

# UCI Claire Trevor

## School of the Arts

A man wearing a green polo shirt, a dark cap, and glasses is standing on a silver scissor lift. He is reaching up with both hands to adjust a bright stage light fixture. The background is dark, suggesting a stage or rehearsal space. The lighting is dramatic, with the main light source being the fixture he is working on.

**Masters of Production**

Staff Spotlight



# Assistant Dean's Message



**As a staff member** at the Claire Trevor School of the Arts, I am continually inspired by our colleagues' exceptional talents. Their dedication and expertise shape our students' educational experiences and are integral to UC Irvine.

Our staff form the backbone of creative work at CTSA. They create a safe and accessible environment for faculty creativity and student learning, extending their support beyond the classroom into every aspect of our school's operations. This issue highlights the Production department staff, showcasing them as remarkable artists and professionals.

Our staff are educators in their own right; many graduated from similar graduate and undergraduate arts programs, bringing a wealth of experience and understanding to their roles. They impart not only skills but also insights into the professional dynamics of the arts. Students engage with a diverse team, including designers, finance experts, managers, actors, stage crew, HR, and IT specialists, gaining a holistic view of their future careers.

Our staff are true collaborators, working alongside students and faculty to produce artistic works that epitomize the collaborative nature of the arts.

I am proud of the work we do at CTSA. Facing new challenges daily, it is fulfilling to lead a team adept in creative problem-solving. Our staff's commitment to excellence reflects the vibrant community at Claire Trevor School of the Arts. I invite you to explore the unique roles and careers of our talented staff.

*Jason Valdry*

Jason Valdry, UCI '98, MBA '08  
Assistant Dean

Meet the Creatives Behind Every Theatrical Production

# Masters of Production

By Christine Byrd  
Photos by Emily Zheng



***Behind the scenes*** of every musical, play, opera and dance production put on by Claire Trevor School of the Arts is a hardworking team of production professionals. They sew the costumes, build the sets, create the props, hang the lights, balance the sound, and manage the schedules and budgets for every production – 100 shows a year.

They not only use their years of experience in theaters across the country to make CTSA's shows run smoothly, they also mentor and provide technical training to students. Every day, their creativity and problem solving helps achieve the seemingly impossible: bringing to life the artistic visions of UCI's emerging theater artists for professional-quality shows on a public school budget.





# Matthew Chandler

## Production Manager

As the production manager for the Claire Trevor School of the Arts, Matthew Chandler strives to create an experience for student artists that mirrors professional theater, whether they are designing, directing or performing.

“Our students will leave here knowing what budgets are, what it means to ‘do a tech,’ and be equipped with as many of the technical tools as possible,” Chandler says. “For many, it’s their first time experiencing a production of this scale, so it’s really important that we are aspiring to the highest professional levels in our work with students.”

**Background:** Production manager

**Degree:** Master’s of technical production, Florida State University

**Years at UCI:** 1

**Hobby:** Crossfit

During his 15 years with major regional theaters including Chicago’s Goodman Theater and South Coast Repertory, Chandler worked on international tours, Broadway productions, and world premieres, making him ideally suited to lead CTSA’s production team. He came to UCI in 2022, drawn to the opportunity to continue working in theater while also adding some work-life balance to the mix. Plus, he already knew many UCI faculty and staff from working together in the industry.

Chandler also has a master's in technical direction, which he describes as an engineering and project management degree for live theater. So when challenges arise – such as how to build a platform that safely holds several actors, or how to make a door that functions normally and also spins on its center axis – Chandler can lend his expertise to help find solutions.

He's at the front line of budgeting for CTSA productions, relying on a small fraction of the funding he had when mounting shows around the world. And he has to help students and faculty navigate the complexity of making art while also following the policies and procedures of a large public research university – useful training for students who aspire to future creative leadership roles in industry.

“Students need to have the flexibility not only of their designs, but also how to work institutionally toward change whether that's here or in the theater world,” Chandler says.

He adds, “What excites me the most is knowing that I will have played a part in not only their development through school, but into the professional world.”



*Image: Matthew Chandler reads over plans for a set design.*



## Jenn Dugan

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### Costume Shop Manager

“There is never a same day. And honestly that’s one of the things I love about this job,” says Jenn Dugan, costume shop manager for the Claire Trevor School of the Arts.

Dugan starts each day meeting with her staff of two to run through the day’s schedule and what needs to be cut, sewn or fitted. The rest of her day may be filled with meetings, shopping, budgeting, mentoring students or handcrafting special costume pieces.

Dugan’s first foray into costuming was for a children’s production during her freshman year studying fashion design, and she’s been professionally involved in costuming ever since. Before coming to UCI in 2022, she was

**Background:** Costume director and business owner

**Degree:** Bachelor’s in fashion design, Marist College and associate’s in business administration,

SUNY Schenectady

**Years at UCI:** 1

**Hobby:** Founding and managing the local Theater Makers Collective

the costume director for the Glimmer Glass Opera Festival in Cooperstown New York. Although she no longer designs costumes, she now helps M.F.A. students bring their creations

to life – a role that she jokes makes her “the executioner.”

When needed, Dugan herself makes pieces by hand. She crafted foam shoulder pads painted to look like metal armor for last spring’s rock musical *Airness*, and last summer, she created the mantel Julius Caesar wore at the New Swan Theater, rigged to reveal blood when he got stabbed.

While faculty guide their graduate students’ creative costume designs, Dugan can help them decide what’s feasible with their budget, and which fabrics will work best with their design. Students also work in the shop for course credit, gaining hands-on experience sewing costumes, or they sign up as “runners” who learn to handle backstage wardrobe duties during live performances.

“Working in the shop improves their technical skills and allows them to see the full costuming process

that takes place behind the scenes,” Dugan explains. “They get to see the difference between the design side versus the technical side.”

Dugan and her team manage hundreds of costumes for CTSA actors and dancers, ensuring every piece meets the needs of other aspects of production: Footwear must suit the choreography, fabrics need to be tested under the lights, microphones need to be subtly placed, and pockets need to hold props. Everything works in service of the bigger picture.

“I really enjoy working with the CTSA students,” Dugan says. “They want to learn, they’re receptive – and I want them to succeed, so I want to give them any and all knowledge I have.”



*Image: Jenn Dugan reviews costumes for the fall musical, Cabaret.*



## Bill Kingsbury

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### Technical Director

One of Bill Kingsbury's many jobs as technical director at the Claire Trevor School of the Arts is to teach students construction basics such as how to use a screw gun. But one of his favorite aspects is when they tell him they have put those practical skills to use in real life, like assembling a desk in their apartment.

"I show them the safe way to use tools, and give them different tricks and tips and techniques," he says. "I want them to do as much of the work as possible, because the more hands-on that they can be, the more enjoyable it is, the more educational, the more they get out of it. And that's why we're here - to foster that."

**Background:** Theater technical director and high school teacher

**Degree:** Bachelor's in performing arts, Emerson College

**Years at UCI:** 1

**Hobby:** Caring for two young granddaughters

Students who build pieces in the production studio can later sit in the audience with their friends and get excited to see their work on stage. It's a feeling Kingsbury still gets too. The Cabaret set for the fall 2023 production included three arches with angled curves that was unlike anything Kingsbury had ever built. But the finished product was "a piece of art," he says proudly.

Kingsbury grew up in a family that did theater set construction, so he learned to use tools from a young age. After working behind the scenes in LA theater and TV for six years, he spent nearly two decades overseeing theater productions for private high schools in the greater Philadelphia area and throughout California.

He joined UCI in January 2023, drawn to the opportunity to both teach and be part of a larger team of production professionals. At UCI, he's getting used to working on multiple shows at a time – installing one show that's about to open, budgeting for two upcoming productions, while starting creative conversations with the designer of a show that's even farther out on the calendar.

"I was just pulling out my old theater books trying to figure out how we're going to accomplish these ideas," he

says. "I love this phase, when there are no 'noes' because it's so early. We don't have to worry about budget or time yet. It's a clean slate, and that's the fun part."

Kingsbury's team includes a shop supervisor and a master carpenter, plus he brings in undergraduates through Drama 101, where he teaches them to use tools as they earn course credit. Returning students often have enough skill to build certain parts of a set.

"You can see in their eyes when that 'aha moment' hits, and then they get excited," Kingsbury says, "That's why I like working with students."



*Image: Bill Kingsbury works with Geronimo Guzman, shop foreman (left) and Alex XXX, student intern (lower right) on the installation of the New Swan Theater near Aldrich Park.*



# Christine Salama

## Scenic Charge Artist

Whether it's texturing and painting surfaces to resemble brick, or painting fiberboard to look like a marble bartop, chances are that Christine Salama had a hand in creating the illusion for the audience. As the Claire Trevor School of the Art's scenic charge artist, Salama is responsible for creating all the textured, sculpted and painted surfaces the scenic designer envisions – and budgeting to make them feasible. She can turn ordinary materials into almost anything.

Salama started taking studio art classes as a child, and was oil painting by the time she was nine. Her love for

**Background:** Studio artist, scenic charge artist  
**Degree:** Bachelor's in communication with a minor in studio art, UCSD; M.F.A. in studio art, Claremont Graduate University  
**Years at UCI:** 5  
**Hobby:** Cooking

art never waned, and she minored in studio art at UC San Diego before going on to earn an M.F.A. in studio art from Claremont Graduate University. While she continued to have group and solo exhibitions post-graduation, she also continued taking art classes to explore even more mediums and methods – mold making, clay modeling of the human figure, digital painting, garment

pattern making and construction, costume design, and stage craft. The combination of these experiences led her to theater, and she began working on scenic paint crews, participating in summer stocks and freelancing.

Salama worked at South Coast Repertory as a scenic painter for five years before coming to UCI. At CTSA, she works with scenic design students to help develop and implement their ideas. This includes budgeting for proposed designs, determining feasibility, and discussing with the designers how their choices affect other aspects of production such from props to costumes.

“A lot of what I do involves research and problem solving; thinking abstractly about how to solve problems while factoring in the whole concoction of

theater,” Salama says.

After the weeks of meetings, budgeting, problem solving, purchasing, sampling and, of course, painting the built set, comes the irreplaceable moment when a scenic design M.F.A. student’s eyes light up seeing their designs transformed from drawings on paper to full-scale sets, with the help of professionals like Salama.

“I think what makes me a better artist,” she says, “is always being able to discover a new way of making something.”

*Image: Christine Salama mixes paint supplies in the Leo Freedman Production Studio.*





## Joe Forehand

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### Lighting Supervisor

Lighting supervisor Joe Forehand was bitten by the theater bug in high school, when he volunteered to be a wardrobe assistant and “really ended up liking the vibe backstage.”

After minoring in technical theater, he worked as the technical director at the small liberal arts college in New York for over a decade. When he moved his family to California and became a salesperson for stage lighting company Cal Stage, he built connections across the industry, including at the Claire Trevor School of the Arts.

Forehand eventually joined the Claire Trevor School of the Arts production team as a carpenter building scenery, and during his 8 years in that role,

**Background:** Technical director, lighting designer, carpenter and sales  
**Degree:** Bachelor’s in English language & literature, technical theater minor, Manhattanville College  
**Years at UCI:** 16  
**Hobby:** Home improvement

he helped construct the celebrated theater-in-the-round that hosts the New Swan Shakespeare Festival each summer. But when CTSA’s lighting supervisor retired, Forehand happily jumped into that role.

“I love it all, but lighting is where I did my art,” he says. “This kind of

job, strangely, was my dream job after coming up through industry.”

Forehand appreciates getting to do what he loves every day without the exhausting travel schedule and long hours of the typical theater world.

As CTSA’s lighting supervisor, Forehand works with both graduate and undergraduate students. Faculty mentor the five M.F.A. students in lighting design, but Forehand works closely with them to procure the technology and equipment they need, and to help them adjust their plans to stay within budget.

“They’ll bring their ideas and I’ll see if we can either shape the resources we have to match their ideas or work with them on their ideas to match what’s available,” he says.

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“What might surprise other people is the amount of creativity that I need to put into my job.”

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For example, when a director wanted expensive fluorescent tubes hanging throughout the black box theater, Forehand procured aluminum conduits and lit them with various colors to create a similar effect - within the budget.

“What might surprise other people is the amount of creativity that I need to put into my job,” he says. “It may seem like I’m just making other people’s ideas happen, but it takes creativity to make that happen, especially when the budgets are small and the resources are limited.”

Working closely with the lighting supervisor gives the emerging lighting designers practical experience to draw on when they work professionally. Undergraduates work in lighting through the Drama 101 courses, either as a “hang crew” which puts the lights on the plots, “run crew” which runs the lighting during live performances, or “shop crew” which fills in as needed.

“It’s hard work, so some students get burned out on it and swear they’ll never get their hands dirty with lighting again,” says Forehand. “But others relish it.”

Forehand, of course, is in the latter group. He has fun spending time in the Lighting, Logistics and Maintenance Area, or LLAMA, where he works on projects such as retrofitting lamps that will be used by actors on stage as part of their set, or wiring dramatic chandeliers that fly in to set a scene.

“I like a creative environment where people like each other and want to work together,” he says. “And that’s what I have here.”





# Pamela Marsden

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## Props Supervisor

When you ask CTSA scenic assistant Pam Marsden for a teacup, she has a few follow-up questions. Does it have a saucer? Is it chipped? Is it actually a restaurant mug? Is it a to-go cup?

“There are a thousand questions that have to be answered, and every one of those choices will tell you something about the character who’s using it,” says Marsden. “Even if an audience member doesn’t realize it, they’re subliminally getting a message through these visual cues.”

Marsden came to theater later in life than many of her colleagues. While she worked as a flight attendant and then

**Background:** Flight attendant, travel agent, props assistant

**Degree:** Bachelor’s in drama, UCI

**Years at UCI:** 10+

**Hobby:** Gardening

as a travel agent, she enjoyed attending dance and theater performances with friends at South Coast Repertory. It was there that she saw Aunt Dan and Lemon in the late 1980s, and was utterly transported.

“That was the moment where I knew theater was the thing,” she recalls. “It was so powerful.”

When Marsden had the opportunity to go back to school, she naturally chose drama, where she volunteered behind

the scenes for Saddleback College's production of the Sound of Music, and looked around at the props, and knew instinctively that she could do that job – and do it well. She started assisting with props during summer stocks and civic light opera.

“The through-line is that I grew up building things, making things,” she explains. Marsden's dad was an engineer and did woodworking; her mom let her cook as soon as she could reach the countertop; her grandma taught her how to sew and do needlework as a child.

Marsden transferred to UCI with a Chancellor's Scholarship and finished her bachelor's in drama in 2007. Since she already had professional experience, she was hired to help with props even before she graduated, and worked off and on with the team for 5 years. When the prop supervisor left in 2013, Marsden stepped into the role.

“It still feels to me like a little miracle happened that I could do this, and it's been over 10 years now,” says Marsden. “It's been amazing.”

Marsden's day is full of meetings and conversations with other production team members, directors, and student scenic designers. A seemingly simple prop can interplay with everything from the light to the sound – such as a gramophone she recently procured for a show, which creaks when the table turns. When the inevitable challenges arise in the production process, or the team's well-laid plans go sideways, she likes to exclaim, “Plot twist!” and just keep going.

“I love all of it,” Marsden says. “I love the exploration. I love problem solving and the puzzle of it. I love helping students figure out how to manifest this world they're imagining.”



*Image: Pamela Marsden reviews some of the inventory in the Leo Freedman Production Studio prop shop.*



# Mike Ritchey

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## Sound Supervisor

Mike Ritchey doesn't mind if you don't notice his work. In fact, that's a sign he's doing a good job.

"If it's a great sounding show, the audience doesn't even think about it. They just enjoy the show," he says.

As sound supervisor, Ritchey's job goes well beyond ensuring the actors' microphones are functioning and the audio is balanced. He can help theatergoers believe they are listening in on a quiet conversation in a cozy living room, or that they are hearing performers sing in an expansive opera house.

Ritchey has been behind the scenes dealing with speakers, sound consoles

**Background:** Theater technical director and high school teacher  
**Degree:** Bachelor's in theater, UCLA

**Years at UCI:** 1

**Hobby:** Running a small production company

and wiring ever since high school. He majored in theater with an emphasis in sound design at UCLA, and then went on to work professionally for Laguna Playhouse and South Coast Repertory, as well as serving as the technical director at a high school. He came to UCI in 2022, drawn by the opportunity to work with team members he knew from the industry, and to help train the next generation.

“I knew this work would be fulfilling, especially working with students,” he says. “It’s rewarding to help them develop into their professional careers.”

Almost every day, Ritchey is working with the M.F.A. students in sound design on the technical aspects of their designs. After they figure out their conceptual plans for a production, he helps students acquire the right equipment, connect the various pieces, install it in the theater, and make sure everything has enough power to run smoothly – while balancing the needs of other parts of the production like lighting. Undergraduate drama students can also work in the shop to gain exposure to elements of sound design.

One of the benefits of working at a university is that the major theater

audio companies make their sound equipment available for educational purposes, and he often gets to see students try out the latest models – and provide feedback to the manufacturers. But the best part of the job, he says, are the people.

“It’s about the students, the faculty, the production staff,” he says. “This is a really nice place to work, and a happy environment to work in.”

*Image: Mike Ritchey mixes on the sound board in the Claire Trevor Theatre.*



# UCI Claire Trevor

## School of the Arts

University of California, Irvine  
Claire Trevor School of the Arts  
200 Mesa Arts Building  
Irvine, CA 92697-2775

## Purchase tickets

**Arts Box Office:** (949) 824-2787

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