

STUDENT PERFORMANCE NIGHT

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INTRODUCTION

Performance night is an event that is similar to an open mic night but is organized in a way that helps students think more deeply about the arts and connect their talents with their Christian faith. By thoughtfully curating a performance topic and connecting that with a hands-on experience of the arts, students easily engage with the topic of faith and art while still drawing an audience.

At its core, the arts are forms of communication that shape how we experience and understand the world we live in. T.S. Eliot says, "It is just the literature that we read for 'amusement,' or 'purely for pleasure,' that may have the greatest and least suspected influence upon us." In our society, we constantly consume the arts, from music to billboards, but we almost never slow down to consider this spiritual food we eat.

Something that has such an influential and subconscious presence in our lives deserves our attention as Christians. Whether we are professional artists or inquisitive amateurs, we are all called to engage in our expressions so as to prepare the way of the Lord. As Isaiah says, let us reveal the glory of the Lord through our word, dance, song, and image (Isaiah 40:3-5).

GOAL OF OUR TIME TOGETHER

To get students to not only perform or present their artistic expression, but to also articulate and engage with how it intersects with their faith.

WHEN?

If you have a large group meeting, replace your normal programming with Performance Night, or create a special one-time event.

- Be sure to explain why you are doing this: because you believe that the arts are an important part of our lives and God cares about everything (i.e. the Jubilee vision).
- Think about when in the semester it best fits. Does the topic of art come up in your speaking schedule? Is there a topic that comes up naturally that would fit well with the arts?
- It works best around three quarters of the way through the semester, when students have had a chance to create but are not stressed about finals yet.

WHO? *Creating a list*

Ask students to sign up to present their art. This can be song, dance, visual, spoken, film, etc.

- Don't be passive in this. Think about who you think are thoughtful and talented students. Most students need some arm-twisting to present their work.
- Create a list and follow up with people who sign up.
- Budget about seven minutes per performer and tell each one they have five minutes (one song, act, etc.). You can be flexible with this, but it's better to end early than go too long.
- Create a limited number of spots on the roster, and do not allow sign-ups on the night of.

WHAT? *Picking a theme*

Pick a theme for the evening and ask each performer to present something related to that topic. For example, the theme might be "new life," because it is near Easter and you are preaching through the book of John.

- Open the evening with a brief introduction to the topic. Explain again why the arts are important and how they fit into the larger picture of your campus group. Explain what the topic is and why you chose it.
- The sooner you know the topic, the better. Tell students the topic early so that they can either prepare or create something new.

HOW? *Asking questions*

The format of the evening will be:

1. The student performs or presents their art.
2. The emcee asks one to three questions about the presentation as it relates to the theme.
3. Repeat.

- Asking good questions of the students is the key to whole evening. This is where students will be able to see the connection between art and faith.
- Try to avoid asking the same questions for each performer. Each performance or presentation is different, so try to think of a unique question pertaining to that art form. For example, with the theme of “new life,” you might ask a musician about what new life they hope to give the listener, while you might ask a film-maker what kind of new life they saw in the film crew while making it. A mixture of unique and rote questions is good.
- If you are struggling to find a question, ask the audience if they have any.

WHY? *Setting the atmosphere*

Remember, the goal is to get students to start thinking about the intersection of their faith and art. This is done mostly by getting them to ask good questions, not always by teaching. So making the evening fun and relaxed is important. Create an environment where people are excited and inquisitive.

- Pay attention to your room. Does it work well as a performance space? If not, try to find an alternative. How can you set up the chairs so that people engage better?
- Bring snacks and drinks.
- How is the lighting? Sound? Can you project movies? Get help with these details. The best ideas can fail with a glitchy projector or PA system.