# Table of Contents

Connecting at a distance, Reckoning with our reality  Page 3

The 2020-2021 Production Season
Conventional Wisdom Defied  Page 5

The 2021-22 Season
Back to the Theaters  Page 16

Our Programs
Undergraduate Program  Page 18
Multicultural Theater Certificate  Page 19
Graduate Program  Page 20

People
Faculty and Staff  Page 22
Supporting Our Learning and Creativity  Page 28
Alumni Highlights  Page 32

Anti-Racism Work  Page 35

Replenishing the Rainy Day Fund  Page 38

Facility Updates and Plans  Page 39
2020-2021
CONNECTING AT A DISTANCE,
RECKONING WITH OUR REALITY

We had the benefit of half a semester’s worth of online classroom experience March — May 2020, but there were still many unknowns as we entered this second year of learning and creating theater under COVID-19. How to teach online, how to connect with new students, how to produce theater online, how to safely accommodate those classes that were able to meet in person — these and other questions kept faculty, staff, and students in conversation over the summer.

We began the year with most of our classes online, barring a few exceptions.

We also scheduled an all-online fall season slate, featuring both recorded and live materials. We pivoted, hard, away from trying to do what one student described as “the sad trombone version of real theater.” Instead, we embraced the parameters of Zoom to create works that explored new directions. We used the chat feature to create interactivity and intimacy with our audience, and created break-out rooms that offered the opportunity to select what thread of a performance to follow. Bolstered by our
successes, we planned a spring season that featured live-streamed online work which explored digital special effects.

At the brilliant suggestion of Prof. Judyie Al-Bilali, we also planned an ambitious festival that responded to our ongoing reality. We scheduled a slate of pre-recorded and live online work, as well as in-person presentations that brought us together for the first time in a year with an enthusiastic audience practically starving to view live in-person work again.

This was also a time of taking stock and planning to build back better. Like many PWI (Predominantly White Institutions), we were challenged in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests to look at how we could serve our BIPOC community better. Faculty and staff participated in workshops, and, with the valuable guidance of Consultant Trenda Loftin, we formed an Anti-Racism Committee to create a “Roadmap” toward redressing the areas where we are falling short vis-a-vis our BIPOC community members. Parallel efforts began to revise elements of our undergraduate program to better recognize the unique circumstances of BIPOC students, faculty, and staff. We will continue our work to draw up the Roadmap, as well as to work on important changes to the undergraduate program in Fall 2021.

Amid all of this work, those of us who were in-person saw first hand the activity concentrated around the front of the building. After a halt on the work at the start of the pandemic, work on the Fourth Floor Arts Bridge proceeded throughout the year. We are spending the summer drafting plans to move into that space in Fall 2021, and we are excited to spread out in a new space that accommodates new shop space, equipment, and rehearsal space.

We’re excited to see what next year looks like, and to welcome everyone — students, staff, faculty, special guests and patrons — back into our spaces.

A screen shot of a scene from Gender Experience TM by M Sloth Levine, a new play streamed for audiences in March as part of Visionary Futures, conceived by Josh Glenn-Kayden.
The 2020-2021 Production Season
Conventional Wisdom Defied

It’s important to understand the context of our 2020-2021 production season. As the pandemic took hold, the performing arts were simultaneously more appreciated than ever and in a state of crisis. Live performance spaces shut down and many industry professionals found themselves out of work and lacking the income needed to participate in the arts. At the same time, people seeking an escape flocked to streamed concerts, readings, and plays to experience the laughter, inspiration, and uplift the arts can provide.

We knew any events we delivered would, at least initially, need to take place over screens. We also knew we wanted to be in keeping with many in our industry who eliminated or lowered ticket prices to make our work more financially accessible, a statement about our current economic reality and a recognition of the accessibility issues surrounding the arts.

Even so, would people show up? A Google search of statistics showed that between 35 to 55 percent of registrants for live online events do NOT attend. Additionally, the percentage of virtual attendees who check out of events lasting over 20 minutes is around a third, according to another Google search.

What actually happened in our events? The short story is we consistently had at or near the number of registrants show up, and while there was melt the longer an event went, it was usually well under that dreaded third.

Factors in our success were:
1. brevity — most events were under an hour,
2. connection — our audiences built organically from existing communities of department friends and family, many of them able to support their friend/child/relative with repeat viewing or attendance from around the nation in ways that are usually impossible, and
3. interactivity — our events encouraged interaction, whether it was leaving comments in chat or actually coming on camera to interact with performers.

We witnessed remarkable moments of genuine connection: audiences not just praising the cast for their work, but thanking them for the opportunity to engage and join their community for the event. One COVEN-19 audience member responded to the cast’s invitation to share how everyone was feeling by posting about a personal tragedy she had just experienced. She was uplifted by both cast and audience, and thanked them for the comfort she found in attending the event on a dark night for her.

The same feeling of appreciation and reciprocal generosity occurred when we took a few steps toward in-person presentations as part of the Festival we mounted at year’s end. Audiences were of necessity kept small for these events, and overall, people were thrilled to experience theater, even standing outside in the rain or seated at a distance and watching masked performers.

The nature of both online and in-person events this year made exact totals hard to come by, but we are proud to note that we finished the year with **over 3000 audience members/viewers**, and, with some events still available on demand, that number is **still growing**.
Please read on for notes about each production, including box office, viewership, and/or participation.

**When the Soul Looks Out: Selections from Dr. Yusef Lateef’s Creative Writing**

Presented as part of Yusef Lateef: A Centennary Celebration by the Fine Arts Center  
Curated and directed by Priscilla María Page  
Premiered Oct. 9, remains available on-demand

**Event description:** Dr. Yusuf Lateef is a towering figure in jazz, a deeply spiritual and philosophical man whose recordings and teachings have left a lasting imprint in the world of music. We are proud to be a part of the Centennial Celebration of Yusef Lateef, coordinated by Glenn Siegel as part of the Magic Triangle Series out of the UMass Fine Arts Center. To honor Dr. Lateef’s legacy, Dr. Page has curated a filmed presentation of his writings, Midnight in the Garden of Love, Spheres, and Another Avenue, performed by Five College and UMass Theater alumni, faculty, and students with guest artists Miles Griffith, Mary LaRose, and Fay Victor.  
*Presented by the UMass Fine Arts Center’s Magic Triangle Series and UMass Theater.*

Dr. Page, who is the UMass Theater Director of the Multicultural Theater Certificate Program, brought us into this celebration of jazz great Yusef Lateef’s many talents. In a video recording, guest artists, faculty, and students performed writings by Lateef; the video was posted on the website dedicated to the celebration, which also included jazz performances, interviews with collaborators, and other items.

**Audience:** The video has been viewed 191 times through the Fine Arts Center’s website, as well as 92 times through the posting on the Department’s own YouTube channel.

**COVEN-19 — Samhain**

Produced by Maegan Clearwood, Percival Hornak, and Helen Rahman  
Presented Oct. 29-31 live only, via Zoom

**Event Description:** 2020 is on fire, and more than ever, we are being called upon to own our individual and collective powers, make meaning out of utter chaos, and manifest tangible, seismic change. In late October, when the veil between our world and the other is at its very thinnest, our Coven will perform a live, remote ritual for the community that addresses the grief and pain we are all experiencing — but also the potential for transformation in these strange times. The time is ripe for magick-making: join us.  
*Presented at Samhain in the Fall 2020.*

With break-out rooms re-dubbed “Brooms” and audience members chanting the final spell in unison with the cast,
this production represented a full embrace of what Zoom theater could offer. Thirteen performers presented a ritual that encouraged audience participation on camera and in the chat, welcomed folks turning on cameras at set points in the event, and was intentional about drawing the viewers into actively joining the “coven” for the evening. The event was well-received by audiences, including many who noted that it was a relief from the stressors of the pandemic and other circumstances of their current life.

A second iteration of the piece was part of the Rights of Spring Festival and is discussed below.

Audience: With some screens providing access for entire families and room groups, our best guesstimate is that we welcomed 149 people to the live-only event.

**Visionary Futures: Science Fiction Theater for Social Justice Movements — November**

Conceived and directed by Josh Glenn-Kayden
Presented Nov. 12, 15, & 19, live only, via Zoom

Event description: This project takes its inspiration from the Octavia’s Brood anthology, which explores the connections between radical speculative fiction and movements for social change. We are commissioning three professional playwrights to each write a 30-minute play of visionary fiction that confronts urgent issues of our time. Each writer will be paired with an activist whose work intersects with the play’s subject matter. These writer/activist teams will collaborate to create work that is visionary in its approach while also grounded in contemporary activist thought.

The plays, written to be performed digitally, will be in conversation with each other and will present three different visions of future worlds.

Each performance will be followed by a post-show discussion with the creative team about the process.

*Unity* by Phaedra Scott
*Beyond Reform* by Jaymes Sanchez
*Gender Experience TM* by M Sloth Levine

MFA Directing student Josh Glenn-Kayden wanted to explore new ways of collaborating on new work and created this project, working with playwrights and activists to create work that used speculative fiction (aka sci-fi) to imagine solutions to modern problems. In this iteration of the work, audiences saw staged readings of first drafts of these three plays, which were then revised for a fuller spring production. The three pieces tackled climate change and colonization, prison reform, and gender identity.

Audience: With some screens providing access for entire families and room groups, our best guesstimate is that we welcomed 146 people to the live-only event.
Café Subterrain — December & February
Devised and directed by Rudy Ramirez
Presented Dec. 1, 2, & 3 live only, via Zoom accessed through a dedicated website
Re-mounted Feb. 10, 11, & 12 live only, via Zoom accessed through a dedicated website

Event description: Immersive theater works by placing its audience amid the action; we’re taking this concept remote. Café Subterrain invites audience members to gather in a digital café where they’ll journey through virtual rooms to meet resistance agents from across time and space who will share their stories and empower audience members to commit small acts of change in their home communities. The idea: to give comfort and hope that the world can emerge from hardship to a better place, and that the struggle can feel like celebration.

As with COVEN-19, this production capitalized on the ways Zoom allows for interaction between screens. A team of actors embodied individuals from time periods and drew audience members into conversations at their tables, comparing their historical experiences with audiences’ comments about those same issues. Audiences could “table hop” between break-out rooms to have as many conversations as they wanted. Because of the interactivity of the event, audiences were limited to 25 a night.

Audience: With some screens providing access for entire families and room groups, our best guesstimate is that we welcomed 77 people to the live-only event in December, and 67 in February.

Women in Theatrical Design
Arranged by the design faculty
Presented live online via Zoom and remains available on demand via YouTube
March 2: Costume Designer Anita Yavich in conversation with Prof. Yao Chen
March 8: Sound Designer Jane Shaw in conversation with Prof. Amy Altadonna
March 16: Lighting Designer Jane Cox in conversation with Prof. Penny Remsen
March 30: Scenic Designer Mimi Lien in conversation with Prof. Anya Klepikov

Event description: In a series of Zoom conversations that will be free and open to a national audience, UMass Theater presents four brilliant practitioners of theatrical design who will share their thoughts on their work and how they experience their field as women. Costume Designer Anita Yavich, Sound Designer Jane Shaw, Lighting Designer Jane Cox, and Scenic Designer Mimi Lien will talk about their art and practice, how they have found ways to assert their voice in a male-dominated sphere, and how they view the economics of making a career in their field. The conversations will be moderated by the designers’ counterpart faculty members in theater, Yao Chen, Amy Altadonna, Penny Remsen, and Anya Klepikov. In private meetings, each designer will also conduct portfolio reviews and offer career advice to the department’s MFA design students.
With the exception of costume design, theater design and technical fields are dominated by men — one recent study shows that in Off-Broadway theaters, more than two-thirds of set, lighting, projection, and sound design hires from 2010-2015 were men. Made possible with support from Women for UMass Amherst (WFUM), a network of alumni that promotes the advancement of campus programs that provide access, support, and opportunity for UMass Amherst students, with preference to those projects that positively impact UMass Amherst women and their respective communities.

“Our guests will help give our students additional tools and impetus for challenging the sexism and bias out there,” said Theater Chair Harley Erdman. “The message is important for students of all genders who will be working in these male-heavy fields. We are thankful to WFUM for jumpstarting this idea and generously supporting it.”

When COVID forced the cancellation of visits by scenic designer Mimi Lien and lighting designer Jane Cox in spring 2020, we retooled our event into a Zoom series of four speakers — Cox and Lien, now joined by sound designer Jane Shaw and costume designer Anita Yavich — all addressing their creative and professional journeys as designers and speaking to their position as women in an industry that is largely male-dominated. Each designer also offered portfolio reviews to our students.

Audience: Because the event was presented by WFUM, we were asked to estimate student and alumni participation. We tracked registrants vs attendees for this event, which confirmed for us the pattern we observed with other performances — we had less “melt” for our online events than the industry standard, even for this series of hour-long events.
Anita Yavich: 63 preregistered, 66 attendees; about 30% students/faculty and/or alumni
Jane Shaw: 38 preregistered, 44 attended; about 25% students/faculty and/or alumni
Jane Cox: 57 preregistered, 70 attended; about 30% students/faculty and/or alumni
Mimi Lien: 60 preregistered, 57 attended; about 25% students/faculty and/or alumni
Total viewership of the live events: 237

Recordings:
Lightly-edited video recordings of all talks were posted on YouTube within 2 days of each talk, expanding the number of participants for each event.
As of writing, views for those events are:
Anita Yavich: 87 views
Jane Shaw: 114 views
Jane Cox: 126 views
Mimi Lien: 82 views
Total viewership (thus far) of the recorded events: 409

Total views of talks including live and recorded thus far: 646
**Visionary Futures: Science Fiction Theater for Social Justice Movements — Spring**

Conceived and directed by Josh Glenn-Kayden  
Presented March 24, 25, 26, 31 and April 1 & 2, livestreamed over YouTube and available on-demand through the Rights of Spring Festival website

**Event description:** This project takes its inspiration from the Octavia’s Brood anthology, which explores the connections between radical speculative fiction and movements for social change. We are commissioning three professional playwrights to each write a 30-minute play of visionary fiction that confronts urgent issues of our time. Each writer will be paired with an activist whose work intersects with the play’s subject matter. These writer/activist teams will collaborate to create work that is visionary in its approach while also grounded in contemporary activist thought.

*Unity* by Phaedra Scott  
*Beyond Reform* by Jaymes Sanchez  
*Gender Experience TM* by M Sloth Levine

After the performances in November, the playwright/activist creative teams worked to revise the plays. During the new rehearsal process, the team grew to include a team of streaming producers who added backgrounds, titles, special effects, etc., to up the production value of this trio of plays. Recordings of the livestreams were added to the Rights of Spring Festival website for on-demand viewing.

**Audience:** Collectively, the six livestreams and in-demand viewing options added up to 859 views as of writing.
The Rights of Spring Festival
Produced by Judyie Al-Bilali
A festival of pre-recorded and live online events, as well as in-person events on the UMass campus, presented April 22-May 3

Event description: Let’s imagine out loud!
With the above rallying cry, the UMass Amherst Department of Theater embarks on its Rights of Spring festival, a mix of virtual and live, outdoor, socially-distanced events scheduled to take place from April 22 to May 2. What better antidote to the isolation and disconnection of this particular winter than to gather to celebrate who we are and what’s important to us. Join UMass Theater for a series of events meant to inspire, amuse, entertain, and spark hope for what’s to come.
The beauty of festivals, says Professor Judyie Al-Bilali, who conceived the idea for the Rights of Spring, is that they serve as a way for a culture to rehearse, renew and if necessary, revise its core myths — to examine its values such as liberation, community, and heroism.
The collective events that make up a festival tell a story about the people who participate in it. This festival, coming after a hard year of massive social upheaval, serves as a statement from a culture that’s redefining what’s important.
The festival kicks off with invocation that includes Earth! an outdoor installation celebrating our planetary home and acknowledging the stewardship of the areas’ indigenous peoples. We will present two live outdoor events, Monuments of the Future and Devising a Future Together, created by teams of artists who are responding to the unique times in which we find ourselves with exciting cross-disciplinary work, as well as a virtual event, COVEN-19, that is reimagined for Beltane after a memorable premiere at the Samhain full moon at Halloween.
Collectively, these events and the other pieces on the schedule are focused about creating community by any means available — in Zoom rooms, in conversations, through a unified appreciation of beautiful work. They represent a redefining of what we fit under the definition of theater — those aforementioned Zoom rooms, performances created by teams creating from scratch, scenic installations that spread out across the campus, web-based design presentations that encompass beauty, environmental awareness, and the wonder of old-fashioned story-telling.

The Rights of Spring Festival came out of a desire to make a statement of celebration and joy, and to make a case for how indispensable all the members of the department are, including faculty, staff, and students. The festival celebrated theater by continuing to offer online events as well as taking the first tentative steps toward a “normal” theater with limited capacity outdoor (and indoor) events. We even folded in collaborations with other organizations. For all events, but notably for the in-person events, audiences repeatedly expressed their joy at participating in theatrical events. Even when weather prompted re-schedulings or venue changes, which might reasonably have prompted complaints in the past, audience members were happy to go with the flow because they just wanted to see theater.
Festival information was presented via a dedicated website, which remains active and offers on-demand viewing of recordings of both online and in-person events: www.rightsofspringumass.com

Numbers for some events are not available due to the various platforms on which they were presented, but between live presentations and continued on-demand viewing of archival recordings of in-person and online events, we can estimate upwards of 800 viewers as of this writing.

**Earth!, Innovation, Atlas**
April 24, outdoors on the UMass campus (rescheduled from April 22)

**Event description:** Taking pride of place beside the Campus Pond just in time for Earth Day, this striking piece of public, activist art will raise awareness about ways to address climate change. Earth! is a transdisciplinary project between Theater technology and Environmental Conservation and the School of Public Policy students, who have creatively applied technology, science, and art to technically design and fabricate a 24’ diameter planet earth structure that is also a model of sustainability, as the construction materials are meant to be reused in future projects.

**Monuments of the Future**
April 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30 and May 2 on the UMass campus

**Event description:** Seven beings rise up from the earth, Seven symbols move across a campus. Seven spokes on a wheel take us through the never-ending cycle of change. Monuments of the Future is an interactive installation and performance collaboration between theater artists across disciplines. Join them as they journey across our campus and reimagine what it means to create images designed to speak across time.

Our opening combined Earth!, an Invocation by students, and a parade led by one of the Monuments. We were able to capitalize on a beautiful spring evening to draw a crowd of not just intentional audience members, but many who were outside on campus and viewed or participated in some aspects of the event. Monuments required the greatest nimbleness of our creative teams and company, as we were bedeviled by wind and rain on several days which prompted us to change dates or move venues. Faculty, staff, and students alike deserved kudos for their unflagging commitment to helping the show go on and pivoting at a moments’ notice to accomplish whatever needed doing — Production Manager Julie Fife in particular was critical in keeping all wheels turning. Kudos, also, to Maryanne Steele, Assistant Director Campus Safety and Fire Prevention at Environmental Health and Safety, who was extremely responsive in working with us to adjust what we were presenting, and even enabled us to move a handful of events to an indoor, timed presentation.

Audience: Collectively, Monuments of the Future (including Invocation, Earth!, Atlas), was attended by an estimated 280 in-person audience members

**Devising a Future Together**
April 23, 24, & 25 at 3 p.m. outdoors on the UMass campus

**Event description:** The company of Devising a Future Together invites you to experience the culmination of their exploration of what it means to come together in joy and community when safety demands we be physically apart. Join us for an outdoor theatrical and
musical celebration!

A team including a director, designers, music director and performers devised from scratch this play with music which mused on the various demands, difficulties, and realizations the group had experienced over a year of dealing with a pandemic.

Audience: *Devising a Future Together* was attended by 73 in-person audience members.

**COVEN-19, or, Magicks for Unprecedented Times — Beltane**
Produced by Maegan Clearwood and Percival Hornak
Performed April 29, 30 and May 1

**Event description:** COVEN-19 is a community of artistic witches who are called upon to own our individual and collective power, make meaning out of utter chaos, and manifest tangible, seismic change. This spring, the Coven will collectively create a process-driven ritual in honor of Beltane, or May Day. The time is ripe for magick-making.

COVEN-19 returned to the virtual stage in time for May Day with a revised ritual. Audience members were invited to practice self care and engage to set boundaries and define goals over the Zoom online performance.

Audience: With some screens providing access for entire families and room groups, our best guesstimate is that we welcomed 151 people to the live-only event.

**A Gathering of Grandmothers**
Presented live online via Zoom May 2 at 4:30 p.m.

**Event description:** Via a mix of recorded and live material, Brown Paper Studio presents a collage of conversations with elder Black women of the Five Colleges and community about the history of New Africa House and the impact of Black culture in the Valley.

The penultimate event of the festival was an online event with recorded interviews with elders of the local Black community and the students who had interviewed them and shared their thoughts about identity.

Audience: Between live and on-demand viewings, we are estimating 87 viewers.

**Studio Showcases**

**Event description:** We’re thrilled to be showcasing the work that’s coming out of some of our classes as part of the Festival. Some projects will be pre-recorded or hosted live on Zoom, while some will be presented in person on the UMass Campus. Here’s what we have so far, but stay tuned for additions and more details as works emerge from the creativity of our students and their faculty mentors!

One of the benefits of the “container” of the festival is that is allowed us to more prominently share the end-of-semester works that are not usually part of a production season, including class projects.
and thesis presentations. Audiences were delighted to stream podcasts, audio plays, attend live events, and view exhibits of design work. Due to the formats of these events, this is the category for which our viewership numbers are the least precise, but we estimate that 50 attended the live events and at least that many more likely viewed the on-demand items.

• **Voices from the Void** — Voice over students working with Professor Elisa Gonzales offer a pre-recorded online presentation of folktales and myths. Premiering online on April 26 at 7:30 p.m.

• **The Freedom Artist Project** — A cast of 12 performers working with Professors Gilbert McCauley and Paul Dennis, doing excerpts from The Freedom Artist, by Ben Okri. To be performed live on the UMass campus on April 28 at 5 p.m.

• **Directing II presentations** — Projects showcasing work by students of Professor Gina Kaufmann, to be performed live on the UMass campus on April 30 at 2 p.m.

• **RESPIRATION.** — Students working with Professor Judie Al-Bilali and graduate student Tatiana Rodriguez collaborate to create a performance that mixes live online and pre-recorded elements, on April 27 at 5 p.m.

• **Podcasting** — Professor Amy Al tadonna and graduate student Bianca Dillard are guiding students through creating podcasts that capture the experience of creating the festival, exploring its social and theatrical goals, and reflecting on its impact.

From our graduate student designers:

**The Cunning Little Vixen**
Premiering online April 23 at 2 p.m.
Storytelling and sustainability fold into a vivid presentation in costume designer Mikayla Reid’s work, as she creates character designs for this vibrant Czech opera while also investigating the viability of natural, more environmentally-friendly dyes.
*Made possible in part by a grant from the UMass Arts Council.*

**Notre Dame de Paris - The Hunchback of Notre-Dame**
Premiering online April 23 at 2 p.m.
Scenic and costume designer Calypso Michelet and lighting designer Sydney Becker use new technologies such as 3D modeling, 3D printing, and laser cutting to bring to life a world that bridges past and present in their vision of the French musical, Notre Dame de Paris.

Finally, we proudly hosted the **WORD! Festival** this year as part of our festival.
Presented live online via Zoom on May 1 at 2 p.m.
Through the WORD! Festival professors in the Five Colleges identify and nurture student writers who engage in multicultural themes and aesthetics. Our efforts build community between and among the departments of theater and the communities of color on each respective campus as we take turns hosting this celebration of new work. The playwrights who present their work receive an award of $100 from the Five College James Baldwin Memorial Fund. We are proud and excited to host the 2021 online version of this event as part of our Rights of Spring Festival this year.
A selection of photos by UMass campus photographer John Solem illustrates the richly varied offerings presented during the Rights of Spring Festival this spring.
The 2021-22 Season: Back to the Theaters

The Season Selection Committee this year included Chair Gina Kaufmann and fellow faculty member Anya Klepikov, undergrads Alison Butts and S. Helen Rahman, staff members Willow Cohen and Julie Fife, and grad student Percival Hornak.

In this edited excerpt of the proposal, they outlined their priorities thusly:

As we emerge from the pandemic and slowly begin to return to the kind of theatre-making to which we are accustomed, a season that is nimble, flexible, and adaptable is essential. There are a lot of questions yet to be answered about what will be possible next season in terms of audience capacity and safety practices, but we believe that our proposal is adaptable to a variety of circumstances while staying responsive to what our community wants and needs. Other questions we considered while crafting the season include: what will best help our community heal from the shared trauma of enduring a global pandemic and a nationwide reckoning with white supremacy and racist violence? How can we build trust and serve the needs of all stakeholders in our community? What are our students craving after a year without in-person performance and collaboration? How can we build a season that does not tax our design and technology students and staff while providing opportunities that they’ve missed during this past year and a half? What themes do we have the capacity to reckon with as we engage in the process of healing? Where can we find joy?

Our proposed season is nimble and provides opportunities for all stakeholders in the department — there are challenging and exciting roles for undergraduate actors, opportunities for new play development with graduate student playwrights as well as a faculty playwright, and a selection of plays that approach healing from a variety of perspectives, offering our community joy through dance, humor, rage, and love.

This season offers space to process the past year together in addition to ways to come together as a community to support one another and our work, and we believe it can pave the way for moving forward together.

Pending rights, as of this writing, our anticipated season line-up is:

EVERYBODY by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins
Oct 15, 16, 20, 21, 22 at 7:30 p.m., Oct. 23 at 2 p.m. in the Rand Theater
Directed by Rudy Ramirez
Content advisory: Strong language, discussions of death
“You’re dying, Everybody. And you’re dying alone.”

Brandon Jacobs-Jenkins’ play, written before the pandemic, proves a prophetic boon in bringing an audiences an opportunity to deal with the fear and grief that we will probably still carry long after we put away our masks. Everybody offers a funny and cathartic confrontation with Death (who is just trying to do their job, after all) through an adaptation of a 14th century morality play. Death comes for Everybody on what should have just been a fun night at the theater, and Everybody must confront the limits of friendship, family love, material comfort, and the human body itself in an attempt to determine the one thing that they can bring with them as they leave this world.
DANCE NATION by Clare Barron
We are excited to have guest director Dawn Monique Williams ’11G with us for this production. Choreographer to be announced
Nov. 12, 13, 18, 19 at 7:30 p.m., Nov. 20 at 2 p.m. in the Rand Theater
Content Advisory: Nudity, gore, coarse language, depictions of self-harm, simulated masturbation and descriptions of masturbation, sex and sexual violence
Somewhere in America, an army of pre-teen competitive dancers plots to take over the world. And if their new routine is good enough, they’ll claw their way to the top at Nationals in Tampa Bay. An ensemble of dancers of different ages, races, ethnicities, body types, and gender presentations examines the challenges and triumphs of growing up in this play about ambition, coming of age, and finding one’s soul in the heat of it all. Dance Nation interrogates what “womanhood” is, and embodies a powerful release of rage, joy and liberation.

WITCH by Jen Silverman
Directed by Rudy Ramirez
Feb. 25, March 3, 4, 5 at 7:30 p.m., Feb. 26 at 2 p.m. in the Curtain Theater
Content Advisory: Strong language, violence, and blood
“What if there is something amazing ahead of us, and all we have to do is burn down everything we know to get to it?”
Based on a Jacobean play written when witches were still being burned across Europe, Witch follows a devil named Scratch as he plays with the desires, grievances and ambitions of two young men, only to see him shocked and intrigued when an outcast woman becomes the first to refuse his offer. Jen Silverman’s play offers a collection of richly drawn characters all forced to confront how their desires are shaped by, and may even be able to do undo, the systems of power that limit them.

LOS OLVIDADOS: A MEXICAN AMERICAN CORRIDO by Elisa Gonzales
Presented in partnership with Breath of Fire Latina Theater Ensemble (www.breathoffire.org).
Directed by Sara Guerrero
Musical arrangement and composition by Moises Vázquez
April 7, 8, 9 at 7:30 p.m., April 9 at 2 p.m. in the Curtain Theater
Content advisory: Use of racial slurs, and discussion of a child’s death
Inspired by the classic structure of a corrido, a traditional Mexican song style that draws on storytelling, folklore, and oral history, Olvidados: A Mexican American Corrido, is a new, musically-driven, theatrical re-imagining of the many untold stories of the Mexican Repatriation of the Great Depression, where over one million Mexicans and Mexican-Americans were illegally and unconstitutionally deported, or repatriated to Mexico. We see the Repatriation and its effects unfold through the eyes of four women, including the playwright’s grandmother and great-grandmother, who were repatriated to Mexico in 1931, the effects of which still echo through the Mexican-American community today.

FRINGE FEST ’22
A celebration of varied projects, featuring UMass New Play Lab To be presented April 21 to May 1 at multiple venues, details to be announced
This event will feature many opportunities for students to showcase their work and projects. It will include, as anchors, the UMass New Play Lab, led by grad students Bianca Dillard and Percival Hornak and featuring pieces developed under the “13-P” collaborative model, as well as class showcases and other end-of-semester projects spearheaded by undergraduates. There will be many opportunities for undergraduate actors as performers. More information is to come later in the fall semester.

The final season is subject to change pending rights, and the above descriptions are still in draft.
OUR PROGRAMS

Undergraduate Program

Exciting shifts are happening in the Undergraduate area, as the program adapts to our times and student numbers grow.

The department is transforming the undergraduate area to make the major more flexible and accessible and sustainable for the coming decades. The program will be restructured to meet to the shifting needs of undergrads and look at how to use the minor, more popular every year, to bring in folks from across the campus who might not otherwise engage with us.

We also anticipate a revised handbook that will help demystify some of the aspects of the program. We expect to be welcoming prospective students back to campus, and to have faculty, staff, and students reaching out via conferences and other events to attract new students.

Meanwhile, in her final report to the faculty and staff, Undergraduate Program Director Amy Altadonna offered an upbeat perspective about our program. After fluctuations as the effects of the minor played out, this past year saw the numbers of both the minor and major increase — in a pandemic! We ended the year with 91 primary and 22 secondary majors, as well as 44 minors.

She noted that:

We are offering something of value that undergirds the collegiate experience, as you can see in our growing minors numbers. We bring diverse voices together for creative exploration, expression and problem-solving and give students an opportunity to grow in all kinds of ways...in hard skills, in technology, and in self-expression and content creation. You see the leadership we foster manifested in our new UAC, which took a proactive role in supporting the department socially and interpersonally over the past year. We learned a lot about communication, community and how to support students during this year, and these lessons will have lasting effects as we move forward with our students over the next year.

With recruiting forced online this year, Altadonna held live sessions with admitted students, bringing in faculty and staff from performance and design, technology, and management areas for 2 separate sessions, both of which resulted in students committing to the major.

Advising also went largely online, with the website maintaining a page that has helps registration run more smoothly and faculty running advising meetings over Zoom.

Also new this year is the UAC — no longer the Undergraduate Advisory Council but the Undergraduate Activities Council. Under the student leadership of Ali Farina, Sena Yacteen, Jemma Kepner and Fleur Kuhta, the UAC recruited a general body, wrote job descriptions for board members, created a mission plan for the UAC, offered regular “social Saturdays” to encourage communication and intermingling of undergraduates in a student-only space, organized peer mentoring pairs for freshmen and transfers and put on a “4-1-1” event for students to discuss and learn more about department courses. They also collaborated to create a virtual tour of the department for incoming and prospective students. Useful during the limited campus accessibility during the pandemic, we anticipate that it will continue to serve as a first look for future prospective students who cannot immediately travel to campus.
Multicultural Theater Certificate

Multicultural Theater Certificate Program Director Dr. Priscilla Page did not award any certificates to students this year, but that doesn’t mean the program was inactive.

There are five students currently in the program at various stages of completion. Page expects that number to grow as all Five College members resume a fully in-person academic calendar in the fall — a significant percentage of certificate students have been non-majors and students from other campuses, making the program a valuable connector to the rest of the campus and Five College community.

Dr. Priscilla Page did not award any Multicultural Theater Certificates this year, but in addition to teaching classes, she remained active as a mentor to students through her involvement in the WORD! Festival, which “identifies and nurtures student writers who are engaging in multicultural themes and/or aesthetics.” The festival, presented live online and still accessible as a recording on YouTube, was hosted by UMass Theater as part of the Rights of Spring Festival.
Graduate Program

Despite all obstacles, the Graduate Program area had a strong year, according to Graduate Program Director Chris Baker. Seven MFA students graduated from the program this year, and five are returning next year, when they’ll be joined by the incoming cohort of nine first-year graduate students. Said cohort includes students from Brazil, Costa Rica, India, Iran, and South Korea, and while we are keeping a watchful eye on any visa complications the pandemic may cause, we are excited to once again be welcoming talented theater makers from so many different areas, as well as the varied perspectives to theater-making they will bring to our department.

Next year is not a recruitment year for the department, which gives some time for the program to look at best practices in other, similar departments, and to find ways to boost recruitment of underrepresented students. The design areas also expect to collaborate on a new brochure that highlights their areas specifically, so as to continue to strengthen their recruiting pool.

Additionally, Baker noted the following accomplishments of current and recent grad students:

- Xinyuan Li took 2nd place at SETC Design Competition 2021 for his Long Day’s Journey Into Night design, awarded by judge Rachel Hauck (winner of the Tony for Hadestown recently).
- Dramaturgy Alum Gaven Trinidad was named one of Theatre Communications Group Rising Leaders of Color.
- Design Students Mikayla Reid, Calypso Michelet and Maryam Hemayati were all awarded Arts Council grants to support their thesis projects.
- The design portfolios of Mikayla Reid and Calypso Michelet were featured in Design Showcase East, as part of Design Week, a virtual collective of MFA and BFA design showcases from around the country.

First-year grad student Rudy Ramirez directed two iterations of their online piece, Café Subterrain, remotely this winter, then flew up from Texas this spring to join us to direct their in-person project, Monuments of the Future. Photo by John Solem.
At left, graduating MFA scenic and lighting design student Xinyuan Li. Above, scenic and costume design grad student Calypso Michelet models a costume created by fellow grad Mikayla Reid for her thesis, The Cunning Little Vixen. Photos courtesy of Calypso Michelet.
Putting the big news right up front, we were thrilled to have one of our faculty members recognized for his teaching this year. Here’s our news story about Milan Dragicevich:

**Milan Dragicevich receives 2021 College Outstanding Teaching Award**
By Sofia Sallaway | Wednesday, May 12, 2021

The UMass Department of Theater is proud to share that Professor Milan Dragicevich is one of two recipients of the 2021 College Outstanding Teacher Award from the College of Humanities and Fine Arts. This highly-competitive award is given to faculty members within the college who demonstrate excellence in teaching and honor their instructional accomplishments. Students have a strong role in determining the winners for the award.

Dragicevich teaches many classes for the department including Stage Movement, Acting Shakespeare, Performance in Detonated Language, and Actor/ Director Collaborations. From the beginning of his career, he felt drawn to teaching. “I intuitively felt I had an exciting way to present lost knowledge, especially in earlier historical eras, where students from centuries past had access to a way of viewing the world that might be important today. I want to build a bridge between classical training and contemporary adaptation, incorporating the diverse range of backgrounds, voices, and cultures today,” says Dragicevich.

His style of teaching greatly impacts his students in a way that develops their self confidence while bringing new meaning to the material. Former student Luke Bosco ’20 says “acting, contrary to common belief, is not putting on a character like a mask. It is the stripping away of the ego and the self, removing your own mask, and in doing so, discovering a genuine and unspoken human connection. Milan understands this, and through his amazing work, his students begin to understand it too.”

Dragicevich’s teaching philosophy focuses on inspiring students to connect with the material and challenges them to ask the best of themselves. He also understands that achievement is not measured with a rubric, but with breakthrough moments. This is especially shown in his Stage Movement course where students show progress through their confidence and strength in the physical training exercises. Bosco recalls a time where a classmate was nervous about a certain exercise. To help, Dragicevich confided in the student about how that exercise intimidated him as well, then continued to do the exercise alongside the student for the rest of the semester. A student who is committed “can soar, can really grow and acquire skill and new insights which lead to artistry,” says Dragicevich.

Dragicevich’s work outside of UMass Theater as a performer/playwright has often intersected with his work at UMass. He has engaged students as actors for productions, creating opportunities.
for students to grow more as performers. In 2016, his play REFUGEE was produced in the UMass Theater department and later premiered at an international theater festival in Serbia called the Joakim Interfest, in 2018. “It was an amazing bridge between University training and professional real-world application,” mentions Professor Dragicevich. This was the second time he brought students to the festival. His time as a professor at the UMass Theater Department has influenced many students as he encourages them to be the best possible version of themselves and helps them grow as artists.

We are also thrilled to have welcomed a new faculty member to our department, Elisa Gonzales, who dove right in to perform in both iterations of Café Subterrain as well as Monuments of the Future, and who will be part of next season as well. Here’s an excerpt of a story introducing her to the community:

**Professor Elisa Gonzales finds an authentic voice**

*By Anna-Maria Goossens | Tuesday, October 20, 2020*

![Elisa Gonzales](image)

The point of voice class, says new UMass Theater Assistant Professor of Voice and Acting Elisa Gonzales, isn’t to learn how to sound like everyone else.

“There is this precedent of the ‘correct’ way to sound, the ‘correct’ way to be — and that’s not a sustainable way to train actors anymore,” she said. Gonzales, who is Chicana, is part of a wave of BIPOC voice instructors and scholars who are looking at how voice connects to, and is an expression of, identity and culture.

“We have to understand and appreciate and embrace home base first. We have to look at our history, at our origin, and to get a sense of self first before we can take possibly take on another character’s voice or another person’s dialect,” she said, “If somebody asks us to take on General American, for example, we have the skills to do that. But being able to express ourselves through our identity with intelligibility and power and flexibility is the ultimate goal.”

Gonzales is an acting and voice instructor trained in Fitzmaurice Voicework, an active member of the Voice and Speech Trainers Association (VASTA), a performer, a devised theater-maker, and a scholar who examines, among other things, how the discipline of voicework is changing.

At UMass, she’s been teaching beginning acting and voice remotely, and next semester, recognizing that formats like radio plays, podcasts, and other virtual presentations are likely to be part of the theater landscape going forward, she’s offering a voiceover class called The Craft of Voiceover: Vocal Transformation and Storytelling.

“Voiceover artists are busier than ever. They are really having to develop their at-home recording skills and production skills. So not only are we going to explore what it is to vocally transform, and the storytelling aspects of voiceover, I think students will gain a sense of what it is to build a home studio and what it is to produce your own work,” Gonzales said. “I think the skills that you gain in storytelling for voiceover translate to so many other kinds of fields because you really have to learn how to be expressive in new ways.”

... Although Gonzales was admitted to Emerson College’s BFA Musical Theatre Program, her college years were also when she developed the appreciation for language and text that have
led her to her current career, and she switched to the acting program.

Specifically, she fell in love with playwright José Rivera’s work.

“I think it was the first time that I really saw strong Latinx characters being portrayed on stage, which was really important to me as a Latina myself,” she said, “But also, regular, casual, everyday language wasn’t enough for them to express themselves in these situations that they’re navigating. The language that José Rivera uses is poetic, magical, and larger than life, and that really was the turning point for me, was finding his plays.”

After graduation, Gonzales headed to New York to find work as a performer. Many of the auditions her agent was sending to were roles “that put me in a box,” she said, and she found that many friends who were also artists of color were experiencing similar frustrations.

“My experience as a Mexican-American, as a Chicana is so different than some of these roles that they were trying to pigeonhole me into,” she said.

Gonzales and a group of friends created the Impulse Initiative, a multi-cultural dance and theater ensemble and committed to creating and producing works that were representative of their diverse experiences. The group performed at the New York Fringe and at the Nuyorican Poets Café, and she got to meet her theatrical inspiration, José Rivera when the group produced his Sonnets for an Old Century.

After 6 years, she moved to San Diego, which she terms a “pivotal” moment in her career because it connected her to a vibrant network of Latinx theater artists in California and helped her find mentors for her career.

“I think for the first time I felt seen as an artist and as valued as an artist,” she said.

Eventually, she decided it was time to expand her training as a performer. Gonzales enrolled at Arizona State University, where she was introduced to Fitzmaurice Voicework, one of several prominent methodologies for training the voice that is practiced in this country.

...She had the opportunity to explore how her work as a performer and devisor intersected with her voice work while still at Arizona State, when she was part of a team that presented La Casa de Inez, a site-specific work performed at the historic Elias-Rodriguez House in Tempe. “The house was built in the 1800s when there was a wave of Mexican immigrants coming to Tempe to start new lives for themselves. The house was built on a subplot of land that was purchased by a Mexican woman, and she was one of the few female landowners in Arizona at the time,” she said. When her husband left, she had to find a way to bring up her children, and she did everything from opening a pool hall to growing fruit trees to make a living.

“This was a Mexican woman who didn’t speak English, who had to provide opportunities for herself. And so we used her story as a way to umbrella the stories of our mothers, our grandmothers, and ourselves,” she said.

After graduation, she took a position teaching acting and voice in Illinois for several years before being lured to UMass in search of a different balance in her career, signing her contract to join the Department mere days before the lockdown in March.
Now settled in western Massachusetts, in addition to her teaching and scholarship, Gonzales is working on a piece that’s very close to her heart and extremely relevant: her grandmother’s story of being repatriated to Mexico during the Great Depression, a time when the government was looking for scapegoats for its financial and economic issues. Her grandparents eventually returned to the US, and loved this country deeply despite the way it treated them. “It reminds you of what true patriotism is,” she said, noting that her grandparents’ resilience in the face of the obstacles they faced has been a motivator for her during the pandemic.

Other Faculty and Staff Updates
Despite the challenges of conducting creative and academic research this year, faculty reported a number of exciting opportunities throughout the year.

Prof. Yao Chen designed costumes for Merrimack Repertory Theatre’s late-spring production of Until The Flood. She designed The House that Jack Built at Indiana Repertory Theatre, streaming in late May.

Prof. Milan Dragicevich’s book, The Persuasive Actor, got a great review in the July 2020 Voice and Speech Review (the journal for VASTA). It was written by Erika Baily, the head of Voice & Speech at A.R.T.

Prof. Elisa Gonzales co-chairs this summer’s annual VASTA (Voice and Speech Trainers Association) conference, entitled Rising Voices: Listening to the Past, Dismantling the Present, Cultivating a New Future.

Prof. Gina Kaufmann was promoted to full Professor.

Prof. Anya Klepikov is designing the set for Seared at Gloucester Stage Co this summer: It’ll be an in-person production, and her first (outside of our festival) since COVID.

Alum and current adjunct faculty member Finn LeFevre ’17G contributed a chapter to an anthology, Beyond Binaries: Trans Identities in Contemporary Culture. Finn’s chapter is titled “Schrödinger’s Dick: The Transgender Reveal Trope in Boy Meets Girl”.

Prof. Gilbert McCauley directed ‘Master Harold’ ... and the Boys by Athol Fugard for Syracuse Stage, streaming on demand in June.

Dr. Priscilla Page was named to the Faculty of Color Working Group (FOCWG) which “provides extra-institutional space for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) faculty to navigate the particular challenges that they face in their academic positions.” The group, supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and in collaboration with New England Humanities Consortium (NEHC) and University of Connecticut Humanities Institute (UCHI), held its annual Symposium May 26-28 and included scholars from 14 member institutions.

Meanwhile, staff also dealt with the repercussions of the pandemic on the department’s operations throughout the year. Notably, all staff saw an additional 2 weeks of furlough this school year, over and above the week served last school year. Costume shop manager Kristen Jensen and Assistant Costume Shop Manager Felicia Malachite had their hours cut. We are grateful that they were restored to full hours by the end of the school year.

Department faculty wrote a letter of support for staff to the College of Humanities and Fine Arts.

Finally, reckoning that the effects of the pandemic will linger, the Personnel Committee created a
Statement of Pandemic Impact: Faculty and Staff in the Department of Theater:

According to a COVID-19 Analysis done by the National Endowment for the Arts:

“The arts are integral to the social, civic, and economic wellbeing and vitality of our nation. Arts participation in childhood and youth has been linked to positive academic and social and emotional outcomes later in life. There are also positive relationships between art-going and other social and civic activities, such as volunteering in communities. Economically, arts and culture contribute 4.5% of U.S. gross domestic product (GDP), an amount larger than the share contributed by industries as diverse as construction, agriculture, and transportation. Increasingly, the arts and design are used in healthcare, manufacturing, and local community and economic development initiatives. Therefore, the sector’s acute vulnerability during the pandemic has potential repercussions for other segments of the U.S. economy—many of which rely on creative and cultural workers and industries—and society as a whole.

Arts and culture have experienced significant economic setbacks from COVID-19. Across the spectrum of artistic and creative endeavors, restrictions on gatherings, changes in consumer behavior (voluntary or otherwise), and severe unemployment have taken a devastating toll on the sector. The full scope and scale of the impact can be hard to discern, in part because of the size and diversity of the industries and occupations that constitute arts and culture.

For the arts and cultural sector, itself, changing consumer preferences and behaviors during the pandemic—a protracted period of social isolation for many Americans—may have longer-term effects on audience patterns, and therefore on the livelihoods of artists and arts organizations, even when vaccines become widely available. If the trend continues, then the commensurate loss to the nation’s artistic and creative output may prove incalculable. Solutions to sustain the arts and cultural sector—and ultimately to help shape what it looks like post-pandemic—will continue to depend on creative solutions that leverage all that arts organizations, government, the private sector, foundations, and the public can bring together during a time of urgent need.”

Based on the above, the following considerations need to be a part of our perspective and approach to faculty and staff evaluations while the pandemic continues to affect our industry:

• No one should be penalized for what has happened in our larger industry with regard to: Tenure and Promotion Promotion to Professor Annual Faculty Reports Merit Pay for faculty and staff Annual staff evaluations Teaching evaluations Service assignments

• Research and creative work done within the Department of Theater should be evaluated in the same manner as outside work.

• There should be an Increased recognition of the workload related to adapting experiential theater courses to the remote format.

Please consider the very real probability that the impacts of the pandemic will extend beyond this current year, particularly with regard to onsite in-person theater work.
Finally, the Department recognizes that the impact of the pandemic has not been equal, and that the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on many BIPOC and women faculty and staff members. This perspective needs to be part of the above considerations as well.

At top, Scenic Construction Director Brandon Hall mentored scene shop students. At bottom, Felicia Malachite, Anya Klepikov, and Kristen Jensen worked on Monuments construction together. Photos by John Solem.
**Supporting Our Learning and Creativity**

Our Zoom accounts got a workout this school year, as faculty and staff found ways to bring personal collaborators and industry leaders into their virtual spaces to share their wisdom and creativity with students with students.

Department members brought in fewer grants and professional development funds than usual this year due to the pandemic and its economic effects (General Manager Willow Cohen, who is invaluable in administering these funds, notes that many funds were frozen, and others were giving out on a more limited basis). However, we made that money go a very long way!

Check out our long lists of guests who visited classes, gave workshops, helped create both online and in-person work, and more!

**Grants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty - Flex</th>
<th>$4,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty - MSP RSF</td>
<td>$8,590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty – ADVANCE faculty peer mentor award</td>
<td>$250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty - Provost’s Faculty Diversity writing program</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Student – Arts Council</td>
<td>$3,058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Student – Grad School</td>
<td>$994</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Guest speakers and workshop leaders**

Evan Alexander, rendering and drafting artist — Vectorworks guest workshop

Kent Alexander, performer and Anti-Racist workshop leader and consultant — Leader, Antiracist Facilitated Conversation

Lian Amaris, performer and theater-maker — Guest speaker, Theater 100

Valeria Avina, actor — Guest speaker in Theater 397U - Voiceover

Kevin Barry, Broadway production electrician — Guest speaker in Theater 461/761

Trisha Barton, interaction designer — Guest speaker in Theater 105 - Drama and the Media

Melia Bensussen, Artistic Director of Hartford Stage — Guest speaker in Theater 680

Cati Bestard, photographer and sculptor — Guest speaker in Theater 593F

Djola Branner, performer and faculty member at Hampshire College — Guest speaker, Yoruba Aesthetics and Theatrical Jazz

Nicole Brewer, theater-maker and director, and workshop leader in anti-racist theater practice — Guest workshop on creating Antiracist Theater

Allyn Burrows, Artistic Director of Shakespeare & Co. — Guest speaker, Directing Studio, TH750
Derrick Clements, podcaster — Guest workshop on podcasting for Festival podcasting participants

Claire DeLiso, scenic designer — Calypso Michelet Thesis Committee Member

Lydia Diamond, playwright and educator — Guest lecture in Theater 130

Annalisa Dias, Director of Artistic Partnerships & Innovation at Baltimore Center Stage — Guest speaker in Dramaturgy Roundtable

Kim Euell, playwright, dramaturg, and arts educator — Guest Lecturer in TH100

Larissa Fasthorse, playwright — Guest speaker in Theater 130

Emily Freeman — Guest speaker in Theater 462/TH762

Sandra Goldmark, Associate Professor of Professional Practice at Barnard College — Guest speaker at Dramaturgy Roundtable

Sarah Gordon, costume designer — Guest speaker in Theater 462/762 - Costume Design Studio

Virginia Grise, playwright and director — Guest speaker in Theater 130

Joanna Haigood, Artistic Director of Zaccho Dance Theatre — Guest speaker in Theater 100

Jun Han, costume designer — Guest speaker in Theater 593F

Molly Hawkey, voice actor — Guest speaker in Theater 363-Sound Design 1

Frederick Horstman — Guest speaker in Theater 593F

Jerrilyn Lanier, Hair/Make-Up Artist for African American Performers — Guest workshop on African-American hair and makeup

Mary La Rose, performer — Performer, When the Soul Looks Out

Trenda Loftin, theater maker and consultant in Antiracist Theater Workshops — Facilitator in Anti-Racist Roadmap

Sue McFarland, textile artist — Guest workshop in felting

Porsche McGovern, lighting designer — Guest speaker in Theater 363-Sound Design 1

Melissa Moschitto ‘00, founder of The Anthropologists — Devising workshop

Edward (Mike) Nichols — Guest speaker in Theater 680

Jen Onopa ‘17G, director — Guest speaker for Brown Paper Studio

Azure D. Osborne-Lee, theater-maker and interdisciplinary artist — Guest speaker in Theater 105 - Drama and the Media
Dave Rivas, actor — Guest speaker in Theater 397U - Voiceover
Sarah Saltwick, playwright — Guest speaker in Theater 462/762 - Costume Design Studio
Heidi Schreck, writer and actress — Guest speaker in Theater 100
Octavio Solis, playwright and director — Guest speaker in Theater 130
Darius Taylor Brown — Paper Studio Judie guest lecture
Susan B Towne, costume designer — Guest speaker in MFA Costume Design Studio
Jeremy Wahlers, electrician — Guest speaker in Theater 461/761
Solomon Weisbarg, lighting designer — Guest speaker in Theater 360, Scene Design 1
Dawn Monique Williams, Associate Artistic Director at Aurora Theatre Company — Guest Lecturer in Directing Studio, TH750
Cheryl Wing-Zi Wong, artist and architect — Guest speaker in Group Studio
Kristina Wong, performer — Guest speaker in Theater 130
Fan Zhang, costume designer — Guest speaker in MFA Costume Design Studio
Scott Zielinski, lighting designer — Guest speaker in Theater 360, Scene Design 1

Guest artists for productions and special presentations
Miles Griffith, performer — Performer, When the Soul Looks Out
Fay Victor, performer — Performer, When the Soul Looks Out

Jaclyn Chylinski, performer — Guest performer for Visionary Futures
Leanna Keyes, streaming producer — Guest streaming producer for Visionary Futures
Kim Klasner, performer — Guest performer for Visionary Futures
Finn Lefevre, dramaturg and activist — Guest collaborator for Visionary Futures
M Sloth Levine, playwright — Guest playwright for Visionary Futures
Eli Plenk, activist — Guest collaborator for Visionary Futures
Trea Andrea Russworm, community activist — Guest collaborator for Visionary Futures
Jaymes Sanchez, playwright — Guest playwright for Visionary Futures
Phaedra Scott, playwright — Guest playwright for Visionary Futures

Jesus Valles-Morales — Guest artist for Café Subterrain

Kyle Boatwright, performer and composer — Guest deviser, composer, and music director for Devising a Future Together

Malcolm Thomas, transcriber — Transcriptions for Gathering of Grandmothers
Afrikah Smith, dramaturg and performer — Festival dramaturg for Gathering of Grandmothers
Alexia Cota, gallery curator — Collaborator for Gathering of Grandmothers
Ingrid Askew, community activist and performer — Performer and subject of Gathering of
Grandmothers
Theresa Jenoure, performer and community activist — Performer and subject of Gathering of Grandmothers
Carlie Tartokov, performer and community activist — Performer and subject of Gathering of Grandmothers
Theresa Gordon, performer and community activist — Performer and subject of Gathering of Grandmothers

Anita Yavich, costume designer — Guest speaker for Women In Theatrical Design series
Jane Shaw, sound designer — Guest speaker for Women In Theatrical Design series
Jane Cox, lighting designer — Guest speaker for Women In Theatrical Design series
Mimi Lien, scenic designer — Guest speaker for Women In Theatrical Design series

Composer and performer Kyle Boatwright, seated at the keyboard, was one of the creative team members for our in-person, outside production of Devising a Future Together.
Alumni Highlights

Web series, bookstore sculptures, online theater — our alumni took on these and more during the pandemic.

Here, just a few of the highlights we found out about this year!

Christina Beam ’17G caught everyone’s eyes on social media with her inventive costuming for a series of photoshoots reenvisioning fairy tales, created from paper printed with the stories themselves. Below is the Witch from Sleeping Beauty (photo by Ben Tobin).

Kyle Pasciutti ’08 is a special effects and make-up artist and found work even mid-COVID. He talked to us about how to work safely in his business, including a commercial for Middlesex Health where he aged the actors through several life stages.

Pasciutti: Many many tricks in the makeup fx arsenal go out the window with COVID protocols. If we had 4x zombies to make, we would somewhat assembly-line things with all the pieces getting glued down on everyone, then all the filler, all the base coating, etc. Now, those same 4 zombies have to be done one at a time with cleanup in between. Safety has always been a top priority, so adding on to that aspect of the new protocols hasn’t been an issue whatsoever, and in fact, having a production team that is far more understanding of what these things really take to pull off has been a huge positive! Suddenly I find myself no longer having to negotiate for another 15 minutes for a makeup, or trying to squeeze the budget to fit in backup pieces because everyone on the production understands that infection-wise, the makeup department is also potentially the most dangerous spot on the shoot.

...On our particular shoot the majority of the actors were a family unit which really helped with quarantining ahead of the shoot, but smack dab in the middle of our schedule they announced new travel restrictions between states which meant that some of our actors were unexpectedly stuck in a hotel for a few days. Actors can’t wear masks while in a makeup chair, so it’s on the artist to protect as much as possible
which means both masks and face shields. The easiest answer to safety in this pandemic is to: 1. Take every possible precaution, 2. Allow for the time and budget to properly implement protocols and prevent any scenario where you might have to rush something causing a possible slip up, and 3. Get creative after 1 & 2 are under control! If the normal way of doing things isn’t going to work, or can’t be done safely, have plans B, C, and D in your back pocket ready to go!

Katharine Scarborough ’05 was tired of being relegated to “chubby girl” bit parts, so she created Big Girl Show, written by and starring Scarborough. In the spring, after racking up a number of awards for Scarborough and her collaborators, the show found a home on streaming platform Seeka TV.

“I wanted to see a plus-size protagonist who isn’t sad, eating ice cream, weighing herself, or going to an Overeaters Anonymous meeting. You know, she just is living her life, and the struggles of being a plus-size person are present in the series, but the struggle is external and not internal for the character,” Scarborough said. “It’s stories from my life, but made more absurd, heightened.”

“I feel like I am a bold artist,” she said. “I like to make big choices, and I think that started at UMass.” She cited, in particular, her work on projects with then-graduate directing student Melissa (Miller) Sivvy, the mentorship of Professor Emerita Julie Nelson — “When you had a good moment, she did this fist bump thing for you, it’s such a moment of affirmation!” — and the late Julian Olf’s Contemporary Rep class.

“I felt encouraged to take risks as a performer and to be weird,” she said of the class. “It was very formative for me as an artist.”

... Scarborough wrote a comedic play with a plus-size protagonist and held a reading, which was attended by a classmate from an improv class she was taking. “At the end of it, she said, ‘You know, I think this might be a film’.”

That classmate was Elaine White, who runs Brazen NYC, a production company, with Alyssa Cartee. A few meetings later, Big Girl Show had a become a web series and had a creative team ready to go. In addition to executive-producing together with Scarborough, White served as the series’ director of photography, and Cartee was the series’ director. The pilot was filmed in 2018, and the remainder of the episodes were crowdfunded and shot in 2019. All the episodes are under 15 minutes, and follow the conventions of different film genres. For example, there’s a romantic comedy episode, and a black and white silent film clown piece.

“Big Girl has been my main creative focus for the past few years. I feel like Big Girl is like a child who will not leave for college. I want her to go. I want her to do well. I would like her out of my house,”
Scarborough laughed. “I just want everyone to see it and love it!”

**Gaven Trinidad ‘18G** is the Community Engagement Associate with the prestigious New York Theatre Workshop, as well as pursuing independent work. In an excerpt from an interview he explained:

At the center of my work is social justice, providing tools to the local community and beyond so that people can tell their own stories and be empowered to lead their communities as civically-engaged artists. I work closely with the Artistic, Marketing, and Education Departments, in addition to our artist community. I collaborate with them on how to ethically, conscientiously, and impactfully engage and build relationships among different communities with whom our artists are in conversation. The fun parts of my job are things such as hosting artists networking events, monthly Open Mic Nights with Poetic Theatre Productions, producing our free virtual programming, and creating new free educational programs. In fact, I am building with my colleagues at NYTW and other non-profits two new free playwriting seminars for veterans and another for immigrant artists. I collaborate with my colleagues on Equity, Diversity, Inclusivity, and Belonging (EDIB) initiatives and trainings for all staff, artists, and board – unapologetically scrutinizing White Supremacy Culture and creating a paradigm shift for every facet of the company to being actively anti-racist. Also as a staff member of NYTW, we are encouraged to be civically engaged with our local communities, so much so that we have paid days off for civic engagement. (I want to also give a shoutout to Uno Servida and his 2050 cohort who started the Open Your Lobby Movement, which offered support to Black Lives Matter protesters over the past summer!)

He also shouted out to his mentors: The trifecta of Professors Judyie Albilali, Megan Lewis, and Priscilla Page instilled in me the importance of ritual. They helped me learn how to better interrogate artistic choices and ideas in a way that is conscientious of its potential effect in and on a community, making and understanding the distinction between intention and impact. After graduation, I’ve made it a point to find like-minded individuals and companies, as I do not want to work at theatres and collaborate with artists who are so artistically, politically, and culturally narrow-sighted as not to recognize my whole self and the nuances of all my intersecting identities. In this time of WeSeeYouWhiteAmericanTheater, it is important for every artist to take responsibility to do their part to be actively anti-racist and pro-black, be open for personal and collective growth, and to allow themselves to be in uncomfortable conversations with collaborators. There are theatre companies and artists who are actively making these changes in the industry – reach out to them! As a queer artist of color, you have the power to build your own community.
Where we are:
Over the past year, the Department of Theater committed itself to making significant strides to address its shortcomings in the area of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

Specific efforts over the last year have included the following:
• Kent Alexander and the workshops he led for faculty and staff two years ago on the subjects of race and privilege, as well as for his work to moderate a community meeting that addressed student concerns
• Nicole Brewer and the workshops she led for faculty and staff this school year on the subjects of building an Anti-Racist theater practice
• Design faculty brought in a Jerrilyn Lanier to lead a make-up and hair workshop for performers of color to address a gap in our current expertise
• Most significant to this document, the Department has formed an Anti-Racism Committee. With the guidance of facilitator Trenda Loftin, this committee began work on an Anti-Racist Roadmap which will guide the department in redressing existing wrongs and create a more equitable and diverse path forward.

This work is on-going and unfinished; we selected the term “Roadmap,” because we understand that we are making progress but have further to go.

This progress report is not the final Roadmap but is an accounting of the progress made so far.

Work will continue, both in individual initiatives by faculty and staff, as well as in a retreat planned for August 2021, and with the resumption of committee work in the fall. Of note, also, is that in parallel with that committee’s work, a number of individual department members and other committees began or continued work that includes Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion focus.

Recognition of prior Anti-Racism work
In a number of instances, current work builds on what individual faculty, staff, and students set in motion previously.

We recognize in particular the following:
• Dr. Priscilla Page for the work to create the Multicultural Theater Certificate, as well as her recruitment of BIPOC students to our program
• Department members who pursued opportunities to welcome, recruit, and retain BIPOC students through outreach to local schools and organizations, as well as on-campus connections
• The faculty who created the courses and performance opportunities engaging with multicultural theater practice and performance opportunities for BIPOC students and performers, including Professors Judyie Al-Bilali, Gilbert McCauley, and Priscilla Page
• Students who brought concerns to the department through open letters, during community meetings and forums, and other means
Anti-Racism Committee and Roadmap
In fall 2020 the department formed an Anti-Racism Committee composed of faculty, staff, and students, with theater-maker and Anti-Racism Consultant Trenda Loftin to guide the work. The committee drafted questions for a survey and Zoom focus groups intended to identify key issues within the department. All faculty, staff, students (graduate, undergraduate, minor, major, and theater-adjacent), as well as alumni, were invited to complete the survey in February. In February and March, Trenda moderated Zoom focus group with these constituent groups, including one for BIPOC students and one for BIPOC faculty and staff. Once compiled, information, trends, concerns, etc., were shared by Trenda anonymously with the committee to ensure the confidentiality of the respondents who might fear reprisals.

Categories of issues identified as areas of concern are the focus of the Roadmap, as outlined below.

Transparency & Accountability
Many stakeholders expressed a need for greater transparency of department processes that impact diversity, equity, and inclusion.

• Communicate specifically around these issues.
  o Shared information thus far includes an email about the survey and focus groups, as well as this progress report. Updates to come quarterly, and to be archived on the website.
• Keep better records and track our history to address a feeling of “going in circles” and lack of progress.
  o Included in brief here but on-going and to come
• Compile communication and resources re: current and future DEI work, how to raise concerns, and how to access resources
  o The handbook is being revised this summer to include these items, including which issues are addressed in-house and which need HFA or UMass support. Handbook will be online.
• Regular communication and review of processes and procedures
  o To be encompassed in our quarterly updates
• Communicate and build across committees to find coming-together points: Where can the Anti-Racism Committee lighten the load or amplify other work?
  o Still to come

Recruiting
The department needs to hire more faculty and staff or color and needs to recruit more students who are of color or otherwise under-represented.

• Support incoming faculty of color
  o This year, the personnel committee created guidelines to mentor new faculty which named explicitly that faculty of color face unique challenges that must be accounted for.
  o Other supports are to be addressed in retreat and future committee
• Connect with current faculty who have experience on recruiting under-represented students and learn from and support their efforts
  o Access the history of: Jen Onopa’s recruiting work in Springfield, Marlow Bull’s theater conference and school visits around New England, and Gilbert McCauley’s work with Upward Bound, which connected the department with students in western Massachusetts, including Springfield. Re-activate and potentially resource resumption of these networks
  o Research campus-wide resources to support the work, including support at HFA (Dean) and UMass levels
Pay Equity:
Faculty have raised pay equity concerns with the committee.
- Address in-department and elevate where needed through proper channels
  - Confidential proceedings, but cases raised thus far are making their way through these channels
- Outline and communicate pay structure system with staff & faculty

Season Selection:
There is a need for greater transparency so that stakeholders understand the process, have a bigger voice in the process, and can constructively address potential DEI issues in the process
- Identify the committee as early as possible to engage with questions
  - Who would be directing? Is it honoring the story?
  - Notice and name where white folks with goodwill center whiteness in antiracism/decision making
- Use the Lobbyist early in the process to increase transparency about the process with an FAQ about season selection, committee members, remove the secrecy (real and perceived) about themes, requirements, needs, and decision-making
  - To be addressed at the start of the school year
- Create space for feedback
  - To come in fall after the committee is convened

Curriculum and Production Process
We want to prepare students not just for theater of the past but theater of the future. Much of this work is being addressed by our undergraduate major committee, which is reviewing the structure and requirements for the major.

- Questions raised in the survey and Zoom sessions that should be considered in curriculum revision include:
  - Industry hierarchies
  - When white supremacy values are being upheld or we are asking someone to code switch or perform emotional labor
  - Consider process-oriented vs product-oriented and transactional vs transformational education
  - How to grade fairly and carry grading innovation from the pandemic forward to address DEI issues
    - Still to come
- How can the model of Rights of Spring be replicated to foster new collaborations and educationally valuable projects that forward underrepresented voices
  - Still to come
- More transparency of faculty goals and priorities: profiles with values or intentions
  - Update of website bios to be addressed in fall semester

Next Steps
In the coming year, the department will continue to come up with concrete steps to center Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in all its work, especially as we finalize plans for a new major, planned to launch Fall 2022. A fall 2021 retreat will be the next moment for these ongoing discussions.
This is the year Theater found itself dipping significantly into its rainy day fund. Like many organizations, UMass saw its budget affected by the pandemic, and that trickled down to the department.

While we were able to find savings through reduced costs in some areas, others saw higher need than usual. In order to teach the classes we needed to offer students, we paid for some guest instructors. Circumstances also demanded the purchase of some specialized equipment, subscriptions to various platforms, and software to accommodate both teaching and performing in an online setting.

Additionally, we paid for consultants to advise us in our Anti-Racism work, so that we can better serve our BIPOC student community.

Like many other arts organizations, we felt it was not right to charge admission for our events — we wanted to be as accessible as possible at a time when economic reality and isolation was hitting many very hard — and so had less revenue coming in than usual.

We had enough money saved to cover the expenses we encountered, but we knew that we would end the year with a depleted “rainy day” fund. Accordingly, we reached out to our friends, alumni, and supporters, asking them to “be our umbrella” and help refill our rainy day fund, and we were thrilled with the way they came through for us, often despite dealing with their own difficult circumstances.

With the assistance of our helpful colleagues at the Fine Arts Center Box Office, we were also able to add a pop-up ask for donations during the ticket reservation process, and many patrons who were financially able gifted the price of a ticket and more. During our festival, in particular, who saw many folks generously give, even making repeat gifts, as they joined our excitement about being able to present so many events.

Finally, we participated in the annual UMass Gives campaign, resulting once more in generous gifts from our donors.

As of May 2021, we had raised $13,615.95, which includes box office donations. Included in that total is our participation in the UMASS Gives campaign, during which we raised $3,430 from 27 gifts.
Coming in Fall 2021:
The Arts Bridge Grand Opening!

We are expanding! After a stoppage at the start of the pandemic, work resumed this year on the Department’s expansion to the fourth floor of the Arts Bridge. Arts Bridge will have a new design studio, a new rehearsal studio with footprint of Rand stage, a new costume shop complete with dye room and fitting areas, and a large recording studio with a spacious control booth. It will also have music education classes, art studios, a computer lab, a graphic design lab, and a room for green screen technology. Students from all the arts departments will be interacting on the Bridge.

We are looking forward to celebrating the completion of this exciting work; it will be thrilling to share the space with our department members past and present, details to be announced!

At top right, the placement of the hallway was flipped to capitalize on the natural light in the space while still allowing the rehearsal space to be dark when needed. Beautiful lighting and vibrant colors will liven up the common spaces. The facilities will be outfitted with everything our students need; for example, the sprung floor in the rehearsal room.