

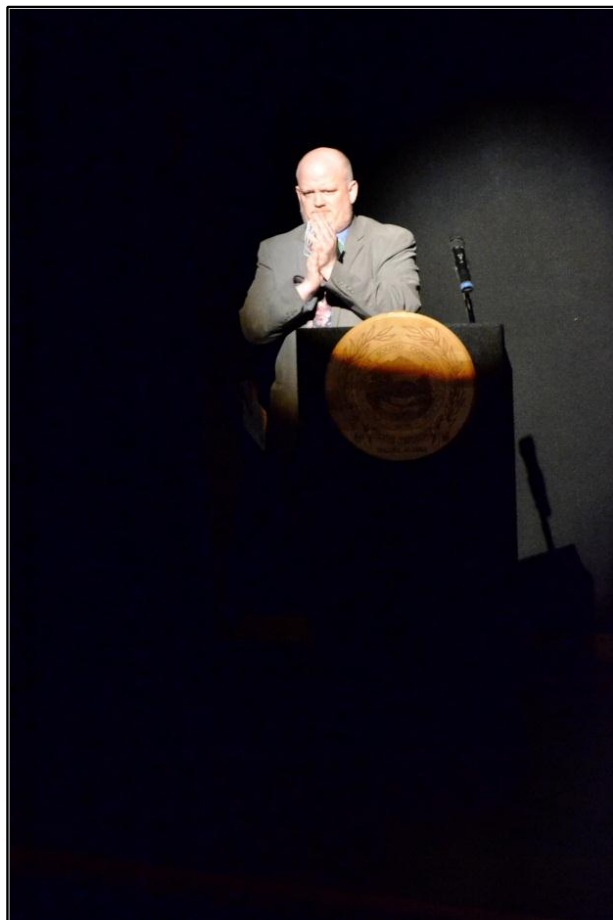
The Last Frontier Theatre Conference 2012 Evaluations Report



Frank Delaney in TBA Theatre's production of Eoin Carney's "The Rendering of Conor McShea," the closing Friday night performance.

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

Introduction



Each year, Conference participants have the opportunity to give their feedback on their experience in Valdez. For the first year, an online program, Survey Monkey, was used to amass these responses. An additional survey was created this year for the actors. The responses are all analyzed here, then used in the planning for subsequent years.

The first ten pages are a breakdown of participants' numerical rankings of various topics. Scores from the previous six years are included, as are initial reactions and plans for 2013. 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.

This is a long report, and my analysis probably contains most of what you are interested in. I would suggest reading that, and reading the quotes for areas you are more interested in.

Conference Coordinator Dawson Moore

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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.

	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2012</u>
Excellent	71%	66%	61.5%	45%	75%	58%	63.8%
Good	20%	24%	29%	39%	20%	28%	27.6%
Satisfactory	7%	8%	4.5%	12%	3%	6%	6.9%
Unsatisfactory	2%	0%	2%	2%	0%	4%	1.7%
N/A	0%	0%	3%	2%	2%	2%	0%

Numbers are slightly higher than last year, but not back to where we want them. There were a number of people who were more confused about the workings of the Play Lab than we had had in year's past, accounting for some of this.



Our Goal for improvement for the 2013 Conference

A more complete guide to the workings of the Play Lab will be created and distributed to invitees to make sure that people at least have full access to the knowledge before they come. It will not contain anything new, per se, but will put the whole process in one place. Otherwise, efforts will focus on not losing ground in areas where we are already doing a good job letting people know how things work.

Communication is a two-way street. There are multiple instances where respondents say they wish they knew some specific thing that was communicated to everyone and they missed it.

Australian playwright Jennifer Williams, from whom the information perceived prior to the Conference was sufficient to get her here from where she currently resides: Dublin, Ireland.

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, with two 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>	<u>2012</u>
Excellent	73%	67%	55%	59%	50%	50%
Good	23%	29%	38%	39%	46%	36.7%
Satisfactory	4%	3%	7%	1%	2%	13.3%
Unsatisfactory	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%
N/A	0%	1%	0%	0%	2%	0%

We tried out a new methodology of scheduling this year, having only two play readings at a given time, sometimes competing with classes. It wasn't a disaster, but possibly this accounts for the reduced rankings in this section. It's also subjective: one year's group of participants may experience the time crunch differently than another one.



Artists waiting to be let into the closing evening gala.

Our Goal for improvement for the 2013 Conference

The plan for now is to go back to the schedule that was in place from about 2000 to 2011. The goal is to have activities available from 8:00 a.m. to midnight; not that everyone is expected to go to everything, but we do not want people feeling like they didn't have options. We may add a half-day break in the schedule, or possibly another large group activity.

Conference Website

Aside from direct contact with the Coordinator, the website is 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>	<u>2012</u>
Excellent	52%	51.5%	52%	45%	46%	48.3%
Good	27%	22%	21%	35%	30%	41.7%
Satisfactory	4%	4.5%	10%	12%	11%	6.7%
Unsatisfactory	0%	0%	2%	0%	2%	0%
N/A	17%	22%	15%	8%	11%	3.3%

These numbers had a noticeable improvement essentially for the first time since we started asking for feedback on it. 90% good to excellent was 10% higher than it has ever been, and the number of people not using the website at all became negligible, a goal from last year. This is probably attributable to the new website location and design at www.theatreConference.org.

Our Goal for improvement for the 2013 Conference

There are no major improvements planned here.



The massive screen on display from the Thursday evening performance of past Alaska State Writer Laureate Anne Hanley’s “The Winter Bear.”

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>	<u>2012</u>
Excellent	71%	81%	76%	71%	77%	87%	74.6%
Good	26%	15%	20%	25%	23%	5%	20.3%
Satisfactory	3%	4%	2%	2%	0%	2%	1.7%
Unsatisfactory	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3.4%
N/A	0%	0%	2%	2%	0%	4%	0%

While the excellent rankings were down, 95% good to excellent is essentially the goal; a less effusive group is likely to think of them as the same. I personally considered it one of our finest years.



Anchorage actress Linda Benson with LA-based Laura Crowe acting in "Prairie Coteau," winner of the 2012 Susan Nims Distinguished Playwriting Award.

Our Goal for improvement for the 2013 Conference

Improvements planned but not implemented last year (increasing involvement in TBA Theatre's preparatory class in Anchorage; addressing the acoustic issues in Ballroom A & B) are on the docket again. We will also make a more exhaustive how-to guide for the Lab to give to participants. The schedule will also return to its previous format, which should alleviate most of the scheduling confusion participants site later in this report.

Panels and Classes

While the Play Lab is the primary educational component of the daytime programming, the Conference also offers classes and panel discussions. 2012 classes were scheduled opposite of Lab readings for the first time since the 1990s, which led to more intimate classes.

	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2012</u>
Excellent	55%	73%	58.5%	52%	62%	68%	59.3%
Good	17%	22%	29%	37%	17%	24%	30.5%
Satisfactory	13%	0%	4.5%	7%	7%	2%	6.8%
Unsatisfactory	0%	0%	1.5%	0%	1%	2%	0%
N/A	15%	5%	6.5%	4%	13%	4%	3.4%



Pianist Juliana Osinchuk with Acting for Singers participant Mary-Liz Murray.

Our Goal for improvement for the 2013 Conference

We will go back to the overall schedule we had in years past. The primary concern with this was that classes weren't long enough in this format, so we'll try to make a schedule which gives classes more time.

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 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>	<u>2012</u>
Excellent	55%	65%	56%	23%	61%	57%	18.4%
Good	39%	23%	30%	44%	34%	35%	38.3%
Satisfactory	6%	6%	12.5%	29%	5%	2%	25%
Unsatisfactory	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	2%	15%
N/A	0%	6%	1.5%	2%	0%	2%	3.3%

The scores in this area were fairly equivalent to those in 2009, or slightly lower, which leads to the belief that they were so much lower basically based on one substandard evening generally dragging down the scores, which was the case that year and is certainly one valid way to interpret this year's line-up. Over half the people still felt the evenings were good to excellent, but 15% saying they were unsatisfactory is, of course, not good enough, and must be improved. Local attendance was up, which was one of the goals from last year, and will remain a focus in 2013.

Our Goal for improvement for the 2013 Conference

A number of people commented that they missed the evening of Featured Artists reading from their own work, so that will return. TBA Theatre will again produce an evening of one-act plays. Cyrano's Theare Company will be bring a two-person production of Josh Logan's *Red*. There will also be another evening with the acting staff featured in a piece from the Play Lab.



Anchorage actor David Haynes' starred as Godzilla in Fairbanks playwrights Tom Moran's one-man play "The Big Guy."

Fringe Festival

The Fringe ran Sunday through Thursday at the Egan Street Pub under new coordinators Bostin Christopher and Janna Shaw, pictured below.

	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2012</u>
Excellent	35%	27%	38%	38%	28%	33.9%
Good	12%	28.5%	26%	29%	22%	25.4%
Satisfactory	8%	11%	6%	3%	13%	11.9%
Unsatisfactory	2%	5%	0%	3%	2%	3.4%
N/A	43%	28.5%	30%	27%	35%	25.4%

The Fringe had a solid year, with good attendance every night and a wide range of material. The only complaint I heard was from people who didn't get selected for inclusion, both writers and actors, and this has been discussed with both Bostin and Janna. It is tricky... you can't do every play that is submitted, and there are a limited number of roles. Not all plays SHOULD be included, and casting, especially when done on the fly like the Fringe has to do it, often comes down to past experiences with the performer. That said, they will endeavor to be more inclusive.



Our Goal for improvement for the 2013 Conference

Largely this will remain the purview of the coordinators. There are talks of involving more styles of performance (music or cabaret, for example), but in the end, as long as it provides a fun gathering place for artists after the evening show, it will be accomplishing its purpose.

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 suit the collaborative spirit of the Conference and the education we are endeavor 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>	<u>2012</u>
Excellent	62%	76%	81%	69%	77%	70%	67.2%
Good	33%	20%	17%	27%	23%	26%	26%
Satisfactory	5%	4%	2%	2%	0%	2%	5.1%
Unsatisfactory	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	1.7%
N/A	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%

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



Featured Artists Y York, Gary Garrison, and Guillermo Reyes respond to a play reading.

Our Goal for improvement for the 2013 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. The staff size will be decreased slightly, as this year it was clearly larger than was needed.

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>	<u>2012</u>
Excellent	94%	100%	98.5%	94%	100%	94%	93.4%
Good	6%	0%	1.5%	6%	0%	6%	3.3%
N/A	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3.3%

Staff rankings are always high, and this year is no exception. I have no idea who the people from whom the staff was 'non-applicable' were, or how they avoided having an opinion.



PWSCC staff member Kate Amerell helps playwright John Pennington get registered.

Our Goal for improvement for the 2013 Conference

We will endeavor to use a slightly smaller staff who works full-time, as opposed to a larger staff all working part time. Also, photography will be contracted next year, as opposed to having it done by a staff member.

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 question will either be modified or dropped from next year's response form; as currently constituted, it doesn't really provide much useful information.

Other sources listed include:

- A participant in Richard Caliban's playwrights workshop. She had gone to the Conference and raved about it.
- NYC Playwrights web site
- The Official Playwrights of Facebook.
- UAA Glee Club
- Dramatists Sourcebook
- The Playwrights Center's website.
- Dramatists Guild Resource Directory
- TBA Theatre
- en Evant listserve.
- UAA
- Googled Playwriting Submissions
- Individuals listed included Gary Garrison, Craig Pospisil, Beth Lincks, Dawson Moore, Timothy Daly, & Danielle Dresden.



Charlotte Campbell, Rod Mehrtens, Devin Frey, and Danielle Dresden in Three Wise Moose Theatre Company's production of Dawson Moore's "Living with the Savage."

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 playwriting or actor movement. 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. The Conference has left this in the hands of the participants in the past, but we may try to do something in 2013. One possibility is replacing the Wednesday evening show with the fish fry that has traditionally happened on the first Sunday. This would give people some down time from theatre events to socialize with each other, and would lead to the most of the participants being present for the annual group photos. It would involve some rearranging of the schedule, particularly the City of Valdez dinner, but is a possibility.

ADD NOTHING OR DON'T KNOW

- "I'd have to think re: this more."
- "It's wonderfully packed full."
- "Not particularly, new stuff is always interesting."
- "No new ones come to mind."
- "Can't think of any."
- "No, it's pretty well-rounded as is."
- "Excellent Format."
- 2 X "N/A"
- "N/A - Everything was perfect!"
- "There are plenty now."

ACTING CLASSES

- "Possibly more acting classes - acting Shakespeare, etc."
- "Perhaps more frequent classes for the monologue workshop."
- "SAG and AFTRA information session. Maybe a demonstration or class about the benefits and pitfalls of using accents onstage."
- "Maybe more acting/reading classes."
- "Tai Chi."
- "More acting classes."
- "In depth training for readers by skilled teachers."
- "Movement for the actor."

- “I am interested in more musical theater performances (scenes, cabaret and one evening production).”
- “Longer actor workshops not in conflict with labs.”
- "Always enjoy the actor labs. Some truly unique ideas are presented."
- “It would be nice to have an acting class available to readers in the lab - something that allows the participant to work on developing a character drawn from new material. It seemed to me that the readers in general could have benefitted from that. That, and/or a class that teaches the reader how to discover within the text the clues or hints the playwright has already given them. We are only as good as our material but often times actors don't understand the material they're given. And here you have playwrights at your disposal! I'm smelling win-win here!! Oh, and can I come back next year as a featured artist? Yes, that is another activity I would like to see added to future Conferences - me!!! I mean, as long as you're asking...”

WRITING CLASSES

- “More detail on solving playwriting problems along the lines of how often to use stage directions, trimming dialogue, etc.”
- "I'd like to see a workshop with a set designer. They have a completely different perspective that would be fun to hear.”
- “I'd like to do/see sight specific work - pieces written at the Conference and performed in specific locations, or pieces that are written at the Conference about the town of Valdez and are performed in the Fringe or at another time or venue.”
- “Screenwriting workshop.”
- “Maybe some kind of workshop where many playwrights can create together one piece, a monologue or something short, and then present it the last day of the Conference (perhaps this already exists, I don't know).”
- “I would have loved more opportunities to write! In the end I did as much as I could, but I would have enjoyed some real hands-on workshops”.
- “I'd like more workshops- and not at 8am!”

BUSINESS OF PLAYWRITING IN SPECIFIC

- “A workshop on the business of being a playwright would be cool.”
- “More help and information on submitting plays.”

DISCUSSION FORUMS

- “Perhaps "Discussion Groups" as well as the Panel Responses to new readings.”
- “I think it would be interesting to have some sort of group work that might break the participants down so they would have some time together early in the Conference to know each other -- and even time to politic your play. Maybe something like a free and open discussion on topics like Avant Garde theatre, and the Theater of Ideas, or Sharing Ideas for Self Production, or Starting a Readers Theatre, etc. I was lucky enough to have

a partner there, plus members of a list serve group, and it was good to have people you kinda know at the Conference that you can get to know better.”

- “It might have been nice to have an open forum discussion on some topics chosen by participants. While I think that the panels and panelists were really helpful, sometimes the best questions come from unprompted and off-topic subjects. So perhaps having the participants choose from a variety of topics and then having the panelists who want to participate in that topic.”
- “I'd like more of what Erma did, dividing us into small groups to work together.”
- “More panels!”

MORE ALASKA STUFF

- “I loved the reception in the museum and it would be wonderful to have a couple of other Alaska or Valdez specific things available as part of the Conference. I would have been willing to pay for a sea kayaking or glacier hiking trip with a group of Conference people if it had been available on the schedule. I love the theatre focus, but part of the wonder of the Conference is being in such a unique venue. Showcase it!”
- “I'd like to see one afternoon of non-theater related activity, maybe a mid-week outing of some kind. Just to take a break, do something else, socialize.”
- “A longer glacier cruise!”
- “More intro and social time to meet artists and playwrights.”
- “More activities outside in the glorious Alaska air.”
- “More of a cookout feel with games etc. Just expand the fish fry event.”
- “Group meals, required & mandatory (with real food).”
- “Critique sessions of the featured artists/directors by members of the casts they direct.”

MISCELLANEOUS

- “Keep the music.”
- “Any that continue to inspire great artistic creativity!”
- “Prize money.”
- “I would love to see another rehearsal or 2 added for the Play Lab.”

3. Which Featured Artist was most helpful to you in your time here?

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, 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.



The artistic staff listening to something obviously very brilliant at the wrap-up meeting.

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). Much of what is to be enjoyed in attending the Conference is not a specific part of it, but the overall experience.

Generally, the Play Lab remains the central part of the Conference experience for most people. Classes had fewer people cite them than in the past, but this was largely because they weren't as well attended because of the scheduling experiment.

GENERAL

- "Everything!"
- "I thought the overall Conference was wonderful - the play readings were great, the workshops very useful, the sense of community amazing. Truly a wonderful experience I will never forget. Hope to return. Made great new friends."
- "Great input re: playwriting, non-competitive atmosphere and the magic of it all"
- "I couldn't possibly be expected to choose just one thing. couldn't. possibly. do. that."
- "The tone set for it. Making friends and discovering talent all around."
- "Everything... The Play Lab concept blew my mind. Fringe was madness. Playwright interacting was also amazing. Rarely do we, as actors, ever see the playwright, much less get to share beers and swap stories. This is community building at its finest."
- "All the amazing work being presented."
- "Just the excitement about theater."
- "It re-inspired my love of theater and the arts."
- "All of it."
- "Non-stop performing."
- "The welcome feeling from Dawson from the moment of arrival."

THE PEOPLE

- "The people and being immersed in new plays!"
- "Sharing with wonderful people (including your staff) in a supportive and generative environment."
- "The people - the staff, the honored guests, the playwrights and actors - it was a great group of people, generally fun and interesting to be with."
- "The chance to talk to so many creative people."
- "The camaraderie with the theatrical community. The energy of everyone. Rooming together with such creative spirits!"

- "The chance to meet new people in the industry."
- "The camaraderie."
- "Meeting other fun, talented theater artists."
- "Networking with so many theatre folk."
- "Learning, meeting people and networking. "
- "Seeing all the great people/friends I have gotten to know over the years."
- "Talking to smart people."
- "The people. The place. It was galvanizing."
- "I LOVE seeing everyone and the jammed packed week!"
- "The dedication and talent of so many of the artists."

THE PLAY LAB

- "Play Lab and comments, interaction with playwrights and featured artists and learning about Alaska."
- "The camaraderie of theatre artists and the opportunity to make new friends/contacts."
- "There was a great variety of play readings and I particularly like the aspect of collaborating with so many people from different cities."
- "Listening to others plays."
- "When I got to read in the Lab."
- "Well, the Play Lab business which I have responded to in the other survey; but beyond that someone early mentioned if you see one of the Featured Artists you think would like your reading, invite them; and I did; and many came. Of course, I was the only show at the time, but still, I felt they were incredibly accessible. That does not happen without it being encouraged. And it was heartening."
- "Reading in a longer play."
- "The high quality of Play Lab mentor feedback."
- "Discussions on plays."
- "Play Lab and responses were invigorating."
- "The Play Lab readings I participated in as a reader and an audience member. They were stimulating, engaging, professional, and well run."
- "Attending readings and sharing with playwrights."
- "The feedback in the Play Lab."
- "Having my play read aloud and the feedback given, after the reading."
- "The new plays!"
- "The Play Lab. Reading and listening."
- 11 x "Play Lab"
- "I really enjoyed the responses from the panelists and the audience, not only for my play but for other plays too. I think it was a very healthy and helpful communion of thoughts, ideas and emotions."

- “... the true joy came from the Play Lab and being able to experience so much talent and new work and then getting to discuss that new work openly with the other participants.”
- “The Play Lab was a great experience for me, and I felt lots of the plays in it were very good. The Play Lab experience I thought was run well.”

CLASSES

- 2 x “The workshops.”
- “Y York's workshop was fantastic.”
- “Reading in the Lab.”
- “Ethics of Ethnic.”
- “I enjoyed the panel discussion on the ethics of ethnicity probably the most. That is besides my post reading discussion with Tim Daly.”
- “A lot of good classes.”

VALDEZ ITSELF



- “The location was stunning and the accommodations were far above my expectation, since they were free.”
- “The reception at the Valdez Museum.”
- “The weather.”
- “The mountains! The people of Valdez.”

SPECIFIC PROGRAMMING (FRINGE, TEN-MINUTE SLAM, MONOLOGUE WORKSHOP, ACTING FOR SINGERS)

- 2 x “The Fringe Festival.”
- “Having a one page submission read at the Fringe.”
- “Great job with new Fringe.”
- “I think I enjoyed the Fringe the most, as it gave us an opportunity to write during the Conference and was a great way to unwind after a long day.”
- “The Monologue Workshop and the Ten-Minute Play Slam.”
- “The monologue and singing workshop performances.”
- “Singers Workshop, Monologue Workshop, Play Lab.”
- “The Monologue Workshop, watching the singing workshop.”
- “Saturday morning/early afternoon activities.”
- “The Ten-Minute Play Slam.”
- “Monologue workshop was stronger than ever to watch - the Play Lab and singers workshops should take a note from the monologue workshop - just fantastic to watch and well paced.”
- “Nancy Caudill singing after hours.”

EVENING PERFORMANCES

- “Some evening performances.”
- “The Winter Bear was great.”
- “The evening performances.”
- “The performance by Michael Graves (Twain), WINTER BEAR.”
- “The Rendering of Connor McShea.”
- “The ceaseless opportunities to work on anything theatrical for the entire week.”



UAA Glee Club performance at the closing night gala.

5. What did you enjoy least?

The most important thing I learned from this section was that the new schedule hadn't worked as well for participants as well as I thought, and we will be going back to the previous methodology. It wasn't a disaster, but there were many more concerns about this than usual.

People complain about the food every year, and I'm a bit at a loss about what to do in that area. My first instinct is to stop providing free lunch, and extend the lunch period to an hour-and-a-half. The Civic Center provided an equivalent lunch to the one we did, so that people who wanted to eat cheap and weren't worried about making healthy choices could still do that. It is hard to lose 45 minutes off of every day's schedule, though, and there's some worry about diffusing the participants in the middle of the day. Also, this will create a whole new economic stress on the participants: we would go from providing a free lunch to having people dining out around Valdez, which runs an absolute minimum of ten dollars/day.

The other items listed mostly seem negligible, specific responses to individual experiences, not systemic problems that need addressing.

FOOD

- "The lunches."
- "The lunches were pretty bad."
- "The food."
- "The food aspect - the food was generally not good and apparently designed for 18-year-olds with no heart disease concerns. Everything is meat, cheese, bread and lettuce. Never enough non-meat options. The one night with good food, the fish fry, was over before it began."
- "Well, there is the food. I'm not complaining because the Conference is perhaps the most generous of any around. And food costs an arm and a leg up there. But it wasn't what I wrote home about. If it was possible, I would do fish soup or fish chowder, salad and rolls with peanut butter and jelly sandwich option, and I would do something like that every day and if someone wanted something else, so be it. If you needed to, I suggest increasing the fee \$50 or \$100 to cover the cost."
- "The Conference was well-planned, well executed, but the food (vegetarian selection) did not offer any variety."
- "The food ie: lunch."
- "Probably the food, even though it was free."
- "The food. I would have been happy with a soup and salad every day."
- "The corndogs."
- "Noon meals are not very appetizing..."

- "Restaurants/food in Valdez"
- "The fish fry."
- "The lunches kinda sucked."
- "Lack of champagne at the reception."
- "While it is hard to complain about free food, the lunches were a little strange and did not seem very healthy choices."
- "Can't complain too much about lunches since they were free, but also very small."

EVENING SHOWS

- "Missing a main stage performance. Next year, I will see them all."
- "The evening performances were surprisingly mediocre - averaged probably no better than the Play Lab readings (in terms of final quality/readiness for audience)."
- "I felt that while the performances each had strengths for the most part they don't seem to represent the kind of work that's being presented and encouraged at the Lab. It feels like there is a disconnect between the evening shows and the rest of the Conference. This is a general statement and is by no means true of every show."
- "Some of the evening performances were disappointing - especially as scripts. Just not as strong of scripts as I saw at the readings themselves."
- "I felt like some of the evening performances were lacking this year."
- "Nite shows."
- "I didn't think the plays were the caliber they have been other years."
- "The evening performances. I felt so stimulated professionally and artistically during the day and was excited at the prospect of continuing that during the evening as an audience member and was disappointed with nearly every event I attended. I'm not sure how the works are solicited, but it may be interesting to try to take some of the more advanced play-lab entries and offer them a more extensive rehearsal process for a script-in-hand staging type of event with a talk back session afterward."
- "The fact that the evening performances were so often sparsely attended."
- "I thought the evening performances were generally disappointing."
- "Some of the evening performances [2 specific evenings cited]."
- "Three of the four evening shows I saw were not very good. The scripts seemed decent but the performances were lacking for me."
- 2 x "Some of the evening performances."
- "The performances were lackluster at best. Why not do an evening staged reading of the ten minutes instead or one of the full-lengths?"
- "Regrettably, [specific production] was not engaging, not up to the usual quality of our evening programs at the Conference."

- "The quality of some of the evening productions was very poor and reflects poorly on LFTC. Suggest a panel of professional theatre artists work with Dawson to search out and vet possible evening shows. If at all possible, view candidate productions in advance or at least view video clips."
- "I really missed the Writers' Night evening performance a lot. It has always been my favorite main stage event and I really, REALLY want it to come back next year. Really. Please?"
- "Not all of the evening performances were fabulous..."

COSTS

- "Issues re: cost, travel, accommodations."
- "The air fare."

UNDER-UTILIZATION

- "I was in a sense recruited as a reader/actor, and would have loved to have done so, but didn't get the chance. The Fringe was OK, but seemingly organized in an "insider" way - for example, how did one get to read in it? More attention maybe should be given to this, since it drew far greater audiences than any PlayLab."
- "Mind bending boredom- not enough reading."

SCHEDULING

- "Scheduling of Play Lab and workshops at the same time. Maybe if Conference was extended another day to accommodate the schedule, this could be worked out."
- "The schedule for the rehearsals was different than that of the reading which confused me. I'm easily confused :/. But I did come very late to a rehearsal thinking it wasn't time yet."
- "The schedule I guess. It was just hard to see and/or take part in everything I wanted to, which I suppose is a good problem."
- "The only other thing that was a little unenjoyable was my inability to be in multiple places at once, as often workshops and Play Labs that I wanted to participate in would occur simultaneously. I would not recommend changing that however, since doing so allowed so much great work to be presented."
- "Conflicting time blocks."
- "Being really tired some of the time, especially since I went to most the fringes- I was exhausted."
- "I hated that I wasn't able to do more things and that I often had clashes in schedule!"
- "Having to choose between the monologue class and seeing some readings."
- "Couldn't see everything -- All the workshops were at the same time as Play Labs."
- "That I had to make tough choices..."

- “Having to choose between seeing a Play Lab or doing a workshop. Unavoidable but still regrettable.”
- “Um... to say that I was too busy to be able to partake in all the panels & readings would be taking for granted that I was too busy because I was rehearsing and performing with amazing artists. But yeah, I really wish I hadn't been so busy so that I could have partook in more panels & readings.”
- “Workshops and book signings were scheduled at the same time as readings and rehearsals, but I suppose there's just not enough time in the day.”
- “I hated missing some of the Play Labs. Not sure that their anything to be done for it but I still felt bad about missing them.”
- “Being exhausted by Tuesday.”
- “The tight schedule prevents us from seeing more Play Lab readings. May be unavoidable.”
- “That I was unable to see all the reading I wanted to.”

FRINGE

- “Fringe, though I barely went.”
- “I thought most of the Fringe was overkill and amateur hour with a lot of actors mugging. Most of the material seemed like sketches, not plays. Didn't need it every night, would have preferred alternating nights with more curated material.”
- “...Bostin did a great job with the Fringe, but the work was a little juvenile. Not his fault.”
- “The content of some of the fringe plays was over the top raw. Perhaps there could be some guidance on rising above repetitive "fucks" and sexual absurdity as the focus. However Bostin and Janna did a superb job coordinating the fringe. It flowed well and was packed to hold attention. They were excellent.”

HOUSING

- “9 women sharing one bathroom? holy hell.. i'm amazed we didn't kill one another.”
- “Not having a key to my dorm.”
- “The cot I got was a little noisy, so I had to be careful when sleeping so as not to disturb my roommates.”
- “Sleeping on a couch in a dorm room with 6 stinky playwrights. Seriously, they're like teenage boys. I'm not the cleanest of people but that bathroom was filthy. And they had no bathroom courtesy whatsoever. I'm writing a monologue about this.”

MISCELLANEOUS

- “Liked it all. Missed Doug.”
- “I was annoyed with one of the moderators, who decided my question about a play was not worth entertaining.”
- “How little I knew of it prior to arrival.”

- “Gala.”
- “No seating in the foyer.”
- “Perhaps there could have been more organized social time for the attendees to mingle. While the Fringe was fun at times, I would have preferred that it be held every other night, rather than Sunday–Thursday, so that receptions could be held on the off nights. For example, the reception at the Valdez Museum was great fun, but it was cut short by the Fringe.”
- "The whole ‘seat of the pants’ mentality/mindset.”
- “Nothing.”
- “I also think being limited to 2 hours of rehearsal for my play did it no favors during the reading.”



Mike Daniels, Morgan Mitchell, Annie McCain Engman, and Joshua Schmidtlein read in the Fringe Festival.

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

Communication is a two-way street, and there are numerous occasions here where people say they didn't know something that was made readily available AND was sent to the participants. We will try to adjust our language so that people understand they are coming to a small community at the end of the road in Alaska (where most things are already more expensive than elsewhere).

Our language about housing was modified this year, with mixed results. I will consult with the housing manager about getting a few more essentials into the rooms (like hangers), and to make sure that what I am telling participants about housing matches with what is being provided.

EVERYTHING WAS FINE

- “Nothing really, seemed like we got plenty of info, I appreciated getting a pdf of the program in advance so I had an idea of the schedule and could peruse the synopses to see which plays I wanted to see read and which workshops I wanted to attend.”
- “I can't think of anything. The information I got was great and the staff was really professional and helpful.”
- “I felt pretty informed.”
- “It was all there, I just didn't read it all.”
- 4 x “N/A”
- “Nothing, I was prepared for the week.”
- “I got everything I needed. I just didn't read it all until after I was there.”
- “None that I can think of.”
- “Nothing. Everything is well explained beforehand.”
- “I felt prepared with the information I was given.”
- “I was pretty well informed.”
- “I was well-informed ahead of time.”
- “Nothing in particular.”
- “Can't think of a thing.”
- “? I feel like I had a really good impression of what I was in for.”
- “Information was thorough.”
- “I believe I received everything I needed.”
- “Felt it was adequate.”
- 3 x “None.”

COST/HOUSING

- “I was unprepared for the cost of Valdez. Restaurant prices and food products were significantly higher than I expected and I had not budgeted properly for the trip.”
- “The costs and difficulties of getting there - What the situation was in the dorms - The trade-offs - It would be great if the actual situation could be improved, and made clearly manifest. I didn't consider the dorms myself, because I thought it was sleeping on the floor with strangers, and I wouldn't sleep. Then it turned out some people guaranteed themselves a room by paying a small fee? Not offered to us? You had to talk to the right people? The whole thing re: cost, transport to Valdez, food, accommodations is a very confusing.”
- “I wish I had more information about where I would be staying--specifically the dorms and how that all works. The sheet given at check-in could've been given upon registration. Also, it would be good to know if you will be getting a room that locks or will be camping in the living room, just to be prepared (and to warn someone since it is not as secure as a locked interior door).”
- “That I should have packed more staples: protein bars, nuts, dried goods. Also hangers. And pots & pans? Forks & knives? Yeah... the kitchen at the dorm was a bummer.”
- “The expense of food in Valdez seemed to be quite the sticker shock for new participants.”
- “I didn't find out about housing sign up until the week before the festival - I checked all the emails I received and didn't see any reference to housing sign up until I asked about it.”
- “The Valdez layout of grocery stores and food places to eat or buy to cook.”
- “I wish I had brought more kitchen utensils for dorm use. I don't know whether that was mentioned or not, but I've now put it on my list.”
- “Honestly, how expensive food is in Valdez haha. I'm gluten free not by choice and I figured even if all the free food was full of gluten I'd just go to the grocery store and get stuff to eat there. I didn't realize Valdez thought it was Midtown Manhattan price wise haha.”

FRINGE FESTIVAL

- “Looking back, of course, I now think I know it all, so I can't remember what I didn't know. I would suggest that people go to the Facebook page. I wish the Fringe piece was clearer. I missed the night my piece would have been read because Bostin didn't know me so he couldn't tell me, even though he was at my table at lunch. So, check the board because the line up there is how it works, etc.”
- “I was a little unclear about the Fringe. Wasn't sure whether the work was supposed to be new work or work which had already been done or already written, but never read.”

MONOLOGUE WORKSHOP/TEN-MINUTE PLAY SLAM/ACTING FOR SINGERS

- “Certainly, the type of monologues sought. (Basically, audition monologues)”
- “I wish I had known the monologues were going to receive so much time and attention. I would have submitted one or two!”
- “There was a miscommunication about some sheet music.”
- “What workshops were available and how to participate in them, how to get in touch with the playwrights, and a full schedule of the week.”
- “I wish I had known about the ten minute play and monologue workshop a bit earlier. I misunderstood what was required so didn't participate.”

PLAY LAB

- “I wish the scripts had been mailed to us this year. I understand cost is an issue- but that would have been nice.”
- “Who will be directing the readings I'm in. I might want to speak with directors in advance.”

MISCELLANEOUS

- "How isolated Valdez is.”
- “Easier to follow overall schedule.”
- “I wish I'd had a clearer understanding of how the Conference would run.”
- “More than anything, info on the daily workshops.”
- “Don't remember seeing info about getting around with shuttles.”
- “I wish that I had thought a little harder about what I wanted out of my reading, so that I could have been a little bit more direct in my meeting with my lead panelist and also in giving the audience to respond directly too.”
- “It's really really cold and wet- not like in "lower 48.”
- “The reader and playwright bios a little earlier!”
- “Marshall's work.”



Missy Williams and Lindsay Lamar in Arlitia Jones' "Shoe Story."

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

Generally, there were few complaints on the site. The most important goal is to keep it current. There is one comment looking for more active content, but there are no plans to head that direction at this time.

NO COMPLAINTS

- “Great. Very informative.”
- “I don't really like websites, but there certainly was lots of stuff there, don't see anything to criticize.”
- “Fine.”
- 2 x “No.”
- “Great! It would be great to have a contact list after the Conference.”
- “I found the web site functional.”
- “N/A”
- “Didn't spend much time with it so no suggestions.”
- “Works for me!”
- “Not really. It was wonderful that Dawson always said 'feel free to ask ANY question!'”
- “The Conference website was actually very useful and easy to navigate.”
- “Helpful the couple of times I consulted it.”
- “Does what it needs to do.”
- “I like the website. Perhaps you can upload more videos of past Conferences.”
- “Even this computer dummy could do it.”
- “I did not look at the Conference website. Next year I will be all over that figuring out what I want to do and what I can fit into my schedule.”
- “Already excellent!”
- “Loved it.”
- “No problems.”
- “Seemed kinda barebones. I honestly didn't consult it much at all. I looked at the material that was mailed to me and the pdf of the program.”
- “The Conference website is adequate, not exceptional. It would be great to have the list of featured artists and actors that will be attending prior to when the brochure is made available.”
- “Good...maybe photos of the activities and the gorgeous surroundings. Video clips?”
- “I think it was good and helpful.”
- “It's easy to navigate.”

- "I didn't visit the website."
- "Fine."
- "Excellent website!"
- "Not really it was fine."
- "Great. No."
- 4 x "Fine."
- "Easy to manage, loads quick - All in all I could find everything I needed about the Conference."
- "I liked how it could be navigated easily."
- "Great."
- "Great, I found all the information I needed there, including a lift from Anchorage to Valdez."
- "Good - none at the moment."
- "It was definitely useful in planning my week. No improvements are needed in my book."
- "Nope."
- 2 x "Excellent."
- "It was fine."
- "I didn't use it much, but what I saw looked great."
- "I love the website. I always think they can be more interactive but that can be as easy as including a blog with comments."
- "Good website."

SOME SUGGESTIONS

- "Just some more local resources posted on shopping and things to do."
- "I would have an addition to the website: a central page that provides the same information as the Conference center does but even more up to date and to the minute. On the first day there was a scheduling conflict and although it was a minor confusion, had there been a digital 'green room', actors could check out all this info via their cellphones. And most have iPhones so, you know... a central page with a calendar that sends out alerts via email or text? Peeps won't miss a thang."
- "I couldn't find a place on the website to see if anyone needed a ride to the Conference."
- "The Conference was so exciting, but was not reflected in the Conference poster."
- "Perhaps regularly scheduled shuttles with a posting of times for pick-ups at different locations."

8. Additional comments.

Mostly people use this section to say 'thank you' in one form or another. The suggestions at the bottom are mostly not practical or redundant to programs already in place.

PURELY POSITIVE

- "Excellent time and good work overall. Thank you."
- "Dawson is awesome. The way he attached to every tiny or large request was almost unbelievable. 5 stars! Thank you!"
- "Loved every moment of it!"
- "I want to thank Dawson and his crew! THANK YOU!"
- "Great Conference!"
- "This was such a well-organized well thought out Conference. Great people all around. Dawson responded immediately to every ridiculous question I had prior to the Conference."
- "I want to return :)"
- "I would LOVE to see a workshop with Marshall Mason on how he would work with a playwright on their new play (with or without the actors). Also something on getting produced or self-producing."
- "love love love it"
- "Thank you!"
- "Thank you so much, to everyone who made this year a wonderful learning experience."
- "Thank you to Dawson and everyone who works so hard to make such an amazing week!"
- "Thank you so much for the administration of such a great Conference!"
- "It was a great confrence- i had a great time- good plays, good readings, learned a lot, very relaxing and everything went well- one of the best yet- thank you!"
- "Great Conference!!!"
- "I am grateful that I was able to go, and that I was able to go with my spouse who also was in the Play Lab. Not only was it good for each of us personally, but we do much theater work and play development in our little community, so there is the ripple effect. My best to the whole crew. I don't know how you do it, and I am amazed it is done so well."
- "Truly amazing! Wonderful people, gorgeous location, fun activities, couldn't ask for more!!"
- "Thank you for featuring TAKE CARE. I am blessed to have been present for this 20th Anniversary Conference."
- "You and the staff never cease to amaze me. You never seem shook."

- “Wow. I was blown away. If you don't take [the] suggestion of hiring central casting out of LA or NYC then I will be back next year.”
- “I really enjoyed the Conference as a whole, I hope to see it continue to grow and change!”
- “I prize the environment that has been created and sustained for the encouragement of playwrights (and actors). It's such a human and humane experience. Encourages a person to jump in and try new things (like new arenas: writing, acting, directing).”
- “I had an amazing week and am so grateful for the opportunity.”
- “Despite my criticisms above, I had an amazing time. It was really an unforgettable experience and I am so grateful that my play was selected and that I attended. I feel part of the LFTC community and hope I can return every year.”
- “It was a good Conference and definitely worth the trip. All of the staff and people coordinating were exceptional and always willing to help and very friendly. Makes for a very welcoming atmosphere. Also, the respondents were all quite incisive and supportive, as well. Keep up the good work!”
- “Atta boy, Dawson.”
- “I had a truly fantastic time at the Conference this year. Thank you for the opportunity to come to Alaska and meet and engage with some wonderful theater artists!”
- “Well done Conference staff! You made it look effortless.”
- “Way to go Dawson & Jay!!!”
- “Nope.”
- “Thanks, Valdez! Thanks, Dawson!”
- “Thanks, Dawson”
- “Thank you. It's an inspiring time and place - I hope it will continue for years to come.”
- “Some touristy events and info might make the Conference more attractive to out-of-towners.”

SOME LAST SUGGESTIONS

- “A 'green room' wouldn't be a bad idea in general. A local hangout spot that isn't the reading spaces. Like... couldn't the lunch room ALSO be the green room? A place for people to congregate? We want a place to hang with each other that isn't the dorm or the bar, if you feel me.”
- “I enjoyed the Gala - though I wish there had been more of a nod to the 20th year - even a slideshow or something to show how things have progressed, celebrate the longevity, etc. But it's nice to have a final evening celebration as a kind of punctuation mark to the Conference. I've been to events where things just fizzle out at the end - it was nice for those goodbyes and thank yous to be acknowledged.”

- “Please acknowledge the plays chosen in the pool for Susan Nims award so more people can see the plays that the panel of judges thought worthy of the award.”
- “After 20 years, find your soul: Native Alaskan, "up and comers", or "established" artists. And assign better actors to the non-marquee stuff. And, don't pretend there are 'marquee' and 'non-marquee' stuff. Xoxox”
- “Some of the best readers were unused.”
- “Excellent Conference, although the quality of readings and evening performances was down a bit from prior years.” “Ask playwrights to submit scripts with ONLY stage directions that will be read in the Play Lab. It's a huge waste of time to spend limited rehearsal deciding which stage directions will be read and which will be deleted. Use more directors to direct readings. Playwrights should be thoroughly familiar with "Marshall's Manual" and be strongly urged to attend the HOW TO DIRECT A READING OF YOUR OWN PLAY.”
- “I think it is fantastic that you allow playwrights to read copies of scripts that they may have missed in the Play Lab. In fact, I feel it is important for us as writers in this situation to have as much visibility as possible. I would suggest for upcoming Conferences, a script request form, making those request a little more formal. While I do not have an issue with my scripts being handed out, as a writer, I would be interested in knowing who had them.”



PWSCC Interim President Wes Lundburg addresses the City of Valdez.

Responses from Participating Playwrights in the 2012 Play Lab

PLAY LAB PLAYWRIGHT RESPONSES

1. 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?

While the information was available, there will be an emphasis next year on making sure that participants have a full understanding of the process before they arrive in Valdez. As becomes clear throughout this section, a number of writers positive experience was limited by not feeling like they completely understood what was going on. In the one generally unsuccessful year of the Conference (2002), the primary issue expressed by participants was that they weren't honestly told what they were getting. We were not at that level this year, but we wouldn't want to be any closer than we were this year. A couple of specifics:

- *The Conference saved around \$600-800 by not mailing hard copies of the plays in advance, so we will not be going back to that system.*
- *Housing was under new direction this year, which probably explains some of the disconnect two people complain about.*

IT WAS ALL GREAT

- "The information was really useful. I don't think I can think of anything else to add to it."
- "As in the past, the Conference is so well set up that there can be little confusion and if there is, it is quickly and clearly answered."
- "I thought it was fairly complete and useful. No surprises when I arrived."
- "Extremely useful! The time of rehearsal and reading was all I needed, I just had to show up!"
- "I think it was good. I was lucky, or someone there was working hard, or the god of theater was on my side, but the casting was great and I think my feedback came in a form and style that will work for me very well. Timothy Mason fit more into my process than I thought was possible and came at my play in a refreshing way. Craig Pospisil had good insights and confirmed what I had hoped good audience might see in the play. And Jean Bruce Scott was fine and supportive."
- "Extremely useful."

- “The information was sufficient. I don't think there was anything lacking.”
- “Everything was very helpful.”
- “The information available beforehand was very useful and included practically everything I would have thought of regarding the Conference. Anything questions (mostly info specifically related to my reading, so it should not have been general info) I did have, were promptly responded to. I also greatly appreciated the constant communication and reminders from the Conference, particularly from Dawson Moore personally, that helped keep me on track of what needed to be completed.”
- “It was fairly helpful.”
- “I liked it all. I purposefully didn't read bios and was glad I didn't as I would have been intimidated.”
- “It was all very clear and informative.”
- “I felt like I had a really good idea of what to expect going in. Everything was explained online and in the packet.”
- “Nothing can totally prepare you for a trip to Alaska, but it was certainly as informative as possible. Other than really stressing how cold and wet it can be.”

FACILITIES CONCERNS

- “First question - I thought it was very helpful, a-ok. Second - I found issues re getting to Valdez, and accommodations, problematic. The costs and time involved are somewhat unbelievable, and the info re the dormitories, for examples, I felt was contradictory and not fully accurate, people got different options. So the logistics was the area where I felt the info flow - and hopefully the economic situation - could be improved.”
- “The only thing I didn't get enough info on was the housing situation. I didn't know I had to sign up for housing until the week before. Everything else was very informative.”

PROCESS CONCERNS

- “The information was very useful - the only bit of information that would be helpful is to instruct playwrights to pick up extra copies of their scripts before the rehearsal to give to actors if they made rewrites. This responsibility should probably fall on the playwright.”
- “I wish that the information would have been a little more explicit in terms of how the process would work.”
- “I'm not sure if I simply overlooked the fact that there would be a panel and a lead panelist or if this was not included. I knew I would have a rehearsal, but it wasn't until it appeared on the schedule that I realized how short it would be. For some reason, I thought I would be doing re-writes after my reading, but that wasn't the nature of the Conference, so next year, if I return, I would like to also participate as an actor in other people's plays.”

- “The information was great. I don't think I was told that I'd have three respondents and one point person, so perhaps that could be more clear.”
- “It was very useful. A reminder that things can change at the last minute, i.e. actors, who's on the panel, etc. (which was fine, but good to get a heads-up.)”
- “Okay, but I didn't think I was going to be a director. I specifically indicated that I didn't want to be a director but I turned out being one.”
- “I can't think of anything else. The only thing that may have been useful was something to help me consider what I wanted out of my reading before I attended the Conference. I feel that if I had a clear goal for what I wanted to achieve out of the reading, that would have been useful in asking for feedback from the audience, panel and lead panelist.”
- “The info was fine. I wish it was still available in advance as a mailed hard copy, though.”

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

I'm sorry one writer didn't feel like it helped, but generally this section speaks to the strength of the program. Responses get a little more into detail later when specifically asked for suggestions.

PRETTY MUCH EVERYONE SAID...

- “Absolutely. It revitalized my faith in a play I otherwise thought was destined for the drawer, and clued me in to some greater overarching themes in my work in general. I feel like I learned a lot not only about this play, but about all my plays. And most of all, the incredibly engaged discussion (which bled out far past our allotted time) was just about as encouraging and inspiring as it gets. Really, I've never felt like such a rock star, or a playwright, ever before.”
- “Yes, I thought so.”
- “Absolutely -- it not only will help me with further rewrites for the script in the Play Lab, but it also gave me insight on writing the next play. Also, as a writer coming from New York City, it is helpful to step out of such the cutthroat industry that is NYC and receive a little kindness, encouragement and insight rather than the constant onslaught of criticism and rejection.”
- “Yes, absolutely. I loved it.”
- “Yes, I got a great response.”
- “Yes. It was helpful to have the play read with actors who were not familiar with my work and with a new audience.”

- “Yes. Very. Just being selected was an affirmation, which we all need as creative artist. And feedback, far from home so to speak, is so important.”
- “Absolutely. The entire experience, including the entirety of the Play Labs, provided new insight into myself and my writing. The openness of the Conference allowed for the ability to continue discussions with playwrights after the readings, making every conversation an educational dialogue that will aid my further development as a playwright.”
- “Yes, very much. I learned a lot. More than I had expected to.”
- “Yes! I was blessed to have a really wonderful panel and the perfect cast. I was able to take some great feedback to make the play a better play. Seeing what needed work wouldn't have been possible for me without this opportunity.”
- “Yes, it definitely was. I had had only one reading of my play prior to this and it was mostly a "civilian" audience, so there responses were not terribly helpful to the further development of the play. The responses I got at the lab were very specific and quite practical.”
- “Absolutely. I felt like hearing the play with an audience and the feedback I got from my panel has helped me decide how best to approach my rewrites.”
- “Yes, very much so. The only bummer was that things were running late, so the audience discussion portion only lasted about 5 minutes, which was disappointing.”
- “It was. I loved the chance to see my work.”
- 3 x “Yes.”
- “Absolutely. I don't necessarily think the actual reading was. Hearing an unrehearsed actor read my play didn't do a whole lot for me but the panelists' responses were extremely helpful.”
- “Yes, absolutely.”
- “Absolutely! I got great feedback and extra feedback from my main respondent.”
- “The proof is in the pudding and the pudding is if the play evolves and evolves successfully. This play is fragile. It would be destroyed if it was rewritten too much (I know my process) but I feel I know where I need to go to do a bit of critical surgery. And further I think it has begged for a companion piece. I think I know what that might be now.”
- “Yes, most definitely.”
- “YES. Even watching other plays and listening to feedback is always helpful, and then sharing information with other playwrights and networking.”
- “Oh Yes.”

EXCEPT FOR THIS ONE WRITER...

- “No.”

3. Were the responses from your panel helpful to you?

There is always a balancing act between being positive and giving feedback, and if we have to teeter over to one side over the other, I would chose being positive every time. The reason I sway this way is that the writers can't help but learn from the process (rehearsing and seeing their play). Most authors also have multiple post-reading discussions with their peers.

ABSOLUTELY

- “Yes, they were. I received a very valuable feedback. Responses were given with honesty and generosity.”
- “Yes. Some great observations, some wonderful mentoring and support for my ideas and in the end some solid criticism to help me improve the play.”
- “Yes, I think they were very much.”
- “Yes, I received a sense of wonder from them which was unexpected, but very gratifying.”
- “Yes. Their responses were the best thing i got out of the Conference.”
- “Yes, they were useful.”
- 4 x “Yes.”
- “Yes. They were thorough, detailed and insightful. They were never harsh or indulgent.”
- “Yes! Gave me a great direction to go in!”
- “Yes, very much so.”
- “As in #1 above, yes. It is so important for me that I don't get responses or suggestions face to face because I am a huge protector of my process and my work. It is outside the box and the wrong approach to it (Whose play is this? sort of questions) will get me to set those defenses pretty strong. These guys, and particularly Timothy, and also Craig, were able to place themselves inside my ring, and won me over.”

MIXED

- “Some were more helpful than others. A couple of comments were unclear to me, but I was never able to catch up with the person for clarification.”
- “If I were to do this again, I believe I would strive to be accepted with a play that is a little less developed than the piece that was accepted at the Play Lab this year. Because the play had been developed to a point where I knew how the structure would play to a general audience, most of their comments, which involved their perceived problems with my structure were not that useful. The audience feedback, which dealt more with the play's plot and characters, was much more useful, as it allowed me to see how my changes to the script in this draft were working.”

- “Depends: one of the panelists rewrote the play for what she/he does/expects, the other panelists took the play for what it is...so; if I want to attach my wagon to the "famous" panelist, then I'll make the changes she/he suggested - if I want to make the play better as it stands, then I'll listen to the others.”
- “Yes, when I separated the wheat from the chaff.”
- “In some ways yes, but in some ways no. My play was definitely geared towards a younger audience (30-40 and younger) and the panelists were all approaching 60 or 70 years old. So much of the point of the play was lost on them. However, I did get great feedback on the structure of the play and how it landed in the audience. My point person had some great insight and some good questions that helped me figure out what I need to clarify and my next writing steps.”
- “Mostly, though I felt it was difficult to draw out real criticism from the panel, and noticed this in other readings as well. Everyone was very positive, which was great, but with some panelists I felt it bordered on unhelpful positivity.”
- “Mostly yes.”
- “Mostly. There were some very clear and specific suggestions. However, I noticed a little more vagueness in [some other] play responders, not just for me, but in other sessions as well.”
- “To be honest, the responses from my panelists were not super helpful. It was great to hear their encouragement (particularly since I often don't find general criticism terribly helpful to my process), although I felt myself more than a little frustrated by my panelists' strict adherence to the rules of naturalism. As a non-naturalistic writer, it was hard to find much that was super helpful or insightful, given that each panelist had to begin with something to the effect of "granted, this is not at all the type of play that I write or usually deal with." Still, their notes helped guide me to some larger issues, and proved helpful as seeds for my own further investigation.”
- “Generally yes. They weren't incredibly insightful, but they confirmed what I felt were the problems with my work.”
- “Not so much from the panel, but other playwrights. Just depends on the mix of panelists -- some are better than others. After you attend other Play Labs and get to know the judges, you can then assess their ability or personal likes as well.”

4. Was your private meeting with a panelist helpful to you?

This remains an important part of the Play Lab, as indicated by a majority of the feedback here. One of the biggest challenges of it, however, is assigning respondents. They are not all created equal. Having me as your individual respondent, for example, would be a comparative let-down to having one of our uber-geniuses like Timothy Daly. It's not that my feedback isn't valid, but we are not on equal ground.

There's not really a way around this. I will continue to endeavor to match people up with artists whose aesthetic matches up with the Lab author's. It's possible that there should be a little more orientation for the Lab respondents as well, to give them a better impression of what is expected of them. In the end, each has their own style, but establishing minimum expectations would be a good thing.

YES

- 4 x "Yes."
- "Extremely -- Timothy Daly gave specific and detailed notes and went through the entire play with me, and when we ran out of time and he didn't finish his notes, he was sure to schedule a follow up meeting."
- "OMG, yes! My lead panelist took comprehensive notes and marked the script both in advance of the reading when she read it on her own, and during the actual reading. She synthesized the feedback from the other panelists and the audience. She was very enthusiastic about the play and helped me to plot its future. We had a fantastic discussion and back and forth over the work."
- "This went very well. I had the opportunity to sit down with Guillermo Reyes, who took nearly a full hour with me to discuss the play both broadly and in specific detail. Because of his preferences, he saw the play ending very differently, and his encouragement to earn my rather depressing ending, led to small but significant breakthroughs with some problem places earlier in the script. For the most part, it was a really good conversation with a theatre professional."
- "Incredibly. Timothy Mason is a wonderful man and was so supportive of me and my play. He helped me pinpoint the useful feedback I got and weed out some of the unuseful feedback to set me squarely on a solid course to a revised script."
- "Very helpful. Lots of good specific suggestions and very supportive."
- "Yes, very much. I had a chance to ask some clarifying questions about the response, make some comments, and get some good ideas."

- “My private meeting was great and I think it's a very good thing to have those after hearing the responses from the panel and the audience.”
- “Very.”
- “Yes. It was amazingly informative and helpful.”
- “Extremely! My panelist went out of his way to have a meal with me and discuss my play at length.”
- “They were all great and had on the spot critiques.”

SOMEWHAT

- “Perhaps, but that remains to be seen. I'm still digesting much of what was said.”
- “Somewhat.”
- “I am still following up with my panelist this week, as I was too busy/exhausted at the end of the festival to make a time. I have read through his notes on my piece and I am extremely grateful that he is making time for me outside of the Conference to continue to talk about the script.”
- “For various reasons we didn't have time. For one, the time allotted was short, we couldn't start for twenty minutes, and he had another play immediately after. I crashed and burned with a serious cold on Saturday, was on the other boat, etc., and, voila, the Conference was over. I was a bit miffed that I had missed that opportunity, but Timothy had made and gave me 6 pages of detailed notes on his comments and those of the other panelists, as well as from the audience. Frankly there are so many politics going on in my head during intense feedback and would have been during a meeting that listened less and missed more had I been taking my own notes. They are not only fair and honest notes on the session, but they are a great roadmap for revision -- which is, after all, the best outcome of all.”
- “I thought it could have been a little more comprehensive but was an overall excellent review of my play.”
- “Not really but only because of the specific judge. I had another one on one unofficially and it was highly productive and helpful.”

NO

- “This was my one gripe. My panelist (a wonderful person) didn't have much time as he was leaving early. We did our private meeting over email later, which wasn't as good as I hoped. As a result, I feel like I lost out some. I think it would be better to schedule the private meeting instead of leaving it up to a “We'll talk later” and chance meeting in the hall. I wasn't quite proactive enough about grabbing my panelist before he had to go and that left me feeling a bit disappointed.”
- “Not especially. It was very brief (<15 minutes) and I didn't really get anything out of it that I hadn't already heard from the panel as a whole.”
- “No.”

- “Not to sound ungrateful, but my private meeting wasn't really helpful at all. My panelist didn't have much to say about the play. I tried to engage in a discussion of the broader dramaturgical arc, and talk about big questions of tone, pacing of information, form, etc. Yet I was frustrated to find that my primary respondent came to our meeting with little more than a marked-up version of my script. She had some individual line notes, many of which seemed mistaken or misguided (in particular there was a moment where she criticized me for using the word "remember," as it often points to needless exposition, not realizing that that particular moment in the play was not at all expositional. She was acting on a heuristic without seeming to fully understand it, and, to be perfectly candid, that particular moment made it hard for me to take the rest of what she said with any degree of seriousness.). That being said, having talked to many other playwrights, it sounds like my experience was unique - perhaps just an unlucky pairing.”



Los Angeles actress Michelle Gardner and PWSCC student Theodore Hooker performing in the Play Lab reading of Anchorage playwright Schatzie Schaefer's "Vashon."

5. Were you satisfied with the performance of your readers?

We work with a cast that ranges from movie stars to complete beginners. We orient them, get them scripts in advance, and try to cast them in places where they will be displayed at their best. Not all casts are even, but we sincerely try to get every reading the best reading possible.

I do not want to involve playwrights in the casting process. For playwrights who have been before, I take any requests they give me into consideration, but generally, there is no practical way to have the authors involved in casting 50-60 different shows. The Coordinator's job in casting is to try to assure everyone of the best possible reading, while also making sure that all attending actors are afforded the opportunity to perform.

YES

- "Yes, I thought they were excellent, they accommodated well to my direction, all seemed good."
- "Yes, I really could not have asked for a better cast -- they all worked off of each other very well."
- "Extremely. Wonderful talent pool."
- 2 x "Yes."
- "They were great. Who wouldn't love Van Horn Ely? And Heidi never batted an eye (lash) as she plowed right through the smarmiest role of the week. I was hesitant on directing my own play, but it worked, worked well, and learned a lot. There is a passage in Marshall Mason's book on rehearsals -- either have a lot of them or very few, but nothing in between, and he is right. It was also invaluable advice to avoid talking ideas. Hell, I am not sure I know what is going on in ICE'S DANCING. But they both were great."
- "Very much so."
- "YES! I am so impressed with the quality of actors at the Play Lab and would love to request specific ones if I ever get to come back."
- "Yes. Very happy with their performance and very surprised. "
- "Yes, especially with the two young readers from Alaska! And one of them, Rob, was 'pulled in' late and hadn't had a chance to read the play before our rehearsal."
- "Yes. I enjoyed them."
- "They were all really great. Talented and easy to work with in the rehearsal room. I couldn't have been happier."
- "Yes, they were actually better than the cast I put together for the earlier reading of the play in New York! (casting and directing are clearly not my forte)."

- “Yes! The readers were all fantastic!”
- “Yes, very much so.”
- “Absolutely. Morgan Mitchell deserves an OBIE (or whatever they have over in Valdez).”
- “Yes. Very much so.”
- “Yes!! They were extremely talented and professional. I couldn't have asked for a better reading.”

MIXED

- “I was very satisfied with my readers, especially during the rehearsal. I learned a lot about what my script was doing working with them on the play. I also learned a lot (too late) about how to really optimize that time. The actual reading was less energetic than the rehearsal, but it was late into the long week, and the audience did not, for the most, share that feeling. It is a hard script and a hard one to pace correctly with only one rehearsal and the cast worked very hard to make it work.”
- “3 out of 4 were excellent. The other was very nice, but noticeably greener, performance was a little shaky.”
- “Yes. Things could be improved sure, but given no rehearsal etc, I thought the lab was well cast and competently read.”
- “Yeah I guess. He did a good job for only having one rehearsal but he was miscast to some extent. He just spoke too slowly for the characters.”
- “It was a bit uneven, but that enabled me to hear the work.”

NO

- “No. If I could have seen auditions, even for a reading, I would have only chosen one reader, including the person who read stage directions, I wouldn't have chosen this person either.”
- “No. I would say this was the worst reading I've had at the Conference (out of 5.) I think this is partially due to directorial mistakes by myself, but for some reason the reading was lacking in energy and the pacing was way off.”

6. What worked best for you in this process?

The Play Lab has generally worked well since its inception. The one missing component is that no one cited their individual meeting, which is worrisome. That part of the program is in some ways the most complicated element to control. We may do more to literally schedule the meetings in 2013, though this could create as many problems as it solves.

WHOLE THING

- “Play Lab process I thought generally worked well.”

- “Knowing the rehearsal and reading schedule ahead of time, as well as knowing up to date information on the actors cast in my play reading -- it is extremely helpful and insightful to see appropriate age casting (as much as I love my friends in their 20s willing to read whatever I give them back home).”
- “The whole thing was awesome.”
- “I think the Play Lab process in general works very well.”
- “Everything. The rehearsal, and especially respondent and audience feedback.”
- “The immersion into "all-day-theatre-world" and the community aspect of going to see each other's [readings] and learning from my fellow playwrights as much as from my own [reading].”
- “Well, panic is the best motivator of all. I think the match with the panelists was also good. And actually match with the actors. The audience was all over the place from cut down the swear words, and some looking for more normality (in a play that deliberately is not), to those who liked it, including a new friend and fellow playwright who leaned over to say, 'Don't listen to them, I loved the play, don't change a word.' Although it was most likely due to a shortage of time, I appreciated the fact that I was not called on to respond much. It's better for me to gather up all the gifts I have been given and live with them for a while. If I had had to defend the play immediately, I would have been forming opinions much too quick, or falling back on opinions I held before I even took the ferry to Valdez. I think I am in a position to come out of this with a work in two or three parts in a few months that will owe much of its strengths to the gifts I got there.”

FEEDBACK

- “The feedback from the panelists and the meeting with my lead panelist. Also, going to other people's reading, listening to the panelists, giving feedback and seeing how other writers tackle writing issues.”
- “The post-reading discussions. The panel was stacked with excellent artists and very kind people. I could not have had a better experience.”
- “The feedback was very very helpful, both from the panelists and the audience. Gave me great insight into improving the play.”
- “It isn't the rehearsal process because there isn't enough time, but since the actors were so good, it left time to discuss the actual play and get feedback not just from panelists, but other playwrights.”
- “The panelist responses were the best thing out of the whole week. I really felt like I learned a lot from them.”
- “The post-reading discussion.”
- “Hearing from the panelist and the audience.”

REHEARSALS

- “The rehearsal itself was quite gratifying. Also talking to others afterwards about the process.”
- “I really enjoyed the rehearsal process. I think I would have kept things simpler if I were to do it again. Some aspects, such as moving an actress in and out of the audience worked very well, but too much up and down on stage distracted from the words. When I focused on the words, the play was presented at its strongest.”
- “I'm very glad I got the time to rehearse. My play hinges on a very particular balance of tone, and it was incredibly helpful both to direct the text (as a way of understanding it better) and to prepare the actors for the reading. I said it before and I'll say it again, the audience response to my play was so incredibly encouraging, I'm still reeling from it a week later. That experience alone was worth the whole trip.”

THE READING ITSELF

- “It certainly worked to have the play read in front of people. While listening to it, I could see what things worked and what things didn't for the audience. I very much liked having a private meeting with one of the panelists too.”
- “Watching how the readers made the words and situations their own.”
- “A chance to see audience reaction.”
- “Hearing the play out loud, and the reactions to it.”
- “I really like that I got to direct the reading myself as that made it easier to talk about the play and characters and just get down to doing a reading for the purpose of development, not production.”
- “The scheduling, which allowed Conference-heavy mornings, and free afternoons to hang with fellow participants. Good balance.”
- “I'll let you know.”
- “Having to talk about my work and in the process, having realizations about how I felt and thought about it.”



Dick Reichman with panelists Timothy Daly, Danielle Dresden, and Colby Kullman.

7. What would you like to see improve in the Play Lab?

The schedule always remains a top point of concern for people, perhaps a little more than in year's past. We scheduled readings opposite of classes, which I didn't see generally affecting playwright's audiences, but some people point to this as an issue. I am not certain whether we will go back to our original schedule or not.

The primary strength of the Last Frontier Theatre Conference is creating a huge family of artists each year. A large part of what people get from their experience is created by our comparatively massive numbers: they make professional and personal connections, and learn from each other. Our schedule would be much less full if we invited fewer people, but the Conference would be weakened on many levels.

I don't worry about people who comment that they had to miss things, as this is a given for the process. We provide activities from 8:00 a.m. 'til about 11:00 p.m. every day. Anyone who can attend everything may not be human.

Making the panelist assignments more public is something I have wanted to do in the past, but thus far the assignments tend to come after the publication deadline, and then tend to be fluid. But it would be better to have this information available, possibly as an insert.

NOTHING

- "Nothing at this time."
- 2 x "I can't think of anything."

SCHEDULING

- "Make it clearer to panelists about when to start the play and maybe make sure that the playwright is present and ready to begin. My lead panelist was in a hurry and started without even acknowledging my presence or asking if i was ready. People were still entering when he gave the go-ahead."
- "My only regret was not being able to see as many playlabs as I would have liked because of overlapping schedules. It would have been especially nice if the workshops had been scheduled at different times than the playlabs as in the end i missed a lot of workshops in order to see playlabs. But I do understand something like this is unavoidable when doing so many plays. Bottom line: I had a fantastic week and hope to be able to do it again."
- "Just a schedule of followup times with mentor. I realize this would be a lot of work but it's a wish list right?)"

- “I’m not really sure. As this was my first time, my reading seemed to go really smoothly. The only complaint was that due to rehearsals and conflicts, I couldn’t see all the plays that I wanted. Perhaps, less plays might be a good idea? Thanks.”
- “Allow time to see more plays by not having them compete with workshops. Attendance at some plays was much lower when there was a really good workshop on at same time.”
- “The only thing I can think of was that there was some confusion and/or overlap with the rehearsal space, but this did not damage my experience.”
- “One issue is re getting an audience. I would have liked to have had a larger audience and wasn’t sure how to go about that. Clearly, there are issues about attractive classes and locally well-known people going up against you. I think the info one has about where to go and why might be improved. Maybe people should be "encouraged" to go to certain Play Lab sessions based on their own style or interest as playwrights - I don't think synopses per se do that much good - There is a tendency for people to go where they know actors, writers, etc. - Personally I would also CHANGE THE LENGTH OF THE DAY. It seems designed for teenagers - from 8 am to past midnight. I would cancel the 9 am and possibly 10 am readings. Certainly the earliest were not well-attended in many cases. The schedule, for me, was too grueling and I basically compensated by joining the Conference most days around noon - But missed lots of stuff I didn't want to. Isn't a 12-hour a day schedule enough?”
- “Less timing conflicts -- I would have liked to see more plays and workshops without them conflicting with other plays and workshops, although I understand why it was done this way.”
- “It would be great if the Labs didn’t compete with the workshops. I really wanted to go to the workshop that was held the same time as my reading. Maybe they could be filmed? (or even handouts would have helped. I did ask about that.) Also if I had been asked if I had questions about my play, after the panelist spoke. That would have been helpful. (I totally agree playwrights shouldn’t speak during the feedback sessions.)”
- “I know s**t happens, and I know it was a little less than twenty minutes we lost, but that was a big piece of a short time frame. I realized later that I was using the same panelists (so opting for another room was not a choice). The first play of the afternoon was ten minutes late. So the next one ran twenty minutes late.... The reading ended at 2:30 when my play was to start; and then they took a break. Eek. We had a lot of people in the room (50 I think) and I think the play was stimulating a good discussion. Sigh.”
- “More -- but not too much more -- rehearsal time.”
- “Because I was unable to have a reading of this draft of my play before the Conference, I would have like to have had a read through with the cast, then gone and done re-writes, then had a short rehearsal incorporating the re-writes and blocking the reading.”

- “It would be great to have more information beforehand, just so we could be prepared.”

PROCESS

- “My issues with my reading, ultimately fall on my choices. I would recommend somehow putting the playwright, briefly, in contact with the panelist, to give the playwright an opportunity to give specific questions that we have about the play to the panelist, so that at least a few comments actually address specific issues that playwright wants addressed.”
- “It works pretty well. I'd like to know who the responders are ahead of time without having to go and ask.”
- “ENFORCE the RULES for what is allowed in terms of "reading" lines -- how much animation, movement, inflection, interaction, etc., amongst the readers/actors is allowed and make sure each reading/performance abides by these RULES.”
- “I enjoyed the whole experience and I learned a lot from the responses, from the reading and the general energy. I guess I would have liked to have more meetings with the actors and the director before the reading but I do understand that this can be difficult in an event that lasts just one week.”
- “I wish I had more time with my play. It didn't seem as intensive as it might have been. Perhaps that is inevitable with so many plays. But I do wish I could have had a little more time with my play. Not sure how to do that of course given the current parameters.”
- “More rehearsals would be good and maybe asking playwrights for actor requirements before casting. Other than that I thought it was fine.”
- “I'd love to see some more panelists who work outside of naturalism. I saw a few in my time there, but for the most part the featured artists came from a fairly conventional school of thought. A little more diversity in terms of style and taste would be particularly helpful, especially in terms of pairing panelists to playwrights.”
- “I would better emphasize the availability of directors if people don't want to direct their own play. In retrospect I wish I had done that this year.”
- “List the 10 plays that were chosen in pool for Susan Nims for 2 reasons; give those playwrights some credit and allow those chosen to see their competition.”

NO RESPONSE FORM IS COMPLETE WITHOUT SOMEONE SAYING...

- “Better lunches.”

Responses from Participating Readers in the 2012 Play Lab

1. How useful was the information you received before the Conference regarding the process, advice, and rehearsal schedule? Is there other information you wish you had prior to arriving in Valdez?

A majority of our readers are past participants. The responses indicate that most people felt prepared, but when there were problems, they were primarily for new people. Sometimes they just aren't looking closely enough (there was a handout with both the rehearsal performance schedules in everyone's program, for example), but I will examine orientation communication to make sure that it is as clear as possible.

ENTIRELY POSITIVE

- “As someone who's gone through actor training and readings the information seemed basic, but it showed a good sense of professionalism on the part of the Conference coordinators and it let me know that each participant is asked to approach the Conference in a professional and prepared manner, which made me know (as a first time participant) that no matter what your level, everyone will be held to the same expectations. That was reassuring that being a reader would be worth my time as a professional. The rehearsal information was very helpful and gave a good sense of what to expect and how to manage time effectively. I don't think any other information is necessary for preparation.”
- 5 x “Very useful.”
- “Nope. I felt well prepared.”
- “All information was given in a timely manner.”
- “Everything was great.”
- “It was great! I liked getting my scripts by email, then I didn't have to worry that a packet might have been lost in the mail.”
- “Everything was well explained. I knew where and when to go to what.”
- “It was fine.” “Just fine.” “Fine.”
- “Information was clear and concise.”
- “Everything I received was good/helpful”
- “It was extremely helpful and I understood where and when I was supposed to be.”
- “The information I received prior to the Conference was very helpful.”

- “Since I live in Valdez, I have access to any questions regarding the process, advice and rehearsal schedule, which was easy to follow anyway.”
- “No, info excellent.”
- “I had more information than I needed and felt that I was excellently used.”
- “The information was sufficient. Nothing additional was needed.”
- “None, everything was well explained.”
- “I always really appreciate the advice, and the rehearsal schedule is easy to follow.”
- “I thought it was very useful”
- “It was very useful - it was very helpful being emailed the scripts well in advance before the Conference as well.
- “Information was quite adequate.”
- “I felt prepared.”
- “Very useful, didn't need other info.”
- “Very useful. No other information necessary.”
- “There was enough advance information for everyone to be prepared, and I think that most actors are veterans at this process.”
- “Being an old hand, I really didn't pay attention to the info. I just show up and hope I have no schedule conflicts.”
- “Information was clear and concise.”
- “It was very good, I just wished I had read it more carefully so I hadn't missed my first rehearsal!”
- “I had all the information I needed in advance.”
- “It went surprisingly well. The sheer number of plays that were read was impressive. The commentary afterward was effective yet diplomatic.”
- “Great.”

MOSTLY POSITIVE

- “Good - schedule was a little hard to follow but I figured it out just fine.”
- “I think the handout you gave was great. It might be nice to have some contact with the playwright in advance to know how staged the reading might be, but it's not really necessary.”
- “Info was fine -as a returning participant, there wasn't anything new for me to know. I do miss getting mailed a hard copy of the program in advance, though.”
- “I think the info I received--some by inquiry--was exact. I don't think it's feasible, but perhaps an exchange of info re: casting.”
- “Useful, but I wish you'd let me know about my extra reading via email - I had to look at the changes schedule to figure it out.”

- “Very useful. It was unfortunate to lose a reading due to scheduling conflicts, but that is how things go sometimes and is completely understandable.”

CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

- “Weather was really hard to plan around. And I wish I'd brought a decent sized bath towel. and a backpack ;)”
- “The information was fairly helpful, but if the reading set up could have been described slightly more in-depth, it would prevent readers from attempting to memorize.”
- “I think that perhaps the first year it would have been helpful if I knew to practice with a cell phone recording me from a distance and to treat the stage directions as seriously as an actual part. I think volume, elocution, and articulation are as important if not more so for the reader of stage directions because we have to follow them well without seeing the action. I did hear that some of the stage directions were overacted and some were impossible to hear.”
- “It's clear to me now, but my first year was a little confusing...”
- “Having never attended the Conference I did not know what to expect. Other than the readings I was given and my schedule for rehearsals and readings I did not receive any other information. I would have liked to have known about the workshops but I did not receive any information on those, nor did I go looking for it until (I'm assuming it was somewhere on the Conference website).”
- “I would have liked one schedule showing both rehearsals and readings - it made it difficult to tell if I could do certain things because I was flipping around between several pages trying to coordinate my schedule:
- “Schedule not 100 % clear to me for rehearsals.”

2. Once in Valdez, was there any part of the Play Lab process that confused you?

Again, we will work to make our orientation materials as clear as possible. The two comments on directors are essentially going to be ignored, as working with a director is the exception, not the rule, and is a decision left entirely up to the writer. Having different rooms labeled A, B, & C is a long-standing minor problem that we will rectify in 2013.

NO PROBLEMS!

- 21 x “No.”
- “It all made sense to me.”
- 2 x “None.”
- “I felt it was clear.”

- “Nope - it was fairly obvious. Although it was definitely intimidating... i mean, there is SOMUCHGOINGONATONETIME.”
- “No. It all went easily”
- 4 x “Nope!”
- “For me, there was no confusion since I know what to expect. It has helped being a previous participant.”
- “No, i thought once I was there, it was managed very well.”
- “Nope. The staff were great.”
- 2 x “Not at all.”
- “No, i have done it before- it all came back to me.”
- “It was not confusing.”

MIXED RESPONSES

- “There seemed to be quite a difference in how the physical place was used. Some concentrated on oral interpretation, while others were more closely akin to readers' theater.”
- “No confusion. In reference to rehearsal time in question below, it felt adequate for full length plays but was very tight for one-acts.”
- “Yes, I was confused as to why we were, on Saturday, expected to have such an enormous attention span for all the activities, which started super early. I could not party on Friday night. Wah.”
- “Just the fact, I thought the rehearsal was at the same time as the reading, the next day when in fact it was a different time.”
- “Where to meet your cast/playwright - some people wander around in the lobby and folks think they're late but they just might not know exactly where to check in - since there is no check in per se.”
- “I did not receive any information about how the readings would happen (reading, panel critique, audience participation). Not a big deal to not have known in advance but super cool that it happens like that.”
- “Not confusion but I was disappointed that it seemed as if some of the readers had not done any preparation. Their faces were buried in the scripts and they made little or no eye contact with their scene partners or the audience. Get the words out to the world! Just seeing the top of the reader's head is not very interesting.”
- “Why were actors- even those from LA, adding words and paraphrasing in the readings? (I thought this was the playwright's job and part of the benefit of labwork)”
- “No, but I had done it before. I heard some people were confused about the rehearsal rooms also being named "A", "B" and "C" along with the performance rooms.”
- “Role of the appointed director versus the playwright's intent with the play.”

- “One of my playwrights had a featured artist help her with the staging, and the double direction muddled things somewhat and slowed down the rehearsal considerably.”

3. Did you feel like you were given enough rehearsal time for Play Lab readings?

There's not much to be done here if there was a problem, so it's comforting that 94.1% of people feel like it's fine. The earlier comment about not having enough time for shorter plays will be a part of planning for next year.

Yes: 68.6%

Mostly: 25.5%

Somewhat: 3.9%

Not at all: 2.0%

4. How useful are the following additional activities and opportunities for actors?

These numbers are pretty much in line with what I expected. Each of these programs will appeal to different people. In next year's survey, we will make sure that it is clear that we only want responses to programs in which individual readers were actually involved.

Fringe Festival

Not at all: 4.2%

Somewhat: 31.9%

Mostly: 19.1%

Very: 44.8%

Monologue Workshop

Not at all: 4.4%

Somewhat: 4.4%

Mostly: 17.8%

Very: 73.4%

Acting for Singers Workshop

Not at all: 13.6%

Somewhat: 15.9%

Mostly: 20.5%

Very: 50%

5. Did you receive adequate notice prior to the Conference about these programs?

A majority of people, about 65%, said they felt fully informed going into the event. Of the ones who felt less than informed, the primary areas that they claimed to not know about with the Acting for Singers program and the Fringe Festival. The former, every actor in the Lab was solicited on at least twice via e-mail, so I'm not sure how they missed it. There was no call for Fringe participation, and I am in correspondence with the Fringe Coordinators about what to tell people in advance about the Fringe. We do not want to have people signing up in advance.

There are enough people not following how the Monologue Workshop works prior to getting to Valdez to indicate that the text for that needs to be revised.

YES

- 29 x "Yes."
- "Yes, excellent communication about programs."
- "Yes, the website was very useful."
- "Yes I did."
- "Yup."
- "Yes - the individual email reminder made that a snap!"
- "I was already visiting the website well in advance."
- "I did not participate in either the Monologue Workshop or the Acting for Singers Workshop so I cannot speak to their usefulness. I did partake of the Fringe, both as audience and as a participant. For many, any opportunity to engage with others on-stage is a value. I plan to attend more of the Conference next year and participate in at least the Monologue Workshop and possibly Acting for Singers."

A LITTLE CONFUSED

- "Yes to Fringe and Monologue, because I knew about them. I did know about the Acting for Singers Workshop, but didn't see anything about it until arriving (I'm sure it was there, if I had looked for it though)."
- "I did about the Monologue Workshop, but I don't think I remember seeing much about Acting for Singers."
- "Um... perhaps I did? I remember getting some email about it, but wasn't really aware what it was until I was up there & everyone was urging me to take part."
- "I didn't realize the monologues called for were intended as 'audition monologues.' I didn't realize the setting/atmosphere for The Fringe--of course, I soon discovered how much fun it was."

- “I did not know of them until I was already in Valdez.”
- “Did not actually go to any. Monologues are not requested any more in [where I live].”
- “It was known of beforehand, otherwise there wasn't much of a notice.”
- “I'm not sure the layout of the Monologue Workshop was fully explained, and I signed up thinking I would have more time to participate in the sessions, but as my schedule worked out I was only able to attend the first class.”
- “I did receive notice, but had booked my flight not knowing about when the monologue workshop had begun, so decided to opt out of it.”
- “I came mostly as a playwright rather than as an actor. I would have appreciated more notice about the workshops before arriving in Valdez, if I were primarily an actor. Then again, I probably would have sought the information out more, too, if that were my focus.”
- “Didn't hear anything about the Fringe in advance but that's ok because the Fringe is rather impromptu. Yes, got enough info on Monologue and Acting for Singers workshops.”
- “I feel like they could all be pumped up more, for sure. Especially submissions for the fringe.”
- 3 x “No.”



Out-of-state playwrights Daniel Guyton, Jeff Stolzer, and Dennis Schebetta on the Friday night Stan Stephens Cruises trip to Shoup Glacier.

6. Did you feel like there were enough additional opportunities available to you to either perform or participate in performance classes during the Conference?

It takes less time to say 'yes' than it does to explain why not, so it's important to recognize that most people felt there was plenty to do. Of those who didn't or expressed concerns, it was usually about the full schedule making it impossible to do everything they wanted. On to specific concerns...

Fringe Coordinator Bostin Christopher expressed the same concern about using too many of the same people over the week, so making sure it's open and inclusive is already a priority for 2013.

This year, more than in past years, most actors had a very limited number of roles in the Lab. Many of my best actors only had a role or two over the week. There are a couple of comments from people who seem to have taken this personally. I don't really see much of a fix for it: the primary purpose of the Lab is to serve the playwrights, which means casting their plays appropriately, with the best actors possible from the available pool. We try to make sure everyone has things to do.

YES

- 22 x "Yes."
- "God yes. I definitely over-indulged."
- "Yes, and I wish I had taken advantage of more."
- "Outside the Play Lab, I didn't participate in any other acting opportunities/classes. I thought there were many great opportunities for actors (and, of course, playwrights), though."
- "Almost too many!"
- "Oh yes! That was great this year."
- "There was plenty of opportunities that were taken advantage of."
- "I had a very busy schedule this year, so I chose not to attend as many workshops as usual, but I believe the opportunities are ample for actors to participate in such activities - including the Fringe."
- "Yes! I was so busy this year, which is a nice change of pace from some past Conferences. I learned so much."
- "Yes but mainly there for playwriting."

- “Yes, even though my rehearsals coincided with some of the classes, I thought what I did participate in was sufficient.”

YES, AND...

- “There were yes, but there is always room for more.”
- “Yes. The 1-minute play slam at the fringe was a nice addition for both playwrights and actors. I think it would be worthwhile to consider adding a (brief) 1-minute play slam to the Saturday events.”
- “I did, yes. It might be nice to have a workshop about the role of an actor in new play readings--how best to serve the play and playwright.”
- “Yes. Although similar to the Fringe, I wish there was a cabaret night.”
- “As teacher of a workshop - no additional time.”
- “Yes. If I would have known more prior, I would have submitted myself to read stage directions or been in more Fringe stuff.”

PARTIALLY

- “I wish that I could have been in either the Monologue Workshop, or the Acting for Singers workshop, but other than that, there was plenty of performing opportunities, which I enjoyed.”
- “Yes, for the Monologue workshop, but I do wish there were more opportunities for me to perform. (It also had to do with that I was only reading in one play, and wanted more time to present myself.)”
- “I wish there was MORE time for more things! I found myself having to choose between things... I wish the writing warm up was later in the day.”
- “I would really have loved to participate as an actor for fringe, which I told the coordinators, but as it was being run it seemed the same actors (people who were known to the coordinators of fringe) were used over and over again. This could be a great opportunity to get to know more people by working in this low pressure atmosphere but by night three I felt that I was seeing the same 10 actors over and over, which offers little as an audience member and doesn't allow much variety for playwrights having their work read either. I think there could be a more organized way of casting for Fringe that would make it a more useful and expanding opportunity for actors as well as playwrights.”
- “I would like to have done more in the Fringe Festival. I submitted two scripts ... on Sunday, but they were not used.”
- “There were opportunities, but I generally had a conflict with classes. And I usually choose a Play Lab play over other things--hate to miss one.”
- “Sort of.”
- “More panels like the "ethics of ethnic" would be swell. It's nice to chat about stuff going on in the theatre world.”

- “I feel strangely as if I'm no longer welcome to participate at the Conference - unless I take a workshop that I don't need. I am saddened by this. I remain interested in some of author's new plays though it doesn't make sense to go to Valdez for a week just to hear them read, by folks who can't do it well. I would rather not be invited than have nothing to do.”
- “I would have liked some forums where people could ask questions of experienced playwrights and actors. An informal “let's hear that story” sort thing, getting away from criticism and parsing.”
- “more more more”

AND FOR SOME PEOPLE THE ANSWER WAS NO

- “No.”
- “No - the monologue workshop was difficult to attend due to rehearsals for the Play Lab and I ended up dropping out.”

7. Would you be open to being in contact with the playwrights of the plays you are reading in prior to the Conference?

While most of the cast would be open to having contact with the playwrights in advance, it is still something we will proceed with caution on initiating. There are plenty of scenarios where contact prior to the Conference between playwrights and their casts (often made up of strangers) creates conflict.

Yes: 94.1%

No: 5.9%



Three playwrights from Kentucky confer with New York playwright Timothy Mason at the reception at the Valdez Museum.

8. Did you experience any problems with playwrights during the Lab process?

There's not much to be said here... everything pointed out is something we are already doing. We request playwrights mark their stage instructions in advance. We reprint their scripts when they need them reprinted.

I think the participant who expressed worry about playwrights contacting actors ahead of schedule summed up my concerns nicely.

On directors... we have tried a lot of different methodologies for having directors involved in the Play Lab, and nothing is perfect. Through trial and experimentation, we have ended up with the current system. Playwrights are told that they will direct their own reading unless they request otherwise. They are given a three-page how-to guide written by 6-time Obie-winning director Marshall W. Mason. On the first day of the Conference, there is a class on how to direct their reading. While this may not be perfect, we give them a lot of guidance, and I really don't know what else we can provide. Having directors for all the readings proved very problematic the one year we did it (2004).

NO PROBLEMS!

- "None - they were great."
- 3 x "None."
- 2 x "None at all."
- "None whatsoever."
- 17 x "No."
- "None whatever"
- "No, their expectations were in line with what the reading would do."
- "None at ALL! All professional and very helpful!! The more they can give advice on the TONE of the pieces, the better!"
- "No. All the playwrights I met at this Conference were great."
- "No, good relationship."
- 2 x "Nope."
- "The playwrights were a nice bunch."
- "Not really."
- "No problems at all - one playwright contacted me before the Conference to see if I had any questions, and all the rest were incredibly open to the process and wonderful to work with to bring their words to life."

- “No, both were accommodating and easy to work with.”
- “None, everyone was clear in intent and we all enjoyed the time together.”
- “None at all- everyone was lovely.”
- “No, they were LOVELY and I think they might have wanted more time to rehearse prior. Since I was in full-length pieces, our rehearsal time only let us rehearse once. But it might have been better that way anyway.”
- “No. Both of the writers I worked with were really amazing people. Kevin Six, especially, just blew me away with how warm and friendly he is at all times, and I count him as a friend now.”
- “Nope, the playwright was great and open to the actors interpretations.”

NOT REALLY, BUT...

- "No. However, it would be nice if substantial changes were made to scripts that the playwrights could reprint them. A few of us tripped over our many-changed scripts. The playwright did not know she could have PWSCC LFTC staff help to reprint and didn't want to bother you. Maybe some clarity on reprinting a few changes is not necessary, but say over 10 changes to a script or dense changes to a couple pages could warrant reprinting.”
- “Lack of appreciation for my effort - I had to wrest a thank you at one of them!”
- “One playwright was inexperienced as a playwright and as a director and juggling the two responsibilities made it extremely difficult for him to communicate effectively what he wanted to see in his reading. I'm sure the Conference asks playwrights before the Conference if they would like a director, but for those of them who say no, I wonder if there is a tips sheet, like the Actor Tips sheet about directing your own reading. I know there was a seminar on day one, but I'm sure not everyone went. Questions like "How do you want the audience to feel at the end of the reading?" and "Let your actors know where you are in the writing process and what you think is the theme of the play" May be useful for something like this. With limited time, it's hard as an actor to make sure you are doing what your playwright/director wants so they can get the best/most useful feedback out of their reading.”
- “Some playwrights don't seem to understand "readings" vs "staged" but that is each person's preference on how they want to experience their play at the Conference.”
- “The playwright for one of my readings didn't think she had enough rehearsal time and was making changes to our staging as late as five minutes before the reading itself.”
- “Not problems but here are two suggestions: 1. PLEASE PLEASE playwrights decide in advance which stage directions will be read. We waste far too much of our limited rehearsal time making these decisions which could have been made in advance. In general strike all "acting note" directions (things like "with great sadness") or anything that the actors can do during the reading ("he looks at the ceiling"). 2. If a playwright

has no experience directing a reading, provide a director or someone with staging experience. Playwrights may not be the best ones to direct their own plays.”

- “My previous answer is with hesitation - certain playwrights are obsessive. I understand they are nervous but this year we had a playwright (after rehearsal) run up to a reader before an evening show insisting they go over script changes. Though I would love to be accommodating to the playwrights, it just opens up too much risk for obsessive behavior - and I see at least one like that a year. I also know of three rehearsals that ran between 5-10 minutes late on their rehearsal time and were only stopped by the next cast showing up.”
- “The playwrights were the stars of the Conference! I loved chatting with them. The acting gurus were a bit of a disappointment.”
- “Nope! They were all wonderful. I just wish there was less foul language and graphic material in the shows that are accepted at the Conference. I don't think it is a true representation of all the theatre that is out there.”
- “I didn't experience any problems but I did have a playwright share information about the characters that was not in the script. As an actor I chose not to use that information in the reading. It seemed like cheating.”
- “Just some minor confusion from one playwright who did not fully understand what a reading encompassed. She was quickly unconfused by the many seasoned theater Conference attendees.”



PWSCC President Emerita Jo Ann C. McDowell, Ph.D., accepts the 2012 Jerry Harper Service Award at the closing night gala.