The Department of Theater
Year in Review 2017-2018

UMassAmherst
College of Humanities & Fine Arts
Theater
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2017-2018 survey results summary and survey plan for the coming season
No doubt about it, 2017-2018 was an artistic high-water mark for us. Our audience survey responses included complimentary descriptions of our shows like “interesting”, “thought-provoking”, “inspiring”, “deep,” and in this word cloud, the lovely sequence of “beautiful, curious, cool.”

We didn’t quite make our box office projection this year, thanks in part to the smaller-than-projected number of tickets available for two shows (although we could have sold twice the number of tickets to both of those shows, they were so popular). We intentionally set out to become more accessible to students this year, by dropping our ticket price from $8 to $5, and by offering a 45th season subscription package price of only $25. For the first time ever, we were also able to accept credit cards and Ucards as payment, which made for increased walk-up sales.

We ended this year with more people walking through our doors than last year, meaning our community is getting bigger. Our kick-off event, a new opportunity for community building, drew 300 people and is still brought up by many when they talk about the decision to attend a show, buy a subscription, or collaborate with us artistically.

Nearly 81% of survey respondents said they’d recommend our performance to a friend, and 97% consider our work to be equal or superior to other theater they’ve seen in the Valley. We knew they meant it when both Dream Play and The Lily’s Revenge performances were marked by mad ticket scrambles. Only a small audience was allowed in every night to these shows, we had to limit our waitlists to 20 at the door, and we actually caught people trying to sneak into the theater. We don’t encourage that sort of behavior, but we took it as an endorsement of our artistic ambitions and as a testament to the powerful relevance of our shows!

Please read on for box office details and a look back at the shows we produced this year.
**Box Office**

**FINANCIAL RESULTS**

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<td>$6,557.70</td>
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<td>Rand or Curtain</td>
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**AUDIENCE TALLY**

FY 18

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<td>303</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>266</td>
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2016-2017 audience total: 4200
2017-2018 % audience size increase over previous year: 3.3%

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We announced our arrival in the 21st century world of ticket sales via an Instagram post of General Manager Willow Cohen setting up our new card machines.
Notes about our 2017-2018 productions

Our theater village is large.
The Department of Theater community is made up of theater makers committed to creating new work and radical adaptations of classics.
But it also includes you, our audience.
We aim to tell stories that matter to you: stories that illuminate the big issues we’re all dealing with, the ideas that inspire us, and the things that make us laugh and cry and connect to each other.
Be part of our village.

Season Kick-Off Celebration!
Featuring students, faculty, staff, guest artists and more!
Oct. 5 at 5:30
The Rand Theater
FREE and OPEN to all!
We’re so excited to show you our season that we’re throwing a preview party! You’re invited to join us as we raise a glass in the Rand to toast the 2017-2018 season. Check out snippets of the shows planned in our season, get a glimpse behind the scenes, and shake hands with our talented artists. Hors d’oeuvres will be served, and a lucky few will walk away with prizes. Open to everyone in the community!

We tried something new to get audience members excited about our upcoming season this year: a Kick-Off Celebration that offered them a preview of the five shows planned for the year. The event was free and open to all, and billed as being only an hour — the idea being to offer people a low-investment opportunity to get to know us. We drew a crowd of 300 to our performance and preview, including UMass officials and community members. Attendees enjoyed 5-minutes clips of each show, had an opportunity to win season subscriptions (only $45 for this 45th anniversary season) and tickets, and gathered after the performance to enjoy hors d’oeuvres and chat with theater-makers. In addition to selling subscriptions and individual tickets, the event resulted in notably strengthening two partnerships.

Upward Bound director Tyson Rose, who had worked with theater members on an ad-hoc basis before, loved the event so much that Upward Bound’s summer program includes a theater class run under the Department’s auspices. Meanwhile new Fine Arts Center programming director Aaron Shackleford was impressed enough by the event that it kick-started conversations between our two organizations, leading to several collaborations and plans for more next year. We plan to run a similar event to celebrate the start of our 2018-2019 season.
Runaways
Music, lyrics and book by Elizabeth Swados
Directed by Lou Moreno, artistic director of New York City’s INTAR Theatre
Nov. 1, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11 at 7:30 p.m.
Nov. 11 at 2 p.m.
School Matinee: Nov. 8 at 10 a.m.
The Rand Theater
The jittery, desperate energy of youth fuels Runaways, a gut-punch of a musical that deftly blends different musical styles from pop to hip-hop, jazz to reggae. Creator Elizabeth Swados interviewed young addicts, con artists, and victims of sex trafficking—all homeless runaways and orphans—to craft a portrait of what it’s like to be a kid on the edges of society. Their stories—angry, joyful, both childish and grown beyond their years—will stay with you long after the last brilliant note has faded.

We started our year with a musical that enabled us to expand our community in multiple ways. We cast several young community members in the piece to reflect the younger ages of some of the characters. We reached out to our professional community and invited guest artist Lou Moreno of INTAR Theatre in New York to direct and mentor our cast and students. Members of the Music Department helped us create a strong musical company out of this cast. We invited local schools to attend our matinee. Alumnus Stephen Driscoll ’73 supported our artistic community by funding the work of fellow alumna Alison Kerr ’17 as choreographer. He and alumnus Robin Swados spoke with our audience about Robin’s cousin Elizabeth and her artistic legacy.
We also offered our audience members an opportunity to upgrade their individual ticket purchases—if they decided to subscribe, their Runaways ticket was applied to the cost of their subscription.

Runaways’ set was designed by Technical Director Michael Cottom. It was his first set design for the Department of Theater, and conveyed the idea that this group of homeless youths had created a community in a dilapidated old theater. Photo by Jon Crispin.
UMass New Play Lab

Snowflakes by Dustin Chinn
Directed by Gabriel Harrell, dramaturged by Kim Euell
Dec. 1, 2, 7 at 7:30 p.m., Dec. 9 at 2 p.m.

Unconditional by Tatiana Rodriguez
Nov. 30, Dec. 6, 8 at 7:30 p.m.

Attrition by Nicholas Cummings
Dec. 2 at 2 p.m.
Directed by Gaven Trinidad, dramaturged by Judyie Al-Bilali
The Curtain Theater, Fine Arts Center

UMass New Play Lab is a crucible for new work. A professional playwright and a UMass student playwright will be given the opportunity this fall for workshop productions of their newest plays — works that represent fresh voices, big ideas, and envelope-pushing modes of storytelling. Being in the rehearsal room as directors and actors transform a script to action and words, and experiencing audience reactions for the first time helps our playwrights hone their ideas into new, sharper plays. Play Lab projects have continued on to further development in regional and New York theaters. Take part in this grand experiment!

Special thanks to the Hotel UMass, which is the official provider of accommodations for UMass New Play Lab artists.

Play Lab has always been about developing new talent, and this year, we found talent right here in our department, when two student playwrights, Tatiana Rodriguez and Nicholas Cummings, joined professional playwright Dustin Chinn in residency. All three plays were topical, clever, and spoke to the concerns that move our students and our audiences these days. Our experiment was wonderfully successful — our Play Lab audiences were the largest yet, this year, and our work with Dustin Chinn was so fruitful that Snowflakes will be the first-ever Play Lab selection brought back for a full production. Additionally, partly on the strength of her work on Unconditional, Tatiana Rodriguez was named one of the University’s Rising Researchers.

Dream Play
Adapted from the play by August Strindberg by the cast and creative team
Directed by Mary Corinne Miller
Feb. 7, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17 at 7:30 p.m.
Feb. 17 at 2 p.m.
Rooms 433-442, Fourth Floor Arts Bridge, Fine Arts Center

What better way to face the absurdity of our own reality than to plunge ourselves into a waking dream? In this site-specific, immersive version of Strindberg’s classic Dream Play, audience members mingle with actors as they weave together a performance encompassing music, dance, and text. Together, they tell the story of Agnes, mischievous daughter of the God Indra, as she journeys to Earth in her quest to understand the
human experience in all its messy, wild, joyful glory.

Late in the 2016-2017 season, the Department of Theater got news that our need for additional space had been heard by the University — the Department would be given a significant chunk of space on the Fourth Floor Arts Bridge. We took the opportunity to inaugurate that space with a ground-breaking immersive production directed by Mary Corinne Miller. Ten rooms on the ArtsBridge were turned into spaces our audiences could explore, with actors performing to and interacting with them. This marked the first time immersive work was part of our mainstage season, and the buzz generated accordingly led to sell-out audiences every night of the run.

**Infants of The Spring**
Adapted by Ifa Bayeza from the 1932 novel by Wallace Thurman
Directed by Ifa Bayeza
March 21, 23, 24, 28, 29, 30 at 7:30 p.m.
March 24 at 2 p.m.
School Matinee: March 30 at 10 a.m.
The Rand Theater
Imagine living in a boarding house during the Harlem Renaissance, elbow to elbow with a vibrant collective of African-American thinkers, writers, artists, musicians, and poets. All of that creative energy births brilliant work about race, gender, sex, class, and gentrification — but can it truly effect social change? And how do these artists balance the calling of their creative muses, their need to support themselves, and their belief in social justice? Ifa Bayeza’s vibrant adaptation of Thurman’s satirical roman a clef challenges us to consider the power of art to effect social change today.

Graduate student Ifa Bayeza came into the 2017-2018 year with big ambitions for her thesis work. A joint dramaturgy/directing student, she aimed to write an adaptation of Wallace Thurman’s 1932 novel and direct it. She achieved both, with the show performing in front of sizable houses, including a student matinee with nearly 250 students. Members of the African-American community, both those performing onstage and those in the audience, spoke movingly about seeing this powerful portrayal of the Harlem Renaissance.

**The Lily’s Revenge**
By Taylor Mac
Directed by Jennifer Onopa
April 18, 20, 26, 27 at 6:30 p.m.
April 21, 28, & 29 at 1 p.m.
The Curtain Theater
Hold onto your wigs, grab your glitter and get ready to dance! Award-winning playwright and performer Taylor
Mac’s *The Lily’s Revenge* is a stunning, five-part, epic journey. It turns traditional story-telling on its sparkly ear and invites us to step into a fantastical world as we follow a torch-singing lily flower determined to wed a human bride against the wishes of the God of Nostalgia. As The Lily embarks on a quest of self-discovery, audiences become part of the spectacle encompassing film, live music, and dance that celebrates radical acts of compassion and love.

We had waitlists for miles for our last show of the year, MFA grad student Jennifer Onopa’s thesis production clocked in at over four hours and included everything from musical numbers to puppetry to elements of Noh theater and drag shows in making its points about societal traditions and expectations about gender and sexuality. We used the play as a launching point for a collaborative event called Faces of the Fabulous. Held during Massachusetts’ ARTWEEK, that event featured one of our students as emcee, excerpts from Lily’s, and a celebration of the Fine Arts Center as a space that welcomes LGBTQIA diversity. Later, we brought many of the cast members to Northampton’s Pride march.

The flowers’ beautiful, eye-catching costumes for *The Lily’s Revenge* were designed by Christina Beam, one of four MFA students who tackled this show as their thesis. The others were director Jen Onopa, dramaturg/choreographer Gaven Trinidad, and lighting design Tamara Harris. Photo by Derek Fowles.
Re-organized: The Student Work Series

This year, in response to a lack of applications for our Cabaret 204 series and conversation with students, we re- 
alized that the Cabaret 204 format was no longer meeting students’ needs when they sought to mount their own 
works. We revamped our student production opportunity to create the Student Work Series. Instead of offering a specific space for independent productions, the department supports these efforts with a framework. Students 
learn the ropes of producing their own work through mentorship, assistance with calendars and booking, and guidance on other management tasks. Productions do still often take place in the Department of Theater, but have also gone elsewhere on campus, as well as offsite across the Valley.

The 2017-2018 Student Work Season included:

**THICK SKIN**
Directed by Gustavo Torres
Nov. 15, 16 at 8pm and Nov. 29, 30 at 8pm at 235 E. Hadley Road
“In a generation that couldn’t be more liberal and accepting, Thick Skin looks at who really controls the conversa-
sation, and whether good intentions are always enough.”

**QUEER AND NOW**
Devised by the company and directed by Garrett Sager
Dec. 1 @ 7:00pm and 9:30pm and Dec. 2 @ 7:00pm in French Hall Room 102, remounted in a revised format on Friday, March 2 at 9:30 and Saturday, March 3 at 7:00 & 9:30 in Fine Arts Center Room 204
QUEER & NOW is a new theatrical event that fuses drag, lip syncing, music, poetry, choreography, and gender play to create an evening of celebration and protest. Conceived in response to the increasing anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric in American culture, QUEER & NOW disrupts oppressive narratives through the celebration of queerness as a radical act.

**OUTSIDE LOOKING IN**
Devised by company and directed by Jen Onopa
Dec. 4th @ 5:30pm in the Old Chapel auditorium
An interview-based theatrical collaboration between UMass Theater students and the UMass Veteran Resource Center looking at the unique experiences that veterans have had while integrating into campus life.

**JESUS HOPPED THE A TRAIN**
By Stephen Adly Guirguis
Directed by Tatiana M. Rodriguez and Tyler DiBenedetto
Dec. 14, 15, 16 @7:30pm in the Artsbridge (FAC 4th floor)
“A critically acclaimed piece which focuses on criminal justice and mass incarceration, while exploring moral culpability and religious faith.”

**CARRIE THE MUSICAL**
Directed by Erin Hamilton
Jan. 26, 27 in the Old Chapel

**A NUMBER**
by Caryl Churchill
A reading directed by Garrett Sager
Feb. 5 & 6 at 7:30 in Room 204, Fine Arts Center
1675
A new musical by Jasmine Goodspeed
March 30 at 7 p.m. and March 31 at 2 and 7 p.m. in Fine Arts Center Room 204
A new musical about the tragedy of Deer Island

SIS! HOW’D YOU GET THERE!
A screening of a documentary and a photo art gallery by Sabine Jacques
April 27 at 7 p.m. at the New Africa House

ONE SPANISH EYE
A new devised dance theatre piece directed by Jasmine Mary Caamaño
April 27 & 28 at 7:30 p.m. in FAC Room 204

PRIDE GOETH BEFORE THE FALL
A thesis project by Devon Lennon — a contemporary adaptation of *The Persians* by Aeschylus
Tuesday, May 1st at 7:30 in FAC Room 204

SPELL #7
By Ntozake Shange
Directed by Sabrina Victor
May 3, 4, 5 in the Upper Rand Studio
A choreopoem for the stage

RITE OF PASSAGE
By Izzy Salant
Directed by Andrew Kim
May 4 & 5 at 7:30, May 5 at 2 in Fine Arts Center Room 204
David Greenbaum, a Jewish journalist in his late 50s, has just lost his wife, Maura, to suicide. He is now faced with the task of raising his son, Harold, who has mild autism, on his own, in the middle of planning for his Bar Mitzvah.

PLAY IN THE WOODS
Claudia Nolan’s MFA Thesis
May 5, 2-4 p.m. at the Amethyst Brook Conservation Area, Amherst, MA
Wander through the woods to experience some personal stories about fairytales.

35MM: A MUSICAL EXHIBITION
Directed by Erin Hamilton with music direction by Sean Sanford
May 5 and 6 in the Curtain Theater

UNGROUNDING
Gabriel Harrell and Vishnupad Barve
May 6 at 4:30 p.m. at Park Hill Orchard in Easthampton
Preview: 2018-2019 Season

We’re excited! Over the past few seasons, our focus has been on exploring new works and crafting original takes on classics, sparking vital conversations among artists and audiences alike as we build our community. The 2018-2019 season connects us as theater-makers and -experiencers not just in the present day, but with others throughout time. Whether they live in the past, present, or future, the characters in our upcoming plays grapple with the same issues that matter to us today, on this campus and in this valley, in ways that clarify our own perspectives and prompt reflection.

We hope you come travel through time with us in the 2018-2019 season!

Season Kick-Off Celebration
Oct. 2 at 5:30 p.m.
The Rand Theater
FREE, reservations encouraged
Curious to understand how all of our productions make sense within the bigger arc of a season? Join us October 2 for our second annual Kick-Off Celebration, where we’ll serve up an amuse-bouche of theatrical experiences to whet your appetite for what’s to come. Give us 45 minutes, and we’ll show you a season. Followed by a reception, and free and open to all!

Snowflakes, or Rare White People
By Dustin Chinn
Directed by Gabriel Harrell
Oct. 25, 26, 27, Nov. 1, 2, 3 at 7:30 p.m. | Nov. 3 at 2 p.m.
School Matinee Oct. 31 at 10 a.m.
The Rand Theater
We start our season funny, with Dustin Chinn’s pointed, futuristic comedy Snowflakes, or Rare White People. In Nueva New York in the 23rd Century, a cadre of nearly-extinct white hipsters escape the museum exhibit in which they live, bringing a perilous level of Caucasity to the rest of society. We’re thrilled for a second opportunity to engage with Chinn’s sly, hysterical commentary, which we first encountered in last year’s Play Lab.

What of the Night?
By Maria Irene Fornes
Directed by Vishnupad Barve
Nov. 29 & 30, Dec. 1, 5, 6, 7, 8 at 7:30 p.m. | Dec. 8 at 2 p.m.
The Curtain Theater
This production is actually four linked short plays by Maria Irene Fornes, one of our greatest and most influential living playwrights. She presents a thrillingly dangerous dystopian vision that spans 60 years, tracking an extended family of desperate characters whose lives are intertwined as they try to eke out a precarious living in the city’s violent underground. This Pulitzer Prize-nominated play is Fornes’ incisive exploration of the human hunger for survival by any means.

Wild Thing
Translated by Harley Erdman from La Serrana del la Vera by Luis Vélez de Guevara
Directed by Gina Kaufmann
Feb. 14, 15, 16, 21, 22, 23 at 7:30 p.m. | Feb. 23 at 2 p.m.
School Matinee Feb. 15 at 10 a.m.
The Rand Theater
Written in 1613, *Wild Thing* confronts gender in a way that feels astonishingly of-the-moment. Gila, a peasant girl who calls herself a man, furiously rejects the rules set out for her, preferring the life of a fierce warrior outlaw over subjugation to a husband and society. Join us for this first-ever English-language production of an extraordinary and constantly surprising play that has everything from slapstick comedy to sword fights.

**UMass New Play Lab**

Directed by Erin Eggers  
Dramaturgy by Shaila Schmidt, Tatiana Godfrey  
March 21, 22, 23, 28, 29, 30 at  
7:30 p.m. | March 23 & 30 at 2 p.m.  
The Rand Theater  
Play development is the heart of American theater, and UMass New Play Lab is our contribution to keep that heartbeat going strong. Last year, in addition to producing work by a brilliant professional playwright, we brought student work to the stage to resounding acclaim. We're doing the same this year, and we're wildly curious to see how this year's artists will innovate to bring us the best and brightest new plays.

**Sweat**

By Lynn Nottage  
Directed by Gilbert McCauley  
April 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13 at 7:30 p.m. | April 13 at 2 p.m.  
The Curtain Theater

Created through interviews with the citizens of Reading, PA, Lynn Nottage’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *Sweat* deftly and unflinchingly examines the complicated ways race, class, and gender intersect in a struggling factory town. Nottage’s well-drawn characters inspire us to think about how we overlook what hate can look like and how close it is to us, until we are forced to confront it.

**We’re inexpensive!**

$60 season subscriptions  
$25 student subscriptions  
$15 single tickets (Play Lab tickets are $7.50 each)  
$5 single tickets for students/seniors.  
All seating is general admission.  
Tickets and subscriptions: fac.umass.edu or 1-800-999-UMAS  
We now take credit cards and UCards at the door.

**Want to upgrade?**

If you purchase an individual ticket to *Snowflakes*, and decide to subscribe, you can apply your *Snowflakes* ticket price toward the cost of your subscription! (See website for restrictions)

**Student Work Series:**

Meet the next generation of theater artists and technicians.  
The Student Work Series makes our department an artistically-vibrant place with student productions of original scripts, plays or scenes, cross-genre experimentation, and explorations of theater’s new directions. Shows are usually open to the public and free. Visit us on facebook or check the Student Work Series page on our website for upcoming events.
OUR PROGRAMS
The Undergraduate Program

According to a year-end count, twenty-nine new majors joined the department this year, and the Undergraduate Advisory Council gave approximately thirty tours to prospective students. Our department numbers include nearly 150 majors.

They are a talented and committed group, who came together to help the department pull off one of the most challenging mainstage spring seasons in recent memory, with all three shows having large casts and complicated builds in all the shops. In addition, students put on independent productions around the department and campus, and even ventured into the community.

We have just finished up the first year of Community Meeting, instituted in response to students’ desire for more opportunities to communicate with faculty, staff, and other students about theater issues and theater-making in a setting outside the classroom. Intended as a forum for learning about fellow students’ work, mainstage productions, sharing concerns and ideas about the department, and discussing theater-adjacent topics, the forum has become a font of ideas that have already started to affect the way the department operates. Chief among these changes is the revamping of the way we handle independent work, as outlined in the Student Works Series section of this document.

Community meeting conversations about what students want and need from the department also led us to create the brand-new minor — see the next page!

This year’s graduating seniors pose with their Alumni Lifetime Passes. Photo by Anna-Maria Goossens.
Coming soon: The Minor in Theater

When we heard the students’ enthusiasm for the idea of a minor in Community Meeting, and knowing that over the years, we’ve gotten many questions about the minor from prospective students, we felt it was time to investigate further. Several Gen Ed faculty polled their students (non-majors who nonetheless have an interest in theater) to see if there really would be interest in such an offering. The result of the poll was an unequivocal yes.

Many students who love theater can't commit to the full major, whether it's because of another course of study or, in some cases, family resistance to the idea. The minor, we hope, will offer those students an opportunity to immerse themselves in theater without having to complete the full 36 credits.

The Theater minor will be only 16 credits, with students taking classes in two instead of all three undergrad areas, only one TH 110 class, and two of three classes chosen from TH 120, TH 140, or TH 160. Additionally, our Gen Ed classes can count toward the major. This makes the minor an enticing option for those who find us through the Gen Ed classes in the first place, while still asking of students that they consider theater from multiple angles, the way our majors do.
Multicultural Theater Certificate

Six students graduated from the certificate program this year, the largest cohort so far.

The group included Andrew Cathcart, Irisdelia Garcia, Sabine Jacques, Haley Quinn, Sabrina Victor, Janet Wang-oe, which is notable because several of these names are those of folks outside the major, and one student is from Amherst College.

That trend will continue going forward, as several Hampshire College students are currently working their way through the requirements.

Certificate director Priscilla Page’s Multicultural Theater Practice and Contemporary Native-American Performance courses were approved for permanent course numbers, further strengthening the course and the offerings it has brought to the department and campus in general. Priscilla Page performed a bit of outreach when she spoke with students visiting from the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe about the Multicultural Theater Certificate and her Contemporary Native American Performance course.

Work is still on-going to develop a version of the certificate for graduate students.

Multicultural Theater Certificate Director Priscilla Page proudly poses with this year’s cohort of certificate recipients. Photo by Anna-Maria Goossens.
Graduate Program

Seven graduate students defended their theses this spring.

They were a tightly-knit group, with four of them (Jennifer Onopa, Tamara Harris, Gaven Trinidad and Christina Beam) working together on *The Lily’s Revenge* as their thesis project. They were also a mold-breaking crew, with *The Lily’s Revenge* and Mary Corinne Miller’s thesis *Dream Play* taking our mainstage season beyond its usual confines of our theaters, *Infants of the Spring* offering us a first-ever adaptation of a famous Harlem Renaissance novel by Ifa Bayeza, and people journeying into an orchard to explore fairy tales with Claudia Nolan.

Chair Gina Kaufman, a longtime member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, worked with SDC to ensure that our two graduating directors received memberships as part of the Society’s Academic Initiative, which covers membership dues for the first year.

Looking ahead, we’re excited to welcome the new group of graduate students next year, a cohort that includes two REAL scholarship candidates. Having a full complement of design faculty helped with our recruiting efforts, and our designers are excited about the group coming in. We will not be recruiting in the fall.

To help the students joining us in the fall, the department has created a new handbook for the graduate program. The handbook will serve as a first stop for questions about policies and procedures of the department, such as our desire for truly collaborative projects from graduate students making proposals. Additionally, the handbook clarified matters such as the kind of additional work students must do if they wish to take a course technically intended for undergrads.

This year’s talented group of graduating MFA’s were honored at the end-of-year reception. The photo is missing Tamara Harris, who couldn't make it because she was designing a show in New York City. Photo by Anna-Maria Goossens.
Between retirements and sabbaticals, we have not been at full strength in the design area for some time. This year, however, we were joined by two new faculty members, both talented designers who have already inspired their students. They are Assistant Professor of Costume Design Yao Chen and Assistant Professor of Scenic Design Anya Klepikov.

Both faculty members were interviewed by students for profiles on our news page, excerpted below.

**New faculty member profile:**
**Assistant Professor of Costume Design Yao Chen**

By Jessica Dimmock ’19

When I recently interviewed Yao Chen, the Department of Theater’s new Assistant Professor of Costume Design, I asked her, “What show has been your favorite to costume design so far in your career?”

Her answer? “The next one.” Yao explained that she is always striving to make her next show better than her previous one, because she believes she can always improve and make her “next show [her] favorite show.”

It’s that forward-looking, ambitious attitude that makes Yao a great addition to the department. Yao is one of two new faculty members in the Department of Theater. Together, she and Assistant Professor of Scenic Design Anya Klepikov will give us a full complement of design faculty for the first time in several years, following the retirements of Miguel Romero and June Gaekle. [...]

Yao grew up in China and entered the field of costume design through the fashion industry, which has greatly shaped her costuming style. She received her first degree in fashion design from Dong Hua University in Shanghai. Through this major, she perfected her rendering skills, got experience in her own fashion studio, and was a dresser and swatcher backstage for fashion shows. However, after four years of attending school for fashion design, Yao discovered her love for fashion history, and devoted three more years to achieving her Masters Degree in fashion history. After completing this degree, she worked as a marketing supervisor for an estate company, which was “really fun because [she] got to talk with different kinds of people.” It was here that she realized she was at a major “pivot point” in her life, because she could either stay in China, or she could learn about
the other half of the world. She chose the latter, and began to study English so she could attend an American university to study costume design, because she had realized that that was her true passion.

Yao arrived at the University of Texas, Austin, in 2010, excited to complete her three-year MFA program in Costume Design. From there, she accepted a teaching position at the University of Florida and then eventually came here, to UMass, Amherst. Yao was drawn to UMass because it has such a “complete education structure;” we offer excellent undergraduate and graduate courses in dramaturgy, tech, and performance.

Though it is only her first semester here, Yao is already hard at work on multiple projects. She is costume designing Ifa Bayeza’s production of *Infants of the Spring* which performs next semester. Her research for this production has been “fascinating,” because she was not familiar with the Harlem Renaissance and this production serves as a perfect chance to explore this period in greater depth. In addition to this project, Yao is also advising the graduate costume students in their designs for the other plays in our season as well as some productions by the dance department. Furthermore, she is teaching the undergraduate costume design class and is working with the costume shops to retool the graduate and undergraduate student classes.

And that’s not all! Outside of UMass, Yao is costuming *The Little Prince* at a children’s theatre in Seattle. Yao has a passion for children’s theater: “I love, love children's theater.” Yao says that back in graduate school, she thought she was “too serious” for children’s theater, but now that she has gotten the chance to work with some in both the U.S. and China, she loves it because “there is so much opportunity for imagination, and you always have to trust your audience’s imagination too. It’s just lovely, lovely.”

It was here that I asked Yao to delve into the differences between American and Chinese theater because she told me that she had never participated in theater in school, because theater is not a part of the middle or high school curriculum in China. Chinese theater is rooted in Russian theater, with Chinese theater focused on the director’s concept and expression rather than intimate story telling for the audience. Due to the abstraction and the subjective story telling, there is a time barrier between audience and the story. In part because of her past in fashion – a for-profit industry – Yao is drawn to American theater because it takes the audience into account. She believes that theater has to be “open to the people” and that it has to be “understandable,” or it is the fault of the production. However, Yao did highlight that “commercial theater is growing in China,” so there is hope for more “audience-friendly” shows in the future.

**New faculty member profile:**
**Assistant Professor in Scenic Design Anya Klepikov**

By Christopher Franklin ‘21

“I love to watch actors interact with the sets and costumes I have designed, as we discover what works on stage, and what doesn’t.” This comment from UMass Theater’s new Assistant Professor of Scenic Design, Anya Klepikov, perfectly reflects her unique approach to theatrical design. For Anya, theatrical design is more than building beautiful sets and exhilarating costumes for a performance. Though that is part of it, she finds that the beauty of design is in the collaboration with other artists and the teamwork inherent in the design search. This collaborative approach to design has a profound effect on the way in which she teaches. She aims to inspire her students to work together and artistically inspire each other, while working to solve the needs of a particular production.

Anya has experience with and enjoys designing for many different genres. She has designed for theater,
opera, dance, installation, performance art, and a web-series. She created sets for several world premieres including *Radiunt Abundunt* and the opera, *Empty The House*. Additionally, she has been featured in *American Theater Magazine* for her set design of a production of *Glass Menagerie* at Triad Stage in North Carolina.

...According to Anya, “The genre of the production, or the type of production is not always the most important part. If I am working with an exceptional team, it can make all the difference. Even if I’m not too fond of the play, or the music, if there are people around me that I feel I can create with, the genre isn’t the most important aspect.”

Anya brings this collaborative approach to UMass teaching undergraduate design students as well as graduate students. Her undergraduate design students actively contribute design ideas that are incorporated into mainstage UMass productions. Anya particularly enjoys watching the undergraduate students grow in their understanding of set design as they find their passion in the process.

Anya is fond of incorporating mainstage productions into her curriculum: “I feel that after having wrestled with the design assignments in class, undergraduates are able to appreciate the actual productions of those same works on a deeper level,” she said about her undergraduate students. Her undergraduates are engaging to the point where their work is being featured in UMass Theater Department productions: this fall’s Introduction to Set Design class created possible designs for the Department’s production of *Infants of the Spring*, and one student ended up coming on board as the set designer of the actual production.

In addition to teaching undergraduate students, Anya is shaping a graduate program in Set Design and Technology, for students who are pursuing a professional career in set design. “Theater is always evolving and there are new models of the¬ermaking being explored and practiced today. With less money in the arts, organizations are cutting costs and set designers often have to wear many additional hats. Anya finds that designers are better equipped to function in a variety of the¬ermaking contexts if they have a strong grasp of construction principles along with the experience of working with many different kinds of materials. The Set Design and Technology MFA program aims to provide students with this foundation, furthering their technical savvy through work in the shop and many production opportunities where they also hone their design skills.

In other personnel news, we were thrilled this year that Martha Cuomo’s appointment as a lecturer became permanent. In addition to teaching acting classes, Martha has contributed significantly to the department’s outreach and community engagement work (see that section for details), and she spearheaded the work to set up our brand new minor.

Professor of Dramaturgy Harley Erdman received the the Josephine Roberts Award from of the Society for the
Study of Early Modern Women for his work translating early women playwrights of Spain. This honor is awarded yearly for “the best scholarly edition published in 2016 in the field of early modern women and gender,” and goes to Erdman, who translated the plays, as well as editors Nieves Romero-Díaz and Lisa Vollendorf. In the letter informing Erdman of the honor, the Society wrote, “The committee underscored in its choice how this skillfully translated edition of ten plays authored by three women playwrights from early modern Spain clearly contextualizes these plays in light of Golden Age Spanish theater, considers the various roles of female playwrights in this tradition, and makes explicit the significance of these playwrights and their works in the broader context of women’s and gender studies. They also commented that, taken together, the plays not only exemplify the diversity of women’s as well as men’s experiences, but also showcase the wide range of literary and creative outputs of the three playwrights in question. Finally, the committee noted that the translation is highly readable and has the potential to reach a broad audience beyond specialists in Spanish theater and scholars of literature, women, and gender. With this award, the committee hopes to encourage additional work in this important area. Congratulations on a wonderful edition!”

Next year, we look forward to being joined by Nia Ostrow Witherspoon as our playwright-in-residence. Nia, a Smith College alumna, was introduced to the department in September, when she was part of the Theater Alumnae of Color residency organized by the Five Colleges to showcase the work of alumnae who worked in theater and used their art to pursue social justice.

In addition to teaching classes on hip hop, feminism, and playwriting, she will advise students during their work on Play Lab.

Nia’s bio:

Nia Ostrow Witherspoon is an NAACP-nominated playwright, director, and vocalist/composer investigating the metaphysics of black liberation, desire, and diaspora. Called “fascinating” by Backstage Magazine, and featured on NPR for her curation of BlackARTMatters, Witherspoon is a current 2050 Fellow at New York Theatre Workshop, and Restorative Justice Director at Boerum Hill School for International Studies. Her work has been supported by BRIC, HERE, National Black Theatre, the Mellon Foundation, Astraea Foundation, Theatre Bay Area, Painted Bride, 651 Arts, and Lambda Literary, among other prestigious organizations. Recent publications include Missy’s Trick/(Un)Making Queer in the Journal of Popular Culture and SHE in Imagined Theatres (Routledge). She holds a B.A. from Smith College and a PhD from Stanford University.
Guest Artists and Instructors

Rachel Alderman, Artistic Associate, Hartford Stage – Casting session and hiring discussion in Career Prep course

John Bechtold, immersive theater-maker and theater instructor at Amherst Regional High School — Performance consultant for Dream Play

Lisa Biggs, performing artist and performance scholar at Michigan State University — Guest artist and panelist at Community Meeting and in classes as part of Theater Alumni of Color residency

Liam Byrne, drums — Guest musician for Runaways

Ruby Cain, actor — Cast member of Runaways

William Cantler, Artistic Director at MCC Theatre – Guest speaker in Career Prep course

Dustin Chinn, professional playwright — Play Lab playwright in residence and writer of Snowflakes or Rare White People

Roz Coleman, Red Wall Productions — “Putting an audition on tape” workshop for Carer Prep course

Double Edge Theatre, renowned artist-owned ensemble theater company and theater instructors — Guest instructors, workshop for theater students.

Jonah Dratfield, bassist — Guest musician for Runaways

Stephen Driscoll, actor, BADA Alumnus — Presenter of the BADA Scholarship, speaker at HFA Career Dinner event and at department post-show Q&A for Runaways

Matt Dunphy ’03, General Manager of Boston Bloomingdales — Speaker at HFA Career Dinner event

Kim Euell, playwright, new play development professional, multicultural theater scholar — Playwright-in-Residence; taught and advised playwriting, development and multicultural theater classes, adviser for Play Lab

Anthony Ferreira, musician, music director — Music Director for Runaways and The Lily's Revenge

Nate Gowen, musician — Percussion and synthesizer player for Runaways

Dustin Chinn. Photo courtesy of Dustin Chinn.

Kim Euell. Photo courtesy of Kim Euell.
Sabrina Hamilton, Artistic Director, Ko Fest — Speaker at HFA Career Dinner event

Kunsang Kelden, activist in the Tibetan Freedom Movement and producer of programs highlighting Tibetan, Mongolian and Kalmyk arts and culture — Guest artist and panelist at Community Meeting and in classes as part of Theater Alumni of Color residency

Alison Kerr ‘17, choreographer and actor — Choreographer for Runaways

Talya Kingston ‘07G, Associate Artistic Director at WAM Theatre — Guest speaker in Career Prep course

Finn Lefevre ‘17G, Adjunct Professor at Keene State and theater/community activist — Guest speaker leading a workshop on Theater of the Oppressed during Community Meeting

Sueann Leung, costume designer for theater, opera and dance — Guest artist and panelist at Community Meeting and in classes as part of Theater Alumni of Color residency

Tristan Lewis-Schurter, actor — Cast member of Runaways and The Lily's Revenge

Machine de Cirque, movement-based theater/circus company — Presenters at Fine Arts Center, offered a movement workshop to UMassTheater students.

Keegan Marshall-House, pianist — Pianist for The Lily's Revenge

Mike Mazzu, guitarist — Guitarist for Runaways

Moonfish Theatre, bilingual Irish troupe — Presented Star of the Sea at the Fine Arts Center, offered a workshop to UMassTheater students in advance of the performance.

Lou Moreno, Artistic Director of INTAR Theater — Guest lecturer and director of Runaways

Joe Salvatore ’97G, playwright, director, faculty member of the Program in Educational Theatre at New York University, and creator of the Verbatim Development Lab — Guest speaker, “How Did We Get Here?: Using Verbatim Documentary Theatre to Make Sense of Our Contemporary Political Landscape”

Brianna Sloane ‘15G, theater-maker, co-founder of TheatreTruck — Guest speaker in Career Prep course
Linnea Soderberg, wig and make-up artist — Guest speaker, ventilation workshop in the costume shop

Matthew Spellberg, theater scholar, instructor — Guest speaker in Career Prep course

Ben Stanton ‘00, lighting designer — Speaker at HFA Career Dinner event

Robin Swados ‘74, writer, playwright — Speaker at HFA Career Dinner event
and at department post-show Q&A for *Runaways*

**Linda Tardif**, actor, Managing Director at the Shea Theater — Speaker at HFA Career Dinner event

**Nick Vaughn**, scenic designer and installation artist — Guest artist and instructor, 3-hour masterclass in scenic design

**Denise Wallace-Spriggs**, Costume Crafts Artisan and Dyer at Huntingon Theater — Leader, costume techniques workshop

**Dawn Monique Williams**, theater director — Guest artist and panelist at Community Meeting and in classes as part of Theater Alumni of Color residency

**Ryan Winkles**, fight choreographer, Shakespeare & Co member — Guest lecturer in fight choreography, fight choreographer for *Infants of the Spring* and *The Lily’s Revenge*

**Nia Ostrow Witherspoon**, multidisciplinary artist investigating the metaphysics of black liberation, desire and diaspora — Guest artist and panelist at Community Meeting and in classes as part of Theater Alumni of Color residency

**Kristina Wong**, performance artist, comedian and writer — Guest speaker, Asian American Theater History

Bilingual Irish theater Moonfish Theatre presented a workshop to theater students in the fall. *Dream Play* director Mary Corinne Miller credited the company’s work with influencing aspects of her work on her production. Photo courtesy of Sean T. Ó Meallaigh / Moonfish Theatre Company
Student Achievements

We think our students are talented, driven individuals — and the evidence bears this out. Many are creatively busy outside the mainstage season, producing original works as well as their own takes on classic and up and coming work (see our Student Work Series page in this Year In Review). This year, we had two undergraduates — Nick Cummings and Tatiana Rodriguez — successfully join the slate of professional artists whose work was presented as part of our Play Lab.

Among the highest honors achieved by a student in the Department was the **2017-2018 UMass Amherst Rising Researcher** student achievement award, given to **Tatiana Rodriguez**. While the term “researcher” is more traditionally associated with scientific and other scholarship, UMass Amherst rightly recognizes the creative inquiry pursued by those in our department as a type of research. Accordingly, Playwright In Residence Kim Euell nominated Tatiana on the strength of her playwriting. In addition to being one the Play Lab works this year, Tatiana's plays have been featured in the Five College Word! Festival, which showcases the work of students of color at each of the Five Colleges with readings every year. Tatiana was honored at a luncheon late in the school year.

While the Department has a scholarship named for Frank Prentice Rand, the College also awards scholarships created to honor the memory of this much-respected faculty member, and several of our students received the HFA Frank Prentice Rand Scholarship. They were also honored a luncheon toward the end of the year, with Theater Chair Gina Kaufmann in attendance as well to fête them.

The recipients were:
Jessica Dimmock
Garrett Sager
Tatiana Rodriguez
Nick Cummings

Recognition in the Department

At the Department level, the **Frank Prentice Rand Scholarship in Drama** is given to undergraduate theater majors of exceptional scholarship and outstanding achievement in the areas of: Directing, Producing, Playwriting, Dramaturgy.

The 2018 Frank Prentice Rand Scholarship in Drama recipients are:
Nick Cummings
Erin Hamilton
Tatiana Rodriguez
Afrikah Smith

The purpose of the **Ed Golden Acting Scholarship Endowment** is to honor the exemplary teaching career of Professor Emeritus Edward J. Golden by recognizing and fostering students with exceptional acting talent through scholarship awards. Awards may be made to Theater majors who are either sophomores or juniors who have demonstrated outstanding promise and commitment to...
The 2018 Ed Golden Acting Scholarship recipients are:
Isaiah Grace
Rachel Hall
Lucas LaGuardia

The Susan M. and Larry G. Benedict Scholarship Endowment was created to provide undergraduate scholarship support for students within the Department of Theater who are studying theater design, production, and management. Special consideration will be given to students who have demonstrated technical proficiency and a commitment to professionalism.

The 2018 Susan M. and Larry G. Benedict Scholarship recipients are:
Jessica Dimmock
Thomas Kelleher
Erin MacDevitt

The Denise Lessard Wagner Community Spirit Award is given to individuals who, through their beyond-the-call-of-duty dedication and commitment, have made an outstanding contribution to the community spirit of the Department of Theater. Their names will be added to the plaque that is posted in the Curtain Theater Lobby:

The 2018 Community Spirit awardees are:
Olivia Holcomb
Ellen Keith
Elyssa Needle
Sabrina Victor
Helen Woods
Erin Hamilton
Gustavo Torres
Sabrina Victor


The Midsummer in Oxford program, run by the British American Drama Academy — or BADA — is designed for serious acting students at all levels over the age of eighteen and concentrates on classical acting with an emphasis on Shakespeare. The faculty consists of both British and American leading theatre practitioners and is run in association with Yale School of Drama. Department of Theater alumnus Stephen Driscoll has created the **Stephen Driscoll BADA Scholarship**. Each year this generous award covers half the BADA fee plus airfare for a qualified UMass student.

The 2018 Driscoll Scholarship recipients:

**Matthew Crawford**

Matthew will be joined by one other UMass student this summer: **Emma Perakis**
Alumni Achievements

Probably the buzziest news to come out of the Department of Theater was the fact that one of our alumni had been a stunt actor in the year’s buzziest film: *Black Panther*. **Keisha Tucker ’06** doubled for Danai Gurira’s Okoye in a stunt that involved riding atop a moving car and played one of the Dora Milaje fighting force in a climactic battle.

Keisha was featured on the UMass home page:

A shaven-headed woman in a flowing red evening dress kneels on the roof of a luxury car as it careens through a busy cityscape. It’s a standout scene in Black Panther and a centerpiece of the movie’s trailer—and the stunt performer is Keisha Tucker ’06, a University of Massachusetts Amherst Department of Theater alumna.

In addition to that marquee moment as the stunt double for Okoye, the character played by Danai Gurira, Tucker appears later in the film as a member of the Dora Milaje, the all-women honor guard that protects the monarch in the fictional African nation of Wakanda.

The movie is both a blockbuster and a cultural moment, and Tucker is thrilled to have played a part in it. “Who doesn’t like to inspire little kids?” she asks.

The movie is sparking important conversations, too, notes Tucker. “I didn’t really realize as much as I do now how much representation matters, but I feel like everybody has their eyes more open now. It’s cool to see—maybe there’s a little shift going on with more cultures being represented.”

A theater major at UMass Amherst, Tucker also took many dance classes and performed in theater and dance productions. Her intention was always to head to Los Angeles to break into acting after graduation, and that’s exactly what she did. While her stunt work in Black Panther is getting her noticed (she’s been a stunt double on several episodes of 911, which also stars Black Panther’s Angela Bassett), Tucker notes that she’s an actor in her own right, with several web series and a number of film acting credits on her IMDb page.

Stunt performers, Tucker explains, come from a variety of fields—martial arts, work with guns, motorcy-
Tucker has always been an athlete, listing gymnastics, track, softball, and others among her sports. With that background, it was no surprise her entry into the field came from working as an extra on a project and watching the stunt performers. Intrigued, she worked out a barter agreement with the stunt coordinator: Tucker helped run classes for kids in exchange for learning stunt skills, such as how to fall safely and how to do ratchet pulls (where a person appears to fly backward, as in an explosion).

It's proven to be a good move for her; she got her SAG/AFTRA card and has steady work. “Getting stunt work,” Tucker says, “is different from getting acting work. I feel like there’s less auditioning.” Instead, she says, it’s about personal relationships. Over her 10 years in Hollywood, she has worked hard to perfect her skills and build up a network of people who know she can deliver and be a positive presence on set. “It’s not just skills and looks; it’s also energy.”

Tucker got the Black Panther gig on the strength of another stunt performer’s word.

“The girl who mainly doubles (Danai Gurira) mentioned my name to the stunt coordinator because they were looking for a girl. I submitted my stuff—head shot, résumé—and I was willing to shave my head and work in 30-degree weather,” she says.

The job was with the film’s second unit in South Korea for three weeks (the friend who recommended her was on the first unit in Atlanta). Because the character of Okoye has a bald, tattooed head, Tucker had to have her head shaved and temporarily tattooed nearly daily.

In her other work on the film, a reshoot of a major battle scene, she's a character in her own right. “Just because you're doing a stunt doesn't mean you're not acting. . . . Sometimes, as a stunt person, you’re your own character. Like in Black Panther, I was one of the Dora Milaje, and I had to do a lot of acting on the battlefield.” She laughed, “Just, hopefully that leads to acting with lines.” Tucker doesn’t want to jinx anything, but she's had some promising meetings, and “the movie might have opened up those doors.”

Although breaking into the film industry is hard, Tucker said she can’t imagine doing anything else and is glad she stuck with her dreams.

She urges others in the same position she was in 10 years ago to stick with their dreams, but take it one step further: "If you really love it, make sure that people know that you do!"

Notable alumni news:

Gregory Boover ’13 appeared with Annette Miller in Amy Herzog’s 4000 Miles to wide acclaim at Shakespeare & Co. this summer. Photo by Christopher Duggan.

Jeff Donovan ’91 appeared in Sicario 2: Soldado.

Katie Henoch ’13 made her big-screen debut in Chappaquiddick playing one of the Boiler Room Girls who was friends with Mary Jo Kopechne.

David Korins ’99 designed War Paint and Bandstand on Broadway.

Bill Pullman ‘80G has a successful series on USA, The Sinner.

MFA alumni and TheatreTruck co-founders Brianna Sloane ‘14G and Elizabeth Pangburn ‘15G attended
WAM Theatre's first-ever Berkshire Leadership Summit last October, putting them in the room with leading thinkers and doers trying to change the gender profile of artist at all echelons of American theater.

Lighting designer **Ben Stanton ‘00** was nominated for a Tony award this year for his work on *Junk*.

After speaking eloquently about the work she does during the Five College Alumni of Color residency, **Dawn Monique Williams ‘11G** continued to turn out high-quality work including directing a very well received production of Lisa Kron's *The Secretaries* for the Profile Theatre.
Community Engagement

Work by the Committee

This year, as ever, we made many ad hoc efforts to reach out to various constituencies beyond our walls — we must always remain open to those unexpected opportunities, of course — but we also took steps toward crafting a bigger-picture approach thanks to the work of our Outreach and Engagement Committee.

Capably helmed by Lecturer Martha Cuomo, with members Amy Altadonna, Megan Lewis (Fall), Gil McCauley, grad student Vishnu Barve and undergrad liaisons Tatiana Rodriguez and Afrikah Smith, the committee had a busy year. The Committee specifically set a charge to reach out to younger members of the community, and to that end, members of the committee:

- Attended the Northeast Regional Thespian Festival in Portland, ME
- Attended the Massachusetts State Thespian Festival in Acton, MA
- Led an acting/theater workshop for 65 students from Kiley Middle School (Springfield) at the Commonwealth Honors College
- Videoconferenced with Springfield Central High at the UMass Center at Springfield (UMCS) through College
- Attended Matters 4 U (CM4U)
- Adjudicated at the Spotlight Theater Festival at the Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter School
- Worked on developing an outreach video that can be shown to students at UMCS prior to a videoconference Q&A session
- Represented UMassTheater at the Spring Overnight Program/UMass URep, inviting prospective students to attend part of the final Lily's Revenge design run and speaking with students and parents about our department
- Connected students/alums with Williston for paid workshops/work sessions and led a workshop at Williston Northampton School

Many of these connections were viewed as a first step by the committee; we hope to build further relationships with CM4U and other groups who come to the Springfield location, the Thespian Festivals, and UMassURep, among others.

Additionally, in the coming year, we hope to begin reaching out to offer workshops at GCC, HCC, and other nearby community colleges. We plan to partner with Music and Dance to attend the Fall 20118 NACAC (National Association for College Admission Counseling) Performing & Visual Arts Fair in Boston to talk about our departments individually and our collaboration in Musical Theater (which is a big selling point to many high school students interested in theater)

Upward Bound

Among the lasting effects of our Kick-Off Celebration was our strong connection with Tyson Rose of Upward Bound, which helps students from the Springfield High School of Commerce build skills to be successful in college. His attendance sparked a conversation that resulted in a new summer partnership between our two organizations, with Professor Gilbert McCauley, actor Shannon Lamb, and MFA grad Jennifer Onopa teaming up to teach a theater course to students attending the Upward Bound summer program.

The proposal for the course (which received generous financial backing to cover the instructor fees from Associ-
This summer, the Department of Theater is partnering with Upward Bound to offer a brand-new summer course that would meet Upward Bound’s English and Theater curricular goals. The course, broadly conceptualized as Literature and Performance, would be open to Upward Bound students entering their senior year of high school or their first year of college. The theme of the course would focus on Afro-futurism and the potential embodiment of new futures, with an exploration of the power of myths in how we build/frame society and narratives. Literary analysis and theatrical performance would link with great works (novels or short stories) by prominent Afro-futuristic thinkers.

Participants will:
- Experience a new approach to literature through its intersections with the fields of theater and performance.
- Engage and interpret literary texts by reading and performing segments of them.
- Interrogate the layers of meaning within texts including character development and the authors’ use of technical tools to realize their intent.
- Understand pieces of history and social organization that make the works studied important.
- Create and perform theatrical stories that respond to these works, including participants’ conceptions/representations of embodied possibilities for the future.
- Gain first-hand experience and become accustomed with theater and theatrical theory and practices utilizing multiple resources and performance spaces available through the UMass Theater Department.

Student Matinees

We offered two student matinees this year. While *Runaways* in the fall had a small matinee audience of 80, it was an appreciative audience that responded well to the show. There were several groups that took advantage of our free workshops to explore the issues around the show as well as the artistic background of the piece; everyone got access to our study guide. Our matinee for *Infants of the Spring*, meanwhile, was extremely well-attended, with 250 students from eight different schools and youth groups checking out our study guide and staying for the Q&A in addition to the show itself.

Other Efforts

Dylan Larke working at the College of Humanities and Fine Arts, organized a dinner that gave our students an opportunity to talk to Theater alumni who had taken their degrees down a variety of different paths — everything from managing a Bloomingdale’s to artistic direction — about how theater helped them on those paths.

And of course, as always, our dramaturgs carried the engagement flag for us by holding Q&As and other events pre and post-show that allowed audiences to dive deeper into all sorts of topics related to the shows they saw.
Members of the Department of Theater are ambitious and seek to take full advantage of all the opportunities that come our way, even if there are financial obstacles. Often, the Department is to help faculty, staff, and students get the financial support they need for their creative endeavors. When the Department doesn't quite have the necessary resources, however, our members are proactive about seeking out additional resources of support.

This year, students and faculty secured nearly $70,000 in grants and other funds to support their work.

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$9,373.00
Development

We are truly fortunate, here in the Department of Theater, to have a group of alumni who have our backs. They have come through for us in such beautiful ways again this year, supporting our students and improving our department.

Gabe Capolupo ’86 helped us all the way from California this year. Our production of *The Lily’s Revenge* was a massive undertaking, and Gabe’s support of the work was indispensible to our production. As we put it in our program:

This production of *The Lily’s Revenge* is sponsored by Gabe Capolupo ’86, whose generous underwriting made possible the level of costume and scenic design realization to which our students would otherwise have been unable to aspire.

The opulent, campy beauty of *Lily’s Revenge* was testament enough to Gabe’s support, and made for a spectacular capper to our year.

If it feels like we say thank you to Stephen Driscoll every year — well, it’s highly-deserved! Last year, we were thrilled to announce the creation of the Stephen P. Driscoll Musical Theater Endowment, which will eventually fund multi-disciplinary collaborations with other departments and organizations in support of musical theater, workshops, and more.

Stephen has already begun to support such endeavors outside of the auspices of the fund. This fall, when we needed to hire a choreographer to round out the creative team for the production of *Runaways*, Stephen stepped up to financially support the hiring of Alison Kerr ’17 for that position. (Instead of including a donor profile on our donation program inserts this year, we profiled Alison as an example of someone who benefited from the generosity of a donor — see the image at left) You can read the story about Alison and Stephen’s long-standing connection in the department in the copy of the insert included in this section.

Stephen has a large and generous circle of friends, and after one of them, Rick Guimond, asked about contributing to the Endowment and learned that he couldn’t, we were inspired to create the Stephen Driscoll Musical Theater Fund. That fund now allows
friends of Stephen’s, alumni, and others to contribute toward the goal of supporting the same sorts of projects as
the endowment eventually will.

That fund became the focus of our UMassGives effort this April, with our 48-hour fundraiser bringing in over
$2000 from alumni. (The gifts were many and generous, but a special shout-out goes to alumnus Matt Dunphy
’03, who gave exactly $47 to put us over the top when we stalled out at $1953 for a few hours.)

The other program Stephen continues to help us with in the department is the Stephen Driscoll BADA Scholar-
ship, which covers the airfare and half of the tuition cost for the top UMass Theater applicant to the British
American Drama Academy’s Midsummer in Oxford acting intensive program. Matt Crawford is the UMass
Theater student going with Stephen’s support this year. (He will be joined by first-year student Emma Perakis.)

We want to acknowledge the continuing effect of Rob Corddry, Jeff Donovan, and Bill and Tamara Pullman’s
work to establish the Ed Golden Acting Scholarship. We awarded Scholarships to three students this year: Lucas
La Guardia, Rachel Hall, and Isaiah Grace. All three warmly thanked the donors. We were particularly moved by
Lucas La Guardia’s story and with his permission, have included it here.

Dear Rob, Jeffrey, Bill, and Tamara,

I am writing this letter to express my immense gratitude for being chosen as the recipient of the Ed Gold-
en Acting Scholarship. This scholarship is the culmination of a year of hard-work and fabulousness, and
it means the world to me. I was astounded, electric, and joyful when my name as announced as one of
this year’s recipients of the Scholarship.

Three years ago, I decided to venture out of my hometown in Brazil and come all the way to UMass to
pursue my dreams. At first, I must say, my goals were not clear to me; I started my career at UMass as an
Economics and Political Science major. As my freshman year went by, I realized why I was having such a
challenging time: I was missing a place I could call home. This pursuit of a home away from home threw
me on a journey in which the first checkpoint was the Purple Lobby. I still remember my first meeting
with Gina Kaufmann – who will have my eternal gratitude — and her wise words: “Still a freshman? Most
people take longer to find their way here.”

As a novice in the world of theater, I soaked up all the knowledge and love for theater around me, and
quickly realized I had come to stay. Beginning with my first acting class and moving on to my first play
in the Directing II Series, I began to realize the transformative powers of theater. Not only was I being
changed from within, I could see how theater shaped the community we live in. I grew excited to embark
on a journey of speaking the truth and telling stories often left untold.

I cannot express in words how embraced I feel by our theater community on campus. My growth and
success would not be possible without the contribution of everyone I came across: the professors who
share their knowledge so generously, my fellow students who are always there to support me, the produc-
tion team who makes all dreams come to life on stage, and you, the alumni who so generously support
the work of students like me.

The Ed Golden Acting Scholarship will alleviate my end-of-semester expenses, but even more important-
ly, it will encourage me to keep moving forward and perfecting my craft. I am proud to say that I have
found a home within the Department of Theater, and for that, I will be eternally grateful.

Sincerely,
Lucas La Guardia
We continue to be truly grateful to Susan M. and Larry G. Benedict, whose Scholarship Endowment, established some years back, recognizes students in the Department whose work is focused behind the scenes rather than onstage. This year’s recipients were Jessica Dimmock, Thomas Kelleher, and Erin MacDevitt. In her thank-you letter, Jessi spoke to her goals for the future and how receiving the award helps her on the path to those goals:

Dear Susan and Larry Benedict,

I am writing to thank you for the Benedict Scholarship. I feel so fortunate to have been selected as the recipient and I greatly appreciate your generosity. I am a junior dual degree candidate in English and Theater, also pursuing a Certificate in Arts Management. I chose UMass because I knew I would be able to get an excellent education while still participating in rewarding extracurricular activities, working a campus job, and having meaningful experiences with a diverse group of friends.

I hope to one day run a children’s theater or teach middle school theater education, which is why I am focusing on theater management, lighting and costume design, as well as stage management. The Department of Theater has allowed me so many opportunities to grow as a designer and stage manager that help make that dream a reality. This year, I have stage managed the Season Kickoff Event, the New Play Lab Series, and \textit{The Lily's Revenge}! I have also been in a student directed musical and just finished lighting designing a musical this semester as well. Furthermore, next year I will get to broaden my horizons even further and costume design a Mainstage show for my thesis. Additionally, during the winter months, I work off campus at the Academy of Music in Northampton music directing and stage managing their youth musical each year.

I understand that many of these opportunities are only available to me through donors like yourself. I am beyond grateful to have received the Benedict Scholarship this year from the UMass Department of Theater. Again, thank you so much for your support; I greatly appreciate it.

Sincerely,
Jessica Dimmock

Finally, although Professor Frank Prentice Rand is long gone, his name lives on not just in the Theater but in the scholarship created to honor him; undergraduate theater majors honored in directing, producing, playwriting, and dramaturgy this year were Nick Cummings, Erin Hamilton, Tatiana Rodriguez, and Afrikah Smith.
Facilities Updates and Plans

Construction hasn’t started yet on the Fourth Floor Arts Bridge, but we already look forward to taking over part of that space officially. We already have begun to explore the possibilities of the space, with student and main-stage shows moving into the space as it currently is. Once construction starts, we’re projected to have spaces for prop and costume building, a sound studio that will be shared with other departments, and a rehearsal space.

Meanwhile, we are thrilled with the possibilities presented by the basement space in the New Africa House, where we are already holding classes and organizing event. The process of renovating the New Africa House basement performance space began when Penny Remsen sent an MFA student, Michael Blagys, to that space for a project. Professor Judyie Al-Bilali has taken the project over from there, with valuable assistance from other department personnel including, prominently, department electrician Michael Dubin, who helped with electrics and a light set-up that accommodates performances.
APPENDIX

Audience Survey —
2017-2018 season survey summary
and survey plan for the coming season
Audience Survey — 2017-2018 results and analysis

This is the fifth year of our survey.

Since the beginning, we’ve been clear that while it may not hold to the most rigorous statistical standards (since none of us in the department is a statistician), what we have looked for and found, over the five years of the survey are patterns and confirmation or challenges to our assumptions and observations. When possible, we’ve also checked our survey information against other demographic information which was provided by such sources as our email/list serve application, MyEmma, information about our website, and our social media.

Taken together these sources reveal that we have an audience that is heavily based in Amherst and often strongly affiliated with UMass and, to a lesser degree, the other Five Colleges. We have started to include the possibility of non-binary answers in the gender question, but find that even with the expanded options, the majority of our respondents are identifying as women. The racial and ethnic make-up of our audience remains roughly parallel to that of the local population in general. That said, we had one show where we did not collect any data and one where only minimal data was collected, and we suspect that full information might have affected the numbers on both the gender and racial background of our audience this year.

We continue to experience a real lack of patrons in the 26-39 age range. In that, we are not alone — this is the “parent” demographic, and they experience several barriers to attendance: we in particular do not often present shows appropriate for all ages, and more generally, they encounter the costs associated with an evening out that they would at any theater.

Our audiences are enthusiastic arts consumers, often participants themselves, and enjoy supporting a variety of visual and performing arts.

We have spoken frankly with students this year about how important it is that they talk about their work with friends, family, and classmates. While we do well in terms of people accessing our website for information, and we have a very active engagement that is above industry goals on our instagram account, the fact is that audiences, when polled, cite word of mouth and the desire to support someone they know as significant reasons both for awareness AND for the decision to attend a show.

Aside from that most immediate connection, people learn about our shows via our website, our emails, and our social media. Articles, print ads and posters continue to do their work as well. We tried bus signage this year, but it did not give us much in the way of results.

People attend our shows because of friends, yes, but our audiences are a culturally curious group. They’re intrigued by the descriptions of our shows, looking for a cultural experience, and eager to learn and have their views challenged. They rank us as better or the same in quality as other local shows they’ve seen, and an overwhelming majority would recommend us to their friends. Not much would discourage them from attending a show in terms of content — barriers are more likely to be money or schedule.
Coming soon: audience surveys go online

Although we have updated and slightly edited some questions for our survey, the lay-out and means of administering the survey have been largely the same since its inception. Next year, thanks to the generous folks at the Fine Arts Center, we will be able to update our communication with our patrons and our means of gathering information from them. Most notable will be our new survey, which will no longer be inserted in the program but emailed to our patrons. Aside from the new delivery method, which we hope will reach folks who might not otherwise be inclined to fill it out, we are writing some new questions and will be configuring the survey, all in an attempt to get meatier answers to the most important questions. The draft of the new survey, which is in the process of being finalized, is below. (It may change slightly in the final version.)

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!

_____ Why did you attend tonight’s production? (please check all that apply)
   _____ It’s a class assignment.
   _____ I’m supporting someone who is working on it.
   _____ I like this piece/artist/genre.
   _____ I’m completely new to this piece/artist/genre and was curious.
   _____ The description on the poster/website/etc. sounded interesting.
   _____ I wanted to learn more about the issues brought up in this production.
   _____ I was looking for something to do.
   _____ It was inexpensive.
   _____ Other

Please give us three words or phrases that you would use to describe this production to a friend:
1______________2______________3________________

Do you feel that your time, effort and money in getting to the production was well-spent?
   _____ Yes       _____ No

If Yes:
Would you recommend this production to a friend?
   _____ Yes       _____ No

Would you go see other similar productions here?
   _____ Yes       _____ No

Would the opportunity to attend a Q&A or panel discussion on a given night make you more likely to buy tickets to that performance?
   _____ Yes       _____ No

What kinds of things would stop you from attending an arts event (please check all that apply)?
   _____ Expensive tickets
   _____ Too much violence/sex
   _____ Subject matter doesn’t feel relevant
   _____ Scheduled at inconvenient times
   _____ Parking is expensive or inconvenient
Age: __________

Gender identity: __________

Racial or ethnic background: __________

Where do you live? __________

Are you affiliated in any way with one of the Five-Colleges (student, parent, employee)?

_____ Yes  _____ No

If Yes:

_____ Which school are you affiliated with?

_____ UMass

_____ Amherst College

_____ Smith College

_____ Hampshire College

_____ Mount Holyoke College

Nature of affiliation:

_____ Student

_____ Faculty

_____ Staff

_____ Alumnus/a

_____ Parent

How did you learn about this event (check all that apply)?

_____ Word of mouth/friend is involved

_____ Class assignment

_____ UMass Theater website

_____ UMass Theater email

_____ UMass Theater poster

_____ UMass Theater season brochure

_____ Social media posting

_____ Online calendar listing

_____ Print or online article

_____ Print advertisement

_____ Other

Which played the greatest role in convincing you to attend (check one)?

_____ Word of mouth/friend is involved

_____ Class assignment

_____ UMass Theater website

_____ UMass Theater email

_____ UMass Theater poster

_____ UMass Theater season brochure

_____ Social media posting

_____ Online calendar listing

_____ Print or online article

_____ Print advertisement
Would you like to be on our mailing list? We'll enter your name in a drawing for free tickets as a thank you!