Dr. Aldemaro Romero Jr.
College Talk

“So, as an arts administrator you have to be a problem solver above all. “Yes. I used to joke
that practice” says Milch. “We’re dealing with
numbers, we’re dealing with artists, and we’re
also dealing with communities and audiences.”

But what about parents who think that if their
son or daughter gets into this business, he or she
will not be as successful as one’s peers? “We
are going to have people working in non-profit
institutions with very entrepreneurial mindsets
or with an understanding of how to raise funds
and resources in a more commercial setting. If
we take theater, for example, the majority of
Broadway productions start in the non-profit
sector. So you’re not getting to a commercial
production without understanding how the non-
profit system works, where the development of
the artist is happening, and how that functions.

The connection between those two exists in our
field and exists in the people whom we’re training
as the next generation of leadership. I think the
market is only going to grow in terms of what we
have to offer as skilled professionals in the field.”

Based on what we see on Broadway and at
concerts, art exhibits, and theatrical productions,
technology is playing a bigger role than it has
in the past. The question is how to keep up with
all the innovations that take place constantly in
the arts. Milch has a very clear perspective on
this subject: “I think of it in a really simple way,
which is that we’ve always had to keep up. Now
we’re talking about technologies, but our field
has always been the place where artists think
twenty or thirty years ahead. We’ve always had
to incorporate new technologies. We understand
that we have to be nimble.”

And Milch goes further. “Another practice
that I really instill in our students is that they
need to read the trades. And those trades can be
everything from The New York Times to
Backstage to Art Forum or Art News. They need
to read them every time they come out and need
to be aware of what’s happening and where,
because you’re going to find who you are as an
individual in this field and what strength you
have. Your strength may be that you know how
to code or that you know how to talk to people,
so you’re going to be the one who gets that gig
or gets that connection when there is a tech
show. I joke that when I was freelancing, I used
to get the ‘how to choreograph for non-dancers’
jobs, because I knew how to talk to people who
are afraid of dancing—that was my niche. It’s
the same thing with technology. If you know
how to use it, or if you know who does, then
you’re going to be the one who’s able to keep
ahead and be in the decision-making position.”

He says that for those interested in getting
a masters in Arts Administration at Baruch
College, the rout is very simple. “You can
find us at http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/hasa/
academics/ma-arts-administration/index.html.”

Milch Sees a Great Future for Art Administrators

“Thinking about it from different
angles, I began to realize that there are a lot of
different pieces in this puzzle. I really wanted to
see how they all fit—at least when they work!”

As he says, there are many different pieces
but also many different kinds of people with
whom one must work. How do you prepare for
that as an art administrator? “To be successful,
you have to learn how to deal with the widest
range of people you can. I’ve had artists walk
in who wanted to help me build the set that I
was building, and I’ve had artists walk in who
expected everything to be laid out on a bed
of roses. I’d like to think that I go into every
experience not expecting it to be one way or the
other but instead let that person tell me what
his or her needs are. Then I figure out how to
manage the situation.”

So, as an arts administrator you have to be
a problem solver above all. “Yes. I used to joke
when I first started studying theater that theater
is just applied psychology or applied philosophy.
Whatever it is that the artist is working on, you
have to become an expert in that field. The most
exciting thing about our career is that it changes
every time.”

Milch believes that failure or success in this
career all comes down to professional empathy.
“When students engage, they develop these
incredible connections and relationships. There
is something called professional empathy that
makes you successful. Each individual is going
to express that in different ways, but it’s being
able to listen and understand what that other
person needs or wants and how you can best
supply it.”

So then, what do we really teach in an
arts administration master’s curriculum?
“Understanding how to work with the artists in
that practice” says Milch. “We’re dealing with
Professor Milch at his office.

Dr. Aldemaro Romero Jr.
College Talk

“I didn’t choose art, art chose me.” That’s
how Professor David Milch explains his
personal and professional fascination with the
arts. “I came from a family where there was
always music or always something artistic
happening. It was where I felt at home; it
was where I found people I could relate to,
found ideas, and found the outlets to share the
creations we would make with a wider group of
people,” says he.

Milch, a native of Long Island, New York,
has a bachelor’s degree in theater from Wesleyan
University in Connecticut and a master’s of fine
arts from the University of California at Los
Angeles. Today he is the director of the master’s
in arts administration program in the Weissman
School of Arts and Sciences at Baruch College,
City University of New York.

But why did he choose arts administration
as a career? “I think over time I started to see
where my strengths lie, and I found a process
that was unique. I liked the holistic view—
seeing not just what happened at the end but
everything that led up to it,” says Milch. And
he continues: “Thinking about it from different
angles, I began to realize that there are a lot of
different pieces in this puzzle. I really wanted to
see how they all fit—at least when they work!”

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