

## **The Theatre Arts Department: Connections to the Mission of the College**

### **The Way We Are Based in the Liberal Arts**

The study of theatre is firmly grounded in the liberal arts, integrating knowledge and principles from many academic and artistic disciplines including literature, history, philosophy, religion, speech, art, music, and dance. Both the curriculum and dramatic productions of our department offer valuable cross-disciplinary connections for students and the campus while providing a solid base in classical, modern, contemporary, and multicultural theatre.

Throughout history, theatre has explored the profound questions and problems of human existence that are at the heart of the liberal arts. Plays illuminate, celebrate and affirm our humanity and encourage deep reflection. Students who study plays and participate in their staging significantly grapple with ethical questions of humanity through experiential learning. Dramatic literature itself is an artistic examination of the human journey and therefore every play is an exploration of vocation and a search for self. Characters in dramatic literature live through remarkable events and offer to the reader and audience ways in which to examine and reflect on one's own life and the lives of others.

Theatrical productions on campus enrich, enlarge and empower the Augsburg College and larger community. Our theatre productions draw members of the community together to examine the human journey through the unique and powerful experience of theatrical performance.

Because of its collaborative nature, theatre teaches transferable skills that can be applied to all aspects of life and can inspire life-long learning. Students are inspired to take their knowledge and experience and apply it to future learning. Augsburg College Theatre Arts alumni go on to careers as theatre artists but have also gained valuable skills for other careers as well.

### **The Way We Are Shaped by the Values of the Christian Church**

There are close connections between the study of Western theatre and the Christian Church. The whole history of modern theatre has been shaped by the faith and values of Christianity, from the rebirth of drama in the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages to the writing of modern classics such as *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett. Even with the secularization of theater during and after the Renaissance, Christian themes, values, and issues are imbedded in almost all of Western dramatic literature to this day.

### **The Way We Are Shaped by the Context of a Vital Metropolitan Setting**

The Theatre Arts Department has a long and rich history with several organizations in the Cedar-Riverside Community, which is the home of the West Bank Theater District. As part of our curriculum, students visit and attend productions at neighborhood venues such as The Playwrights' Center, The Southern Theatre, Mixed Blood Theatre, Theatre in the Round, the new Guthrie Theater (located only one mile from the Augsburg campus). Students also participate in service learning and internships at neighborhood theatres. In addition, members of our faculty have a long history of working professionally with

organizations in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. For example, this past summer faculty member Martha Johnson was Associate Director for the Mu Performing Arts production of *A Midsummer Nights' Dream* at the Southern Theatre.

Every course in our department has a “city component” where students either visit professional theatres for tours, lectures and performances or have a professional theatre artist lecture or conduct workshops in the classroom. These classroom presentations are a part of the Theatre Arts Department Artist Series that brings in theatre artists with local, national and international reputations. This past October we hosted Joe Dowling, Artistic Director of The Guthrie Theater. In addition, the department often collaborates with professionals as artists-in-residence on production work.

Currently we have a formal partnership with The Playwrights' Center focusing on the campus production of new works. We also have or have had internship relationships with The Playwrights' Center, The Jungle Theatre, Theatre de la Jeune Lune, The Guthrie Theater, The Children's Theatre, and Chanhassen Dinner Theater. A majority of our majors choose to complete internships with professional companies; as a result, graduates often work professionally in the city as stage managers, designers and performers.

### **The Way We Are Shaped By an Intentionally Diverse Campus Community**

The diverse nature of theatre requires an openness and respect for various faiths journeys and points of view. At the same time, the Theatre Arts Department's curriculum encourages critical thinking and provides students with the skills to interpret dramatic literature and create artistic work, through production, from their own perspectives.

An essential part of the entire theatre curriculum is the encouragement of clear, deeply reflective communication from divergent viewpoints, through discussion, production review and critiques, research projects and papers, and students' critique of their own and other students' course work. In addition, plays are chosen for each season from a wide range of styles and genres, including plays written by multicultural playwrights. Faculty in our department teach and direct plays using various theatrical styles, theories and methodologies. Many adjuncts that work in the Theatre Arts Department are from different cultural, gender and ethnic backgrounds.

The Theatre Arts Department attracts students from various learning groups on campus. Students from the Honors, CLASS and Step-Up Programs participate in our classes, productions, and sometimes become majors. The Theatre Arts Department has collaborated with Pan-Asian Student Services by jointly sponsoring guest artists from Mu Performing Arts and Ragamala Dance Theatre. In addition, the Theatre Arts Department has carried out recruitment efforts that seek out prospective students from Minneapolis and St. Paul, suburban, private and rural high schools.