

Lighting Design as a Career

Abstract:

Lighting Designers engage within both the artistic and technical aspects of productions, architecture, and events. This paper offers a look at this career choice and potential.

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Table of Contents

Page 3. What are the duties of a lighting designer?

Page 3. What is the educational recommendation in this field?

Page 3. What is the outlook for the career path in the future?

Page 4. What is the earning potential for lighting designers?

Page 4. What are the subsets of the field?

Page 4. What is the difference between an assistant lighting designer and an associate lighting designer?

Page 5. What is the demographic breakdown of the field?

What are the duties of a lighting Designer?

Lighting designers are responsible for a wide array of the production of many types of concerts, plays, events, architectural installations, and media production. This includes from an artistic conceptual design to manipulating computer aided drafting software to get specification to standards set by USITT (United States Institute for Theatrical Technology). As shows progress they are involved heavily within programming and playback of the cues and are the lead in the electrical aspects of the show. The counterpart to the lighting designer is the master electrician, the individual responsible for distribution and implementation of the drafts that are supplied to them by the lighting designer.

What is the educational recommendation in this field?

There is no required degree to enter the field of lighting design; however, majority of individuals accrue a Bachelor of Science degree or a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. Many find it is necessary to gain an advanced degree, Master of Fine Arts, which is a terminal degree. A profitable career path is to gain a Master of Fine Arts degree and enter into educational settings, this is often the career path that majority of more experienced lighting designers do.

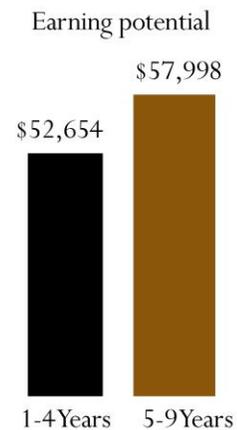
What is the outlook for the career in the future?

There is an estimated 5% growth to occur in this industry within the next ten years. This includes the positions such as associate lighting designer, assistant lighting designer, and lighting director. The field is currently experiencing a major crisis due to Covid-19 and 97% of the 1099 contractor lighting designers have lost all forms of income due to the nature of the field requiring large gatherings. The availability of unemployment insurance for a mixed earner (both W-2 and 1099 earners) is also a hazard in the field in case of unemployment.

“Unfortunately, American workers who have mixed income, that is, income they report as W-2 and 1099 or other self-employment income are being penalized simply because they earned some income as a W-2 employee. If a mixed-earner such as an entrepreneur, seasonal worker, gig worker, or local musician, singer, actor, writer, photographer, or other creator makes enough income as a W-2-employee to qualify for any amount of traditional state unemployment benefits, only their W-2 income is considered in determining a weekly base benefit amount.” - RIAA, The Recording Industry Association of America®

What is the earning potential of a lighting designer?

On average an early career lighting designer earns \$52,654 a year while a mid-career lighting designer earns \$57,998 on average in a year. This is based off of 234 salaries of those with 1-4 years' experience and 143 of those with 5-9 years' experience. However, within the 1099 contract aspects of the industry many make substantially more or less in a year as these numbers are based upon salary positions such as house lighting designer (individual who stays at a single venue).



What are the subsets of the field?

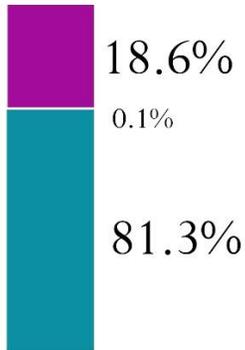
Lighting designers are utilized in many circumstances outside of entertainment, they are also commonly found within architectural design studios, video game development studios, and advertising. The cross disciplinary approach to education within majority of lighting design higher education allows for a blending of the concepts and tools required for each of these subsets. A large difference between the entertainment and architectural sides of the field is often detailed at how long is required to put a production together or an architectural plan. While majority of the tools remain the same, such as utilization of Vectorworks, there is an extended toolset for each of the subsets which include video manipulation software. Many lighting designers hire assistant lighting designers and associate lighting designers.

What is the difference between an assistant lighting designer and an associate lighting designer?

The difference between the two are the amount of involvement within the artistic process where an assistant would be tasked with completing the paperwork after the design meetings have concluded and associate designer would be responsible to research items to bring to the design meeting. Both are alternatives to the career as a lighting designer that does quite a bit of the same function as a lighting designer.

What is the demographic breakdown of the field?

The demographic breakdown of the field has been documented through several demographic categories, yet the one that has been studied the longest would be the individuals who design in LORT (league of Regional Theaters) by pronoun usage.



Overall Lighting Positions

The graphic on the right is a breakdown for the lighting positions occupied by those who use She/Her pronouns (18.6%), They/Them pronouns (0.1%), and He/Him (81.3%). While within lighting designer breakdown, 24.8% utilize She/Her pronouns, 0.2% utilize They/Them pronouns, and 75% utilize He/Him pronouns.