



SPRING 2017

## Humanities and Social Sciences

### IN THIS ISSUE:

Rhetoric and Composition students take a crack at revitalizing a struggling neighborhood. Dr. Terence Hartnett shows students how theatrical performances reflect real moments in history and a visiting filmmaker asks students to tackle gender identity questions through her documentary.



## NEIGHBORHOOD DESIGN

Students in Mark Minster's winter RH131 classes are picking up right where last year's classes left off. They are hard at work writing proposals to improve Terre Haute's Ryves neighborhood, an area of concentrated poverty. Building on the concepts of placemaking and urban metabolism—how cities function as organisms, obtaining and processing nutrients and energy, disposing or recycling waste—students are looking at issues such as affordable housing, accessible infrastructure, attracting businesses through urban renewal, and the revitalization of green spaces. They have hosted a design charrette for residents of the neighborhood as well as representatives from area nonprofits—ArtSpaces, the Purdue Extension Office, Benjamin Franklin Elementary, reTHink, and the Vectren Foundation. The learning is going both ways—Rose-Hulman students are listening as much as they are writing and speaking.

Even more exciting, perhaps, is that this class offers an opportunity for collaboration between the HSS Department and the nascent Engineering Design program at Rose-Hulman. Minster has team-taught parts of the class with Rich House (HSS) and Patsy Brackin (ME, and Director of Engineering Design). Students are energized and their enthusiasm has encouraged the people they're writing for. It's nice to know their work matters.



## DRAMA'S LESSONS

“Since the stage is often a place where social issues and national problems are played out, studying drama is a productive way for students to learn about a culture,” says Dr. Terence Hartnett. “Theater captures how a culture engages with a historical moment. We can’t witness history, but studying plays invites students to experience it through performance.”

That’s why he’s taught a new African-American Drama course this fall that’s examined such plays as Lorraine Hansberry’s “A Raisin in the Sun,” William Wells Brown’s “The Escape” and August Wilson’s “The Piano Lesson.” These plays reveal the history of social justice in America, including topics of race, slavery, civil rights, and voting rights.

With the goal of enhancing the arts education opportunities at Rose-Hulman, Hartnett has developed the institute’s new academic minor in theater and drama, and has added new courses covering modern European drama, American drama, Introduction to theater arts, and Greek and Roman drama to the academic curriculum and developed a new Shakespeare acting course to be offered next fall.

In addition, Hartnett who began directing plays 20 years ago in Bloomington, is now lending his artistic talents as director of Rose-Hulman’s theatrical programs, including leading such spectacular Rose Drama Club productions as “Les Miserables,” “West Side Story,” and “Much Ado About Nothing” during the past three years.

This fall the Drama Club staged “Little Shop of Horrors,” a retro science-fiction musical about an out-of-control carnivorous plant. “One of the most impressive elements of this production is the puppetry,” says senior Christian Schulz, who plays the voice of Audrey II. “This show showcases the advantage of a theater performance at an engineering-oriented college. The skills of our tech crew are apparent throughout the show, and the musical

talents of our orchestra pull everything together. This is truly a show where the entire ensemble shines.”

This winter the Drama Club also performed the comedy “The Servant of Two Masters” and the spring musical is Cole Porter’s “Anything Goes.”



## FILMMAKER STIMULATES GENDER ID DISCUSSION

Filmmaker Gabrielle Burton visited campus for a discussion following a special screening of "Kings, Queens, & In-Betweens," her recent documentary that examines the complexity of gender identity and expression through the upbeat and entertaining lens of drag queens, kings, and transgender performers in Columbus, Ohio. The film focuses on the compelling stories of eight performers, peeling back layers of identity on a world few have seen up close. The event was sponsored by the Department of Humanities and Social Science’s Elsie B. Pawley Fund and Rose-Hulman’s Unity student organization.

While the film screening and discussion was open to the public, it was also part of the course Introduction to Film Studies, taught by Jessica Livingston, associate professor of English. "Kings, Queens, & In-Betweens" is an independent film from Five Sisters productions which was partially financed through a Kickstarter campaign, and it introduced students to socially-engaged documentary filmmaking and alternate models for distributing and marketing films outside the Hollywood mainstream.

The documentary “shakes up assumptions” about gender as Burton says in her Director’s Statement but is accessible to audiences not well-versed in gender studies as well as those who may initially be uncomfortable with the prospect of a film about drag performers. “Burton clearly built trust with the drag performance community in Columbus,

Ohio—the interviews are candid, warm, and funny,” says Livingston.

The discussion with Burton following the film was especially valuable. “In a brief amount of time the conversation addressed rhetorical strategies, the editing process, and the ethics of representation as well as the gender norms that we reproduce even as they constrain us.”



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~J. Irwin Miller

