.

Props

- A prop list must be submitted at the Final Pre-Production Meeting.
- If Prop Weapons will be used, completion of the [Prop Weapons form](#) is required. Prop Weapons should be discussed with Norris staff as early as possible.
- Prop Alcohol must be discussed early in the process. Norris staff will work with you to determine proper procedures for use.

Lighting

- To assure that the light hang is safe and feasible, the lighting design must be submitted at the Final Pre-Production Meeting. Norris staff is happy to guide first-time designers and master electricians through best practices. Norris staff will also provide a Technical Orientation once in the venue to review connecting to in-room systems, review cable management plan, etc.

LED Tape/Set Electrics/Wiring Devices

- All LED Tape, Set Electrics, Wiring Devices, etc. must be approved in advance. Drawings/diagrams of all tape/cable runs must be provided. This is a non-exhaustive list.
- The use of these must be approved by Norris staff and is limited to Completely Prefabricated devices.
 - Completely Prefabricated devices are store bought and require no alteration.
 - The sole exception to this includes LED tape with pre-established cut marks, which may be cut at marked cut points on the tape. Common construction for LED tape consists of a standard Edison plug, LED tape, and a remote for control.
 - Devices should only be secured to set pieces with hot glue, as tape can cause the tape to overheat.
 - Devices should not be secured to any elements of the building infrastructure, including flooring, walls, etc.
 - Self-Fabricated LED Tape/Set Electrics/Wiring Devices are not allowed.

Theatre Garages

Overview: There are three University-owned garages that are utilized by student groups for the construction and storing of scenery. The Norris Production Manager acts as a liaison between the student theatre community, the occupants of the adjacent office buildings, and the University.

Clean up: The group building scenery in the garage spaces is responsible for daily cleanup. All materials must be brought in at the end of each build day and the garages swept and cleaned. **No scenery, however large or small, may be left outside the garage or in the adjacent yards. Groups must be especially diligent not to leave screws or other sharp materials on the ground, in the yards, or on or near any nearby parking lot.** The overall responsibility for the garages (occasional deeper cleanouts, day-to-day space organization, etc.) lies with StuCo. Dumpsters may be arranged for garage cleanout through Norris staff.

Facilities: Please notify Norris staff of any facility issues, such as lights out, doors/locks malfunctioning, expired fire extinguisher inspection tags, empty first-aid kits, etc.

Walkthroughs: Norris staff will walk the garages every week to ensure no materials are left outside. Individual groups are responsible for costs/fees associated with disregarding these policies and for additional labor for cleanup.

Catwalk Access

McCormick Auditorium Cove

- Extreme care must be taken not to interrupt the path of the laser smoke detector located on the rear house wall near the house-left speaker and house-right wall next to the stage. Interrupting this laser will trigger the fire alarm for the entire building.
- At this time, no access to the catwalk is available to groups OR Norris staff.
- Two lighting booms are currently placed at the back of the house with LED fixtures for a front light wash on stage. Fixtures cannot be refocused, removed, or adjusted in any way nor can additional fixtures be added to these booms. Groups can use the lights with their own console via in-room DMX ports.

Louis Room Catwalk

- Extreme care must be taken not to interrupt the path of the laser smoke detector located on the walls above the Louis Room catwalk. Interrupting this laser will trigger the fire alarm for the entire building.
- Access may be granted for the sole purpose of loading in theatrical equipment, primarily lighting. Access to the catwalk should be granted via Center Manager, Event Operations staff, or Technical Services staff.
- Outer booth door should never be propped open, and nothing can obstruct the latch from latching. The space should remain secure at all times.
- While accessing the catwalk, equipment stored or installed in the Louis Booth should not be touched.
- No equipment can be stored in the Louis Booth or the Louis Catwalk, other than what has been temporarily installed for the production.
- Cable must be run cleanly, and walkways should remain clear.
- The Louis catwalk should never be occupied when only one person is working in the space.
- The Louis catwalk cannot be occupied for extended times, such as during the rehearsals or shows (i.e., no performers, crew, or audience members). Any tech table setups should remain on the second floor.

Technical Equipment and Infrastructure

Users of both spaces are required to provide most of their lighting, sound, video, and other technical equipment, unless noted below:

Sound System

- McCormick Auditorium - Groups may request to connect to the built-in McCormick sound system. The system includes QSC line arrays, hung over the stage in Left, Right, and Center speaker clusters. Connection is made via XLR. A sound console is not included.
- Louis Room – Speakers in the Louis Room are only set up in an east or south array and not conducive to theatrical use. Please provide all sound equipment or contact the Norris Technical Services Manager for built-in or rental options.
- Additional information can be found in the [Student Theatre Dashboard](#)

Lighting

- McCormick Auditorium
 - DMX
 - The room is equipped with a DMX (5-pin) network, including an input in the booth and an output both in the catwalk and onstage.
 - Power
 - There are two circuits in the house, one circuit for outlets on the face of the stage and one circuit for outlets in the wings. Additional power can be tied in using the company switch in the McCormick booth. The group is responsible for providing their own dimmer rack or distro, and the necessary camlok cables.
 - Time should be scheduled with Norris staff to connect the dimmer rack to the company switch. Please mention this at your preproduction meeting if you are planning to use it. This can be done during the Technical Orientation time.
 - House Lights
 - House lights are controlled from the button stations, located SL, back of house, and in the booth.
 - Equipment
 - No lighting console is provided in this space.
 - Lights hung in the catwalk or on the in-room lighting trees may be used, but cannot be refocused, recolored, or adjusted in any way. No other lights are provided.
 - Additional information can be found in the [Student Theatre Dashboard](#)
- Louis Room
 - DMX
 - The room is equipped with a DMX network with an input on the east wall and an output on the north wall of the catwalk near the projector.
 - Power
 - There are minimal circuits at floor level in Louis. Norris staff has two options for adding additional power. We can drop spider boxes (power distribution boxes) over the balcony to a location close to the center of the room. Alternatively, a dimmer rack can be connected to the company switch. The group is responsible for providing their own dimmer rack and the necessary camlok cables.
 - Time should be scheduled with Norris staff to connect the dimmer rack to the company switch. Please mention this at your preproduction meeting if you are planning to use it. This can be done during the Technical Orientation time.
 - House Lights
 - House lights are controlled from the button station next to the main entrance to the room in the SW corner. The lights for Louis North are controlled separately, using the switches at the NW corner.
 - Equipment
 - No lighting fixtures are provided in this space, and any lights hung on the balcony rail should be left in place.
 - No lighting console is provided in this space.

- Additional information can be found in the [Student Theatre Dashboard](#)
- Theatre Cable Bin
 - Norris Technical Services has put together a bin of cables to help supplement rented cable from external vendors. This includes Edison power and XLR cables. Please contact Norris Technical Services for the most up-to-date inventory.

Safe Working Practices

General Guidelines

- Use two-person lifting - bend at knees, not back.
- No riding in the back of trucks when transporting set.
- No rolling tables, chairs or other objects on elevated stage or platform without proper edge guarding.
- No use of water around electrical equipment.
- Check power and extension cables for worn areas, exposed wiring, and broken ground pins. If cables are damaged, tape/tag/label them and let Norris staff know immediately. DO NOT break ground pins off any cables.
- Never connect multiple extension cords and/or power strips together. This increases the resistance of the cabling, which increases heat build-up within the cabling, and creates a greater risk of electrical failure and/or fire.

Heat/Cold Stress

- For productions working in the garages during hot and cold temperatures, it is advised that students review the [Heat Stress](#) and [Cold Stress](#) trainings provided by Environmental Health and Safety to ensure proper precautions are being taken.

Power Tools

- As noted, the only power tools allowed in the event space are impact drivers for sinking/removing screws.
- Anytime power tools are being used, including during construction in the garages or offsite, it is required that all safety guidelines and best practices are observed.
- All tools must be unplugged at the end of the workday, including in garages.
- Norris staff can provide tool training and supervision with advance notice.
- All students are responsible for participating in the ~30-minute online Hand and Power Tool Safety training. Contact Northwestern's [Environmental Health and Safety](#) (EHS) team with a list of production team members to be enrolled in the training. It is the responsibility of the Producer or Production Manager to distribute these resources to their production team, and to maintain and submit a list of all students who have been trained and are authorized to use ladders during their production to Norris staff.

Ladders

- All students are responsible for their own adherence to the Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) [Portable Ladder Safety](#) program. That includes completion of the online [Portable Ladder Training](#). Contact Northwestern's [Environmental Health and Safety](#) (EHS) team with a list of production team members to be enrolled in the training. It is the responsibility of the Producer or Production

Manager to distribute these resources to their production team, and to maintain and submit a list of all students who have been trained and are authorized to use ladders during their production to Norris staff.

- Norris Facilities may be able to loan ladders upon request. A signed waiver will be required to use Norris provided ladders.
- Whenever an individual is on a ladder, a spotter must be steadying the ladder.
- When climbing or descending a ladder, you should maintain 3 points of contact (two hands, one foot/hand, two feet).
- Never stand on top two steps of the ladder.
- Keep your body within the rails of the ladder.
- [Environmental Health and Safety](#) (EHS) must approve ladders used as props or set pieces.

Cable Management

- All cables should be run in straight lines, crossing walkways in the shortest way possible, usually at 90 degrees.
- When crossing a walkway, cables should be taped down continuously with gaff tape.
- Cables should never cross at the top of the stairs, as this is a trip hazard that could cause someone to fall down the stairs. If crossing a staircase, the cables should cross along the inside of the stair (where the tread meets the rise).
- Cables should never have connections in the middle of a walkway. All connections should be made before or after it crosses.
- Never wrap cables around support beams or lighting positions. Cables should be secured with tie line, zip ties, or other similar methods.

Lighting

- Ensure lighting fixtures are clear of anything that could ignite, including paper, plastic, flammable set pieces and props, etc.
- All lighting fixtures should be wrench-tight with safety cables wrapped around their position.

Sound

- High noise levels can result in hearing damage and hearing loss. Double-check levels on all sound equipment before testing. Best practice is starting equipment at a low level and gradually increasing the volume.

Special Considerations

Animals: No live animals are to be used in any production.

Fog & Smoke: Smoke/haze machines of any kind are prohibited in Norris. Extreme care must be taken not to interrupt the path of the laser smoke detectors located on the walls above the Louis Room catwalk and on the house walls inside McCormick Auditorium. Interrupting the laser smoke detector will trip the fire alarm and result in an evacuation of the Norris Center.

Loss of Materials: Norris University Center will not be held liable for items lost, damaged, or stolen while stored in the Norris University Center.

Heat Producing Elements: Items including, but not limited to, are prohibited: space heaters, open flame, lanterns, ovens, kitchen appliances, hot plates, cigarettes, candles and matches. Pyrotechnics of any form are prohibited.

Alcohol: No alcohol is permitted in Norris at any time. The sponsoring organization is responsible for publicizing the alcohol ban to its patrons. The sponsoring organization will make a good faith effort to prevent audience members from bringing alcohol into the venue, including monitoring audience members as they enter the facility and providing trash barrels for the disposal of any alcohol. Instances of non-compliance of the alcohol ban by any members of the sponsoring organization's production team can lead to the cancellation of any remaining performances and may prevent the sponsoring organization from being able to reserve space for future productions. Evidence that the production team or cast has brought alcohol into any event venue will also be sent to the Office of Community Standards.

Damages and Fines

Strike:

- The sponsoring organization is responsible for the transporting of materials from the venue to its ultimate destination. Norris Staff will not assist in the transportation or strike of sets, props, etc. **If required to do so to prepare the room for the next event, the organization responsible for the equipment will be billed for labor costs and jeopardize future reservations.**
- Strike includes the removal of all non-Norris equipment, trash, scenic, prop, and costume materials and the sweeping of all floors and carpets.
- The venue must be returned to the condition in which it was originally received.
- The venue must be completely vacated by 2pm on the following Sunday. A group representative must meet with a Norris staff member for a venue walkthrough at 2:00pm on the Sunday of strike
- Norris staff will conduct a checkout at 2pm on the Sunday of strike. A full checkout list can be found on the [Student Theatre Dashboard](#). The group is responsible for completing this checkout list. Norris staff will perform a checkout to ensure these expectations have been met.

Damage

- Fines resulting in damage to Northwestern property will be assessed at the cost of repair by University Facilities. These fines are non-negotiable and will be billed to the organization's SOFO account. **When in doubt, ask before doing.**

General Violations

- Violations can consist of any deviation from these guidelines and will be assessed at the discretion of Norris staff, and in consultation with Environmental Health and Safety and Campus Life. In extreme cases, staff will consider cancellation of performances and/or suspension of future reservations by the student organization. Examples of typical violations:
 - Unsafe set construction, lighting, or sound practices.
 - Altering permanent infrastructure or Northwestern owned equipment, including but not limited to building, furniture, AV equipment, etc.

- Disruptions to other users of our facility
- Violation of alcohol policies
- Improper handling or storage of prop weapons
- Not following through on agreed upon expectations.
- Individuals and student theatre groups understand that a student, group of students, student organization, or the University may file a complaint against a student, group of students, or student organization for any alleged violation of University rules and regulations as outlined in the Northwestern University Student Handbook.
- **It is the responsibility of student theatre groups to uphold and comply with all University rules and regulations and community expectations for behavior and conduct as outlined in these policies and the Northwestern University Student Handbook (<https://www.northwestern.edu/communitystandards/student-handbook/>).** As such, the Norris University Center does not limit creative expression but does require notification for approval in the event of adult themes, prop weapons, or other special considerations.

Contact Information

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