

The Last Frontier Theatre Conference 2011 Evaluations Report



Mark St. Cyr and Darcy Halsey performing Raegan Payne's "Sweet Nothings," a part of the Ten-Minute Play Slam on the Conference's final Saturday.

Photos taken by Ryan Adkins for Prince William Sound Community College and donated by Merry Pierce of Merryweather Studios.

Introduction



Conference Coordinator Dawson Moore

Each year, feedback forms are distributed to all Conference participants when they register. The forms are also made available afterward on the college's website, both as PDF and Word documents. The responses are amassed and analyzed here, then used in the planning for subsequent years.

The first thirteen pages are a breakdown of participants' numerical rankings of various topics. Scores from the previous five years are included, as are initial reactions and plans for 2012. After that are quotes from the participants, sorted first by question, then more specifically by the topic of the response. The Coordinator's analysis is at the start of each section.

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Information Received Prior to the Event

Our goal is to maintain ongoing communication with everyone planning to attend. Particularly for new participants, the size of the event and remoteness of its location can be daunting. To help allay this, all participants correspond directly with the Coordinator, and are repeatedly encouraged to contact him with any questions. The website (www.theatreconference.org) is the other main source of disseminating information prior to the event.

	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>
Excellent	71%	66%	61.5%	45%	75%	58%
Good	20%	24%	29%	39%	20%	28%
Satisfactory	7%	8%	4.5%	12%	3%	6%
Unsatisfactory	2%	0%	2%	2%	0%	4%
N/A	0%	0%	3%	2%	2%	2%

There were last minute changes to the free housing provided to participants that account for the higher 10% of results that are satisfactory or lower. It was also the first year where authors were asked to prepare their scripts specifically for the reading, and this created some confusion over what draft were being read.



Long-time participant actress and playwright Angela Littleton.

Our Goal for improvement for the 2012 Conference

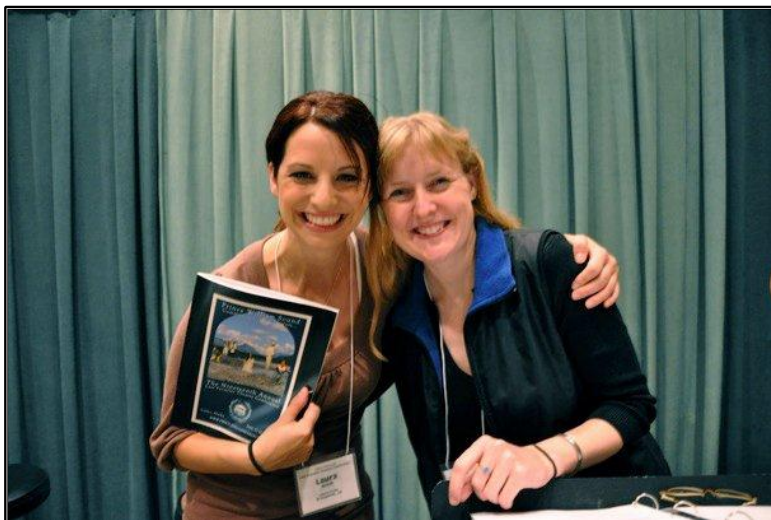
The changes to our free housing came up last minute, and with a year to prepare alternatives, participants should feel better informed. We are making text changes in our website to further clarify what people can expect. We will also be changing how actors are contacted with their roles, going to an all on-line format, as opposed to mailing out scripts via the US Post. This will save money on the expense of mailing 180 actors script packets, and will hopefully give them a clear line of communication to talk about any concerns of schedule conflicts that they have.

Conference Schedule

The ambitious slate of activities for the week provides participants with more activities than they can possibly attend. Daytime activities go from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. every day, and there are generally three choices during any time slot. Evenings contain both a production and late night theatre activities.

	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>
Excellent	73%	67%	55%	59%	50%
Good	23%	29%	38%	39%	46%
Satisfactory	4%	3%	7%	1%	2%
Unsatisfactory	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%
N/A	0%	1%	0%	0%	2%

Despite a decline in excellent ratings from previous year, 96% of the participants rated the schedule good or better. The nature of the event is that someone who attended at every possible time would see around a third of the workshops and readings, and this can create dissatisfaction. It is also a large part of what works about the event, and the basic layout will not be changing as of now.



California actress Laura Crowe and playwright Amy Tofte seem happy with the schedule.

Our Goal for improvement for the 2012 Conference

For the past decade, Lab readings have been scheduled three at a time, with classes scheduled during alternate times. In 2012, two readings will go at once, with the third room reserved strictly for classes. This is an experiment, with potential positive and negative consequences, and we will not know how well it works until it has been attempted. The schedule will otherwise stick to the highly successful pattern established over the past two decades.

Conference Website

Direct personal conversation and the website are our main means of distributing information to participants prior to the Conference, and of publicizing the event. Information contained includes the Conference schedule; Featured Artist biographies; Play Lab selections and information; a “how the conference works” essay; registration form; list of financial benefactors; available local discounts for participants; and a link to contact the Conference Coordinator. We also use it to facilitate programs such as the Monologue Workshop by making dramatic material available to participants there prior to their arrival in Valdez. Lastly, it is used to as a historical record of the event. Programs, photos, and other information give evidence of the Conference’s rich history.

	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>
Excellent	52%	51.5%	52%	45%	46%
Good	27%	22%	21%	35%	30%
Satisfactory	4%	4.5%	10%	12%	11%
Unsatisfactory	0%	0%	2%	0%	2%
N/A	17%	22%	15%	8%	11%

These numbers have stayed nearly identical since this category was added in 2007. While they are solid, we would like to see growth. The percentage of people who said they didn’t use the website was also worrisome.

Our Goal for improvement for the 2012 Conference

There were a couple of technical issues with forms on the website that will be addressed for next year. The Conference is being transferred from the college’s website to its own domain name, www.theatreconferenc.org, and this will also involve a full review of its contents.



Participants gather around the free computers provided at the Civic Center.

Play Lab

Every year, the overall success of the Conference flows from the quality of the Play Lab. Experience has shown that when there are good plays being presented by strong writers, the positive effects are felt in every other aspect of the event. The continued improvement in the quality of the Play Lab is our top priority.

	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>
Excellent	71%	81%	76%	71%	77%	87%
Good	26%	15%	20%	25%	23%	5%
Satisfactory	3%	4%	2%	2%	0%	2%
Unsatisfactory	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
N/A	0%	0%	2%	2%	0%	4%

With 87% of respondents ranking the Lab as excellent, it is clear that this program is running very well. An influx of acting talent from outside the state, coupled with an improving Alaska talent base, is partially responsible. It is also fair to say that the script line-up was as strong or stronger than any year in the history of the event.



UAA Theatre students Alyssa Barnes and Ivory Bodnar with Anchorage actor Erick Hayden and LA-based actress Laura Crowe reading in Chicago playwright EJC Calvert's "The Bird Girl."

Our Goal for improvement for the 2012 Conference

There were improvements this year that help account for the Lab receiving the best marks in its history. Authors chose which stage instructions would be read in advance, and pre-marked scripts were distributed to actors. Playwrights didn't universally take advantage of this process this year, and the expectation that they do it will be more strongly emphasized in 2012.

The two classes on how to direct a reading and how to act in one were the best attended that they had been in years, and the quality of readings showed this. Particularly, Marshall Mason's class in how to direct a reading created a lot of visually exciting readings.

Long-time participant Sue Nims passed away last year, and left funds to establish the Sue Nims Distinguished Playwriting Award. Three panelists read scripts and chose Anchorage playwright Linda Billington as its first recipient. Fears that this award would create competition between attending writers were addressed by having the award determined prior to the event, and the plan is to have the award again available in 2012.



Planned improvements include:

- Increasing involvement in TBA Theatre's preparatory class in Anchorage.
- Addressing the acoustic issues in Ballroom B
- Switching to electronic script delivery, with packets of physical scripts available at the front desk on participants arrival.
- The schedule changes discussed on page 3 will affect the Lab in numerous small ways.

Joyce Eriksen and Harold V. Fergus Jr. in Linda Billington's "Old Unfaithful," winner of the 2011 Sue Nims Distinguished Playwriting Award.

Panels and Classes

While the Play Lab is the primary educational component of the daytime programming, the Conference also offers classes and panel discussions. 2011 classes were scheduled two to three at a time, with at least one of them focusing on playwriting, with the other classes there to provide activities for non-playwrights.

	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>
Excellent	55%	73%	58.5%	52%	62%	68%
Good	17%	22%	29%	37%	17%	24%
Satisfactory	13%	0%	4.5%	7%	7%	2%
Unsatisfactory	0%	0%	1.5%	0%	1%	2%
N/A	15%	5%	6.5%	4%	13%	4%

There was a well-received morning writing warm-up class added at 8:00 a.m. weekdays this year, and the general quality of the classes and panel discussions was very good. The Acting for Singers program, co-produced with the Anchorage Opera, had a very successful second year, featuring a final performance of songs by the participants.



Pianist Juliana Osinchuk with Acting for Singers participant Rachel Marquez at the programs final presentation.

Our Goal for improvement for the 2012 Conference

The primary complaint about classes has been that they did not have enough time to get in depth with the subjects. In 2012, classes will run throughout the day in their own room, with each class having a longer slot. The number of classes will marginally increase, but every class will have more time, which has been a theme of participants' comments on the classes for years.

Our biggest concern is that this may, in some cases, draw audiences away from Play Lab readings. For example, the class pictured below is with a legend of the American theatre. When presented with the choice of watching a developmental reading in the Lab or experiencing a class with a master, most people will chose the latter. The flip side of this is that we will have less competition for audience between the writers in the Lab; every year, at least once or twice a popular Alaska playwright has taken the audience from both of the readings it was scheduled opposite. The fall-out of this change won't be known until it is applied.



Six-time Obie-winning director Marshall W. Mason works with New York actress Emma de Beus in his Improvisation in Rehearsal class.

We will try the new schedule out, and if it works, great; if it does not, we will not repeat it in 2013.

Evening Performances

There are evening performances every night, staging a wide variety of work. The focus is on playwrights developed at the Conference and work by the playwrights on the Featured Artist staff. The shows provide both education and entertainment for our participants. They are also our main connection with the community of Valdez, who often cannot take the week off to attend the day-time events due to work, but are available to see shows in the evening.

	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>
Excellent	55%	65%	56%	23%	61%	57%
Good	39%	23%	30%	44%	34%	35%
Satisfactory	6%	6%	12.5%	29%	5%	2%
Unsatisfactory	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	2%
N/A	0%	6%	1.5%	2%	0%	2%

There was a general feeling that there were not enough full productions this year. The line-up featured only one full play production, in addition to two evenings of readings, two of one-acts, and *Mountain Shack Theatre*, which was a more experimental evening than a play.

Our Goal for improvement for the 2012 Conference

There will be more full productions in 2012. TBA Theatre is being courted to produce a full-length comedy again, as they did in 2007 with the highly successful *The Head That Wouldn't Die*. The one-acts will be presented by Three Wise Moose in their Fourplay program, presented yearly in Anchorage. Playwright Adam Klasfeld will bring his successful one-man New York production of *The Report of My Death*. The play, about Mark Twain, was presented in the Play

Lab in 2008, and the production garnered a rave review in the New York Times. It features Michael Graves, who read in the Play Lab production.



There is also a need for better publicity in the local community, which will be done using more extensive and earlier personal communication.

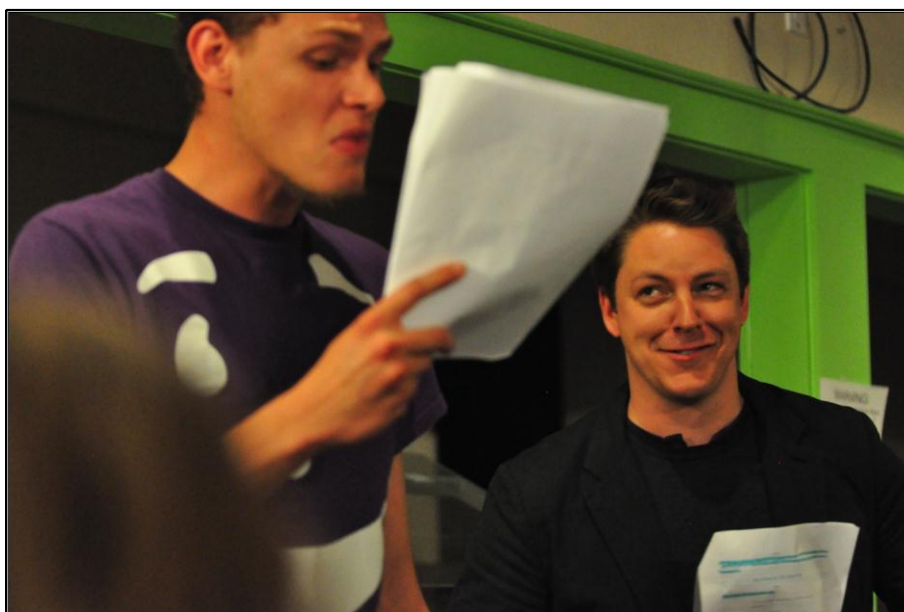
Mountain Shack Theatre featured live actors silhouetted against an old movie about Alaska.

Fringe Festival

The Fringe ran Sunday through Thursday at the Egan Street Pub under the direction of 10-year coordinators Erick Hayden and Barry Levine. The Saturday before the Conference officially began, June 11, featured a performance by the week's late night programming, which this year also included UAA's Glee Club and Improvisation Troupe.

	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>
Excellent	35%	27%	38%	38%	28%
Good	12%	28.5%	26%	29%	22%
Satisfactory	8%	11%	6%	3%	13%
Unsatisfactory	2%	5%	0%	3%	2%
N/A	43%	28.5%	30%	27%	35%

The Fringe this year had issues participants complaining that it wasn't striving to be good theatre, settling for prurient material. This issue was very similar to what people cited in 2008, and to some extent can be a reaction to the nature of the event: it's adult material, and everyone's definition of that is different. Feedback on the two other programs was universally positive.



Our Goal for improvement for the 2012 Conference

For the first time in a decade, the Fringe Festival will have new coordinators. What changes will take place in the event will be determined by them. In selecting a new coordinator, one of the primary criteria will be what their vision of the future of the event is. Discussions are already in place with the two UAA groups to continue their involvement in the Conference.

Featured Artists

The goal is to create a group of professionals from multiple aspects of theatre who can provide attendees with insight and inspiration. We strive to involve featured artists who are accessible, intelligent, good-natured, and talented. These people are picked to best suit the collaborative spirit of the Conference and the education we are looking to provide. There is also an effort to involve Alaskans on the staff, both from within the University system and outside of it.

	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>
Excellent	62%	76%	81%	69%	77%	70%
Good	33%	20%	17%	27%	23%	26%
Satisfactory	5%	4%	2%	2%	0%	2%
Unsatisfactory	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%
N/A	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%

Talented people to fill the artistic staff is not a concern.



Featured Artists Kia Corthron, Gregory Pulver, and Sherry Kramer respond to a play reading.

Our Goal for improvement for the 2012 Conference

We will continue to work on developing Alaskans as a part of this staff, for two primary reasons: one, it improves the Alaska theatre scene to have its leadership better trained; two, they are generally less expensive (reduced travel expense). We will of course still bring in top notch teachers from around the country.

Conference Staff

The staff is the backbone of any quality organization. PWSCC strives to have the highest quality staff possible year-round, and the Theatre Conference is no exception. Through staff meetings and information packets, we make sure that all of our staff is qualified and capable of handling anything that comes their way (or finding someone who can).

	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>
Excellent	94%	100%	98.5%	94%	100%	94%
Good	6%	0%	1.5%	6%	0%	6%

Staff rankings are always high, and it is sometimes difficult to know if they are talking about the primary coordinator and his staff, or the general staff that works the front desk, lunches, etc. They generally think both are great, however.



PWSCC staff member Michael Holcombe and student employee Krista Bass at the front desk.

Our Goal for improvement for the 2012 Conference

2011 did not have a staff specifically designated from the college to work it, instead having different staff members at the college 2-3 days over the week. While money was saved in using student hires, next year the goal is to go back to having a consistent staff throughout the week.

1. How did you hear about the Conference?

About half of the respondents replied that they were either previous attendees or heard about it from one. This is part of the reason the class curriculum is designed to not repeat classes more than once every three years.

Other sources listed included:

- Fairbanks Theatre Community
- Playwrights Center (2)
- Internet (2)
- Cyrano's
- Ohio University Theatre Department
- Scottish Playwrights Website
- Anchorage Opera
- Dramatist Guild
- Facebook
- Main Stage Production
- Northwest Playwright's Alliance

Individuals listed included Gary Garrison, Ursula Gould, Anne Hanley, and Dawson Moore



Kelly Pekar, Dana Brooke, and Jacob Moore in the Cincinnati Playhouse production of Arlene Hutton's "Happy Worst Day Ever."

2. Are there any other types of activities you would like to see added to future Conferences?

Responses in this section indicate some specific areas of study that participants would like to see addressed in future years, such as the business of acting or how to write a successful play synopsis. Often, these classes have been presented in other years, but the curriculum is kept varied from year to year because of the number of repeat attendees.

There is also often a call for group outdoor activities, but the Conference leaves this in the hands of the participants. Partially this is because of liability issues; primarily, though, we are throwing a theatre conference (including a glacier cruise), and not an Alaska tour.

Acting Classes

- Workshop for play summarization.
- More Acting Games!
- Movement classes.
- Seminars on “acting as a business.”

Playwriting Classes

- More writing workshops.
- More diverse panels.
- Afternoon writing classes.
- Acting and directing workshops for writers
- Small playwright roundtables.
- Seminars on getting published
- Beginning writers seminar

Other classes

- Technical production classes.
- More active and interactive workshops.

Featured Artists

- More featured artists

Schedule

- More down time.
- More formally directed mixers.
- More evening performances by non-Alaskan companies
- More musical activities
- Opening event such as group kayaking
- More Fringe

3. Which Featured Artist was most helpful to you in your time here? What did you enjoy most about the Conference?

Most of the details of this response section are not included in this public report. It is the Coordinator's feeling that this information is for him to assist in staffing choices for the future. The artistic staff of this event remains consistently strong (page ten: 70% excellent, 26% good ratings), and publicly weighing their comparative merits is not fair to that team.



To summarize the results, artists who ran a program with lots of specific one-on-one interaction with participants (Ten-Minute Play Slam, Monologue Workshop, Acting for Singers) were among the highest vote-getters. Their positions involve intimate one-on-one work, and it is not surprising that they had multiple citations. All three of these programs are well run and in keeping with the spirit of the event.

Bostin Christopher humbly leading the How to Read in the Play Lab workshop on the Conference's first day.

4. What did you enjoy most about the Conference?

Many respondents listed multiple aspects in their answers, so each individual response might not be a person's single favorite part (for example, 'Valdez' might not have been the absolute best part of someone's Theatre Conference, but they wanted to make sure they cited its importance to them).

- Play lab (16)
- Networking (11)
- Evening performances (8)
- Atmosphere (7)
- Entire Conference (7)
- Monologue workshop (4)
- Fringe Festival (3)
- Workshops (2)
- Panels (2)
- Tim Daly's Seminar (2)
- Event variety
- Alaska
- Mountain Shack Theatre
- The boat trip



Featured Artists Danielle Dresden, Barclay Kopchak, Y York, and Laura Gardner mingling at the kick-off Fish Fry.

5. What did you enjoy least?

The largest area of complain this year was food. The free lunch didn't include enough healthy options and/or variety, and we experienced minor shortages at both the opening Fish Fry and Gala Dinner.

Most of these complaints can be traced back to financial reasons. There is only one available catering option to keep the lunches affordable, the Safeway deli. While it provided variety from day to day, and vegetarian sandwiches, this wasn't enough to make it not a focus point for people's negative comments. The past two years at the Gala, we have tried to save money by having a lighter final meal, served buffet style; both years have had problems with quantities.

The Fish Fry had the same amount of food it has always had; there were just more participants earlier this year.

How to address these concerns is unclear. One option is eliminating the lunches and expanding the lunch break's length to accommodate dining in town; this creates its own problems, and under serves the financially poorest people at the Conference (who are generally not the ones complaining). Another is trying to find another inexpensive option, but where this would come from in Valdez is a problem.

The gala will be discussed with administration, and if possible, more funds will be directed to this portion of the event. After 2012, it is a possibility that the dinner part of the evening might be dropped from the evening.

There were a couple of isolated comments about the evening shows, specific featured artists, the Play Lab, and other specific elements of the Conference, but nothing that cannot just be assigned to an individual's experience (as opposed to a systemic problem).

FOOD

- Lunches Bad (11)
- More variety for vegans (3)
- Entire eating experience (3)
- Quantity of food for Gala & Fish Fry (2)
- Healthier lunch choices
- Gala

EVENING PERFORMANCES

- Evening performances (4)
- All evening performances except Mountain Shack Theatre

SCHEDULE

- Scheduling hard to keep up with (4)
- Overlapping of schedule such as Play Lab readings and Acting for Singers on Monday
- Early mornings

HOUSING

- Dorm registration chaotic
- Dorms unlocked
- Housing over crowded

CLASSES

- Specific workshop
- Meeting requirements for workshops then not using the “required” material

PLAY LAB

- Play Lab quality low
- Actors late or no shows for their readings
- Stage directions need to be struck through beforehand as to not waste time during rehearsal
- Unprepared for readings due to last minute changes
- Stricter guidelines for Play Lab because of offensive material
- Specific Panelist

OTHER

- No Complaints (10)
- Civic center temperature uncomfortable
- Untrained staff
- Conference attendees rudely walking in and out of evening shows



*UAA Glee Club performance.
Pictured are Ivory Bodnar, Sarah
Shoemaker, and Devin Frey.*

6. What information do you wish you had prior to participating this year?

Again, housing was the primary concern, and it will be addressed ahead of time. To some extent, the lack of any other dominant issues means that people's issues are specific to them, and probably not indicative of a larger concern. For example, the one person who felt they didn't understand the atmosphere of the Conference probably didn't read the 'how to' guide on the website, or ask a previous participant about it.

A few words about a master contact list. Every year, a few participants ask for one to be arranged; every year, we resist starting one up. It runs up against University of Alaska privacy issues, and it is much easier to leave in the hands of the individual participants who they give their private information to. When contacted by individuals afterward who are looking for specific people they've lost the information on, the Coordinator forwards the message to the person whose information was requested.



Joel Benson and Danielle Rabinovitch in Laura Neubauer's "Queen Bee."

- Housing accommodations (8)
- Weather information (2)
- Workshops (2)
- Atmosphere of conference
- Fringe festival not being full productions
- Updated version of scripts for play lab
- Email accuracy
- Stage directions marked in advance by playwrights
- Clearer performing guidelines for workshops
- List of whose monologues are being used for the workshop
- A conference contact list that you can opt out of in the welcome packet

7. How was the Conference website? Any suggestions for improvements?

Most people were happy with the website and found it a useful guide. Website designs can always improve, and we will continue to make it accessible, useable, and current.

- Website excellent (18)
- Simplify webpage navigation (2)
- Conference bulletin board on the website as well as big screen to allow for late breaking news
- Keep up to date
- Webpage design needs to be cleaner
- History synopsis of past conferences
- Conference should have its own website
- Reliability of links on webpage
- Accuracy of information on webpage

8. Additional comments.

- Amazing conference (13)
- Thank You (6)
- Dawson Rocks! (4)
- Extraordinary staff (4)
- Keep the acting for singers workshop (2)
- So much fun
- Life Changing
- Actors who show up late or do not show to readings/rehearsals should not be invited to read again
- Josh Schmidtlein and Susanna Perkins superb stage instruction readers
- Continual encouragement for ethics of writing
- Play Lab plays available for purchase even if for only one dollar a copy
- Doug is great
- Keep conference dates in June
- Clearer workshop guidelines
- Variation in vegetarian meal choices
- Specific panelist unprofessional
- More streamlined lined guidelines
- Less fringe

- Conference participation based off seniority rather than skill
- Franchising the conference
- Better quality evening performances
- Fringe more for young crowd rather than general conference population
- Museum reception great
- Thank you for the food coupons



Lindsay Lamar and Ryan Buen in Joe Barnes' "The Shiftlet Abduction," part of TBA Theatre's evening production of one-act plays from the Conference.

Responses from Participating Playwrights in the 2011 Play Lab

How useful was the information you received before the conference regarding the process, rehearsals, selection of readers, etc? Is there other information you wish you had prior to arriving in Valdez?

- No Response
- No Complaints
- Not Really
- The information was very useful. This was, without a doubt, the most organized conference I have ever attended.
- Very useful, all of it very thorough and clear, all laid out very well, this year's program book was the best yet.
- I knew what to expect. Very happy with my actors but judging by some of the performances that was a crap-shoot.
- The info was fine. I would have liked to receive the conference program before heading off to Valdez, in order to better plan my week. Having the schedule pages online is a good compromise.
- It was definitely clear and helpful. Only thing I wish I knew was that I was staying at the middle school and what to expect as far as communal living. Maybe this was sent to us but I wasn't paying much attention. The staff was always around if we needed anything.
- It was fine- but sometimes the "unknown" is what is scary. Really, don't hesitate to involve the network of us returning campers to refer folks to in our respective areas to answer questions, talk about process, etc. We long to tell folks about the conference.
- I was grateful to have a pretty clear idea of the process beforehand, thanks to Dawson and the information on the website. The only thing I wish I had understood better was when/how I could submit monologues or a 10 minute play.
- This was my second time, so I pretty much knew what to expect.
- Very Useful. It would have been useful to have details about more ways to get to Valdez from Anchorage. Someone mentioned to me that one could travel from Anchorage to Whittier and then take a ferry as an appealing option.
- Information beforehand was pretty straight forward which was great. There wasn't too much information, which would have been daunting. It might have been helpful to have email addresses of my cast so that I could address any character questions that they had, etc. Though maybe this would have made the process longer. I'm not sure.

- The information was very useful, I felt very prepared coming to Valdez, even when unexpected situations came up. I also felt I knew enough to allow things to happen on their own, and not plan every second I was there.
- Very useful. I had all the information I needed.
- Most of the information I needed was supplied prior to arrival, and once on the ground the rest came at the front desk. Your staff is to be commended by the way.
- I appreciated being able to pre-cast some of my play and was delighted with two young actors assigned to roles.

Was the Play Lab experience beneficial for you and your development as a playwright?

- Absolutely.
- Yes.
- Definitely.
- Absolutely. It has been every year.
- Not only was it beneficial but it opened up a lot of ideas about future plays that I will write. Most importantly, I have created relationships with other playwrights, actors, directors, and the Last Frontier staff which is in itself invaluable.
- Absolutely. Good readings, helpful discussion, and then feedback throughout the week in private talks.
- The Play Lab experience was invaluable. Plays are not complete until they see some level of “play” or production. Things about my play that I could not have understood reading it on the page became very apparent when read on stage. I think this experience will help me both develop my writing and understand the collaborative aspect of playwriting on a higher level.
- Absolutely.
- Probably, by which I mean to say, it’s too soon to tell exactly how or how much. I’ll know the answer to that better in the future when I can gauge new development and reflect on what influences were at work.
- Absolutely. For my piece in particular, hearing the entire play helped me to see where the play was dragging and needed cuts and/or revisions. Also, hearing positive feedback from my panelists encouraged me. More than anything, this conference made me feel legitimate as a playwright which I don’t feel in my day job. It made me feel validated, which is as valuable as I think as the writing itself. I want to feel confident and energized in my abilities, and the conference certainly did that.
- Absolutely- considering that I heard my play out loud for the first time at the conference and there were many inconsistencies, it really seemed to resonate with people. I am

really excited about working further on [this play], as well as the other plays related to it [my writing].

- Absolutely!
- As far as my writing? Not to any great extent. As a networking opportunity, very much so.
- Most beneficial. I received valuable insight into how to write the next draft.
- Dawson, beyond a shadow of a doubt. My play had made the developmental hell circuit with promises of productions, exposure, etc. but I was ultimately writing for/by committee. The focus of community, and on genuine and honest guidance, created the ideal circumstances for new play development.
- Yes, very much- I just wish I wrote a bigger more ambitious play and submitted that (and if it was accepted) right now I'm playing it safe and feel I don't have that much to discuss with the panel.
- Not Really

Were the responses from your panel helpful to you?

- Very Insightful.
- Yes.
- Very.
- Can't begin to say how helpful they were. Danielle Dresden and Kia Corthron were great and concise in their critiques. Moreover, when I approached them later on, they took the time to give me even more feedback privately.
- Somewhat. Some of the feedback was over technical/ academic.
- Generally. They didn't have much in the way of substantive suggestions, but some of Stephan Golux's comments about copyright law were useful. This spurred similar comments from the audience.
- Definitely. Barclay, Y and that other guy were most helpful.
- Yes, they were helpful. The comments about possible revisions were useful in reconceptualizing the play, and the positive feedback about what went well will keep me writing.
- They were all very kind and validated my thoughts. They didn't really give me anything to work on per se. They all just said how much they really liked it. So, yes, I would call that helpful.
- Somewhat. The panelists followed the same formula in the dozen or so readings I attended. That's a normal response to being put on the spot given the design of the feedback process, but it left me with a sense that they were good at responding on the fly, but that, with some exceptions, they didn't really know what they were talking about in regard to the scripts. I thought too much time was used up by the panels. I

found the responses from non-panelists auditors more interesting and useful, though their participation was limited by time constraints partially aggravated by the obligation panelists had to the protocol.

- Yes, extremely helpful!
- My panel (Catherine Stadem, Sherry Kramer, and George Pulver) was very helpful- the overall tone of the feedback sounded like “yes and...” They were very much onboard with the play, and gave me good things to think about to push the play further. It was also very helpful and insightful to get feedback not just from playwrights, but from theatre critic/ journalist and a designer. I also got good suggestions from the panel (and the audience) about other plays and playwrights that I might like.
- Very much so.
- On whole, yes. They showed me where the remaining fuzzy spots were in my play.
- The feedback from my adjudicators was most beneficial and constructive. Panel: John Difusco, Bostin Christopher, Catherine Stadem.
- The responses were wonderful. Unfortunately we ran out of time so I did not hear everything from Erma. However John, Arlene, and the folks in the room were incredibly thoughtful and encouraging, and most important, honest.
- Yes, in my case, although brief, the comments were very helpful, my play received a very even consistent critique, the panelists were pretty much in agreement and said similar things. The best panelists I witnessed are Tim, Marshall, Dawson, Cassandra, Erma, and Y- off the top of my head- also Bostin is good, Catherine and Barclay as well. All in all, a nice mix, all the panelists, if taken together represents a solid team.

Was your private meeting with panelist helpful to you?

- Absolutely.
- Very. Marshall Mason is most insightful with his advice.
- Less enjoyable but probably just as helpful.
- Not really. Same feedback as general discussion.
- I didn’t have one – Kia and I reached the mutual conclusion that we had covered everything we wanted during the panel discussion, so we let it slide.
- My main panelist Stephan Golux was amazing. We ended up discussing my play for two hours on our one-on-one meeting, even though it was a ten minute play. It opened a myriad of ideas for that play as well as several ideas. I will be forever grateful to him and will suggest anyone else applying in the future to know that this isn’t so uncommon from the other panelists as well.
- Yes. Barclay and I had a good talk. If time permitted, it would be good to meet with all three panelists, individually or in a group, but I fully understand the words “logistical

nightmare.” And Y gave me notes. You and I talked and will talk some more at some point.

- We only met briefly. I think my panelist felt as though she had already said what she thought was most useful after reading.
- Yes, but she simply reinforced what they had said as a group. She was very nice and seemed to really like my work. We did get to chat about the companion piece I’m writing to go along with [my play]. So, that was most helpful to talk through that storyline.
- I particularly enjoyed the time I spent in meeting with panelist Cassandra Medley, not necessarily in terms of notes on my script, but rather for the conversation we had touching on various aspects of work.
- Yes, very much so. My panelist in particular, Missouri Downs, gave me very specific feedback for each scene and that was really, really helpful. It wasn’t just blanket commentary but incision pointer thoughts.
- It was a great continuation of the feedback conversation, and it allowed me to ask questions and to clarify anything that I didn’t quite get in during the audience feedback. Not only did I sit down with my lead panelist, Catherine Stadem, but I also sat down with Sherry Kramer and talked about the play. Cathy helped me think further on fleshing out the main character, and Sherry helped me think about what insights the audience can gain from surprises. I felt lucky, but I felt concerned for other playwrights who had their readings later in the week when time became short and schedules started filling up. I realize every writer is different, has different processes, etc. but I felt lucky that my reading was Wednesday and not later in the week. In terms of my own process, the private session was very important to me. I had a day and a half to process the feedback, filter through it, and bring questions and thoughts to my panelists to have focused conversation. I don’t think I would have been able to get as much out of the conference if my reading was at the end of the week.
- Yes. I very much like the addition in recent years of the one on one session with the panels.
- Very much so – being able to have a personal response was highly valuable.
- Yes, and an offer was made to keep in touch with development by Difusco.
- Absolutely! We talked about the script in general, and moved from scene to scene. She asked me several probing questions, which led to me making discoveries in my script, things that were so obvious, and yet, I was so close I couldn’t see them. My panelist was an absolute angel.
- I had no private meeting with [my panelist]. He asked if it was necessary, since my play was short- and he told me everything- so he asked if he could skip it and I said Okay- I probably should have had a meeting with him anyway to talk about playwriting in

general, if my play was so easily reviewed yes, I now see I blew it, I could have talked about my play, how to expand it and what kind of material would make it into something more lengthy, which is what they all wanted to see- they all wanted more, said my play ended way too soon.

Were you satisfied with the performance of your readers?

- I was beyond impressed and very blessed to have them.
- Yes. This is – it's simply the nature of the heart – hit and miss.
- They did great.
- Yes.
- Overjoyed.
- The performers were great. Even though they had changed when I got there and had less time to rehearse due to scheduling conflicts, everybody was pumped up and ready to go hit their marks. We did a semi reading/performance and I was very happy with it.
- Lovely group. While some folks in other situations mentioned some lack of preparation on the part of some actors, I personally was quite happy and impressed with the prep, dedication and enthusiasm of my gang! And I thought they did lovely work, too.
- I was satisfied with the casting and mostly satisfied with the performances. It was clear that some of the actors had prepared well beforehand and others not as much.
- Very strong, they did a great job.
- Totally! Great cast! 100%. That includes the stage direction reader.
- Yes. Especially my lead actress.
- Absolutely- they really caught the essence of the characters, and it was helpful having age-appropriate actors (as much as I love and appreciate my friends in their late 20s reading much older characters). There were only a few times where they paraphrased or added a word, but it seldom happened and they still captured the essence of action and intention, so I didn't get up in arms about it. My only other suggestion would be to project.
- Yes.
- Extremely, my two actresses especially.
- Quite Satisfied!
- My two actors were absolutely perfect, and I would want them in a full production. The person who read my stage directions? Not so much, but we have already addressed this.
- All in all, they were pretty good- I told them what I wanted (Loud and clear, don't get actorly, keep it simple and not too fast or slow) and they did a decent job- even though the casting was little off (not the conference's fault- there was glitch in the reader's schedule) they did me good- I was happy.

What worked best for you in the process?

- The entire week was the process. Visiting lectures, panels, other plays; My rehearsal, my reading, my meeting with my point person; the nights of karaoke, the glacier tour, and the bonfire; the fringe festival, the laughter, the hugs, the risk taking. The entire week worked for me in a way that, really, to take an individual component out of context just doesn't seem right. It was one of the most artistically (and personally) satisfying weeks of my life.
- Audience Feedback.
- Seeing and hearing what the actors struggled with.
- Rehearsal.
- The chance to the script read by a talented actor before an enthusiastic audience.
- The private meeting as well as going to other readings and listening to the panelists discuss other people's plays.
- Quite honestly, while all the ingredients were in place and wonderful, if I had to say what was best, it was the safe comfortable and loving atmosphere to hear the play read! It made it easy to hear both the play and the comments and put me in an easy, "receiving" mode. That's important.
- The ease and respect of the staff, actors, and other playwrights for each other made me less nervous than I expected to be as a rookie.
- Loved the readings, feedback, and the playwriting workshops.
- A) The reading of the play involving actors. I hadn't heard my play read aloud prior to the rehearsal, let alone professional actors. It was important to me to see how they 'took to' the script. I got to see their reactions to the play and found their reflections in a post rehearsal discussion, as well as the reading the following day, both useful and encouraging. B) The monologue workshop. One of my monologues was performed in the workshop; hence I dropped in as a spectator at the first rehearsal. I enjoy watching people work and found Laura Gardner's dynamic coaching of the actors in their various monologues compelling. So much so, that I veered from my original intents to attend playwright oriented workshops to attending as many actor oriented workshops as I could fit in.
- The process of the reading itself. The structure was really straightforward, and the feedback session was carefully monitored and structured and I liked that.
- The structured feedback- it kept the conversation focused and productive. It's the most helpful feedback I've ever received for a reading, and I know exactly what I want to work on when I revisit [my play] and begin new rewrites. I am also going to use the structured feedback from now on for every table reading and/or staged reading of my scripts, and I am going to highly recommend it for other playwrights as well.
- Being able to hear my play read for the first time.

- I was able to hear direct, from the gut feedback from an interested, enlightened audience.
- The personal feedback. Not sure how to answer this. Last year Brian Willis asked me before the reading of my play if there was something I wanted him to look for.
- The whole experience of having a play in was great- suppose the best thing would be to have a full length script accepted and get an expert like Tim Daley discuss my play with- I've only had one acts in the lab, which I know are a lot easier to get accepted, and my one on one feedback has been good- sometimes to not so good- the best thing I think overall is the encouragement and like mindedness when it comes the potential of the art form- and camaraderie of the conference participants, all the helpful feedback and suggestions from our colleagues.

What would you like to see improve in the play lab?

- I can't think of anything off the top of my head. Maybe after a few years I might be able to relax enough to see something that could use tweaking. For now, I'm just too jazzed. You all helped me rediscover the absolute joy of writing for the stage! I will never be able to thank you enough.
- Maybe late morning scheduling of longer plays
- Typed up/ e-mailed copy of notes from the panel as well as their personal feedback
- New panelists. More emerging artists.
- Reinstatement of an audience choice awards, with the winner receiving an evening staged reading at the following year's Conference. Perhaps this can be merged with the money award given to Linda Billington this year.
- Get some more time to rehearse and get more "how to" lectures like that of Tim Daly's. Other than that, this was one of the best experiences of my life. If anything, this experience makes me want to work harder to come back next year with something even better.
- Acoustics- while I don't like amplification and room C doesn't need help, A & B are a bit acoustically "wet" - you can be loud, but the walls absorb the sound and energy slightly.
- I'm not sure.
- Healthier food for lunch. I would have like more than fifty minutes for rehearsal, but I very much understand the time constraints with that many readings. There's simply not enough time and people to expand rehearsals.
- A) Possibly tinkering with the panelist response model. It would have worked better, for me, if they were on the same footing as the rest of those in attendance and were part of a general discussion rather than on stage, so to speak. I would preserve the model of follow-up meetings with the playwright with panelists. I think everyone would be better served, as long as the panelists are serious about their role, if they took some time to

think about the plays, formulate their responses and present them to the writers the following day. B) Maybe find a way to add more rehearsal time and audience response time. All in all, the conference was fabulously smooth and well run. I'm happy to have participated and will whole heartedly recommend the experience to others.

- Honestly, I can't think of anything. If I do, I will be sure to reach out!
- Some of my thoughts for suggestions are actually things participants should probably take responsibility for themselves. For instance, I thought more guidance in getting the private meeting with the lead panelist would be helpful, but that should probably be the discretion of the playwright and panelist. So, I would offer emphasizing certain things that participants should be responsible for.
- Nothing comes to mind.
- I wouldn't mind being able to have a pre-rehearsal actor meeting to help further reading process.
- I liked Frank Collison's suggestion to put stage directions to be read in bold and not strike out said directions.
- On the whole, it's all there, for me, what I would like to see, in terms of submissions, are better scripts, esp. when it comes to the shorter plays, meaning short plays that are more dramatic and less sit-commy, short plays that aspire to higher levels of literature, rather than quick jokes (which is good, but its seems to be as high as the bar goes most of the time) also, it seems like there are too many first drafts, plays that are not developed as much as they could be (but that's what the Lab helps with, like in my case, having input on what to do with the play next-)



The road to the Valdez Civic Center and the Last Frontier Theatre Conference.