

# Production switches roles

Truman student directs other students, professors, in upcoming comedy

BY EMILY BRENNAN  
Copy Chief

When the curtain opens for the play, "The 39 Steps," this weekend, audience members will witness something innovative — the show is directed by a student and includes student and faculty actors and actresses.

For the past month and a half, students, professors and one member of the Kirksville community have been practicing lines, rehearsing scenes and building sets for one of the semester's final performances.

"The 39 Steps" is a two-time Tony award-winning "fast-paced whodunit for anyone who loves the magic of theater," according to the play publisher's website, samuelfrench.com. The show will be performed 8 p.m. tonight through Saturday in Ophelia Parrish's Black Box Theater. Seats are free and first come, first served. Donations will be accepted following each performance.

Junior director Kristine St. Gemme said she has directed short scenes for acting classes and a freshman showcase, but "The 39 Steps" is the first mainstage production she has directed. She said the prospect of directing the show was scary at first.

"Most people thought it would be scary because you're in a position where you'd be correcting the faculty, but it's not so much that," St. Gemme said. "It's questioning whether what you're directing these actors to do and what you're telling the designers to do is going to make one cohesive production that people are going to enjoy."

St. Gemme said she has enjoyed the experience, and has noticed a difference between working with the students and the older actors.

"It's been really interesting watching the professors and their acting style," St. Gemme said. "It's been fascinating to see their characters develop and grow without me having to push them in any direction."

Theatre professor Randy Bame is one of the non-student actors in the play. Bame has directed a number of productions at Truman, including "Dancing at Lughnasa," "Brighton Beach Memoirs" and "Little Women." He said his degree is in acting, so he feels comfortable on the stage. He said he enjoys working with students in the play, rather than directing them.

Bame said this play presents a valuable opportunity for students to act with professionals instead of just peers. He said the collaboration between faculty, community members and students is important to both the experiences of the students and the theatre department.

"Onstage we're sharing creatively in a different way than we do when it's director and actor," Bame said. "We have to be in sync with one another, understanding where we're each coming from."

Seniors Paige Hackworth and Brendan Gregg are acting in the show alongside Bame, theatre professor Ron Rybkowski and community member Todd Kuhns. Hackworth said "The 39 Steps" is a comedic show, but is not the kind of comedy the theatre department usually encounters. He said the play includes farcical and physical humor, something they have not done before.

Working with students and professors in a new way has been a meaningful experience for Hackworth. She said she has appreciated the experience of acting alongside her professors.

"We view them so much as our mentors," Hackworth said. "So working with them on the same level and being able to bounce ideas



Submitted photo  
Left, theatre professor Randy Bame and, right, community member Todd Kuhns listen to other actors during a dress rehearsal for "The 39 Steps" Monday at the Black Box Theatre in Ophelia Parrish. The play is performed by a mix of students, professors and Kirksville community members, and is directed by junior Kristine St. Gemme.



Submitted photo  
Above left, seniors Brendan Gregg and Paige Hackworth practice a scene in which Hackworth's character tries to convince Gregg's character she is a secret agent Monday at the Black Box Theatre in Ophelia Parrish. Right, theatre professors Ron Rybkowski and Randy Bame rehearse a scene in which their characters are on a train to Edinburgh Monday at the Black Box Theatre. The play they are performing has been described by the actors as including "farcical and physical humor."



off of them and know that we all have equal standing when we say things is really cool."

Hackworth said she has enjoyed working with St. Gemme in the director's seat.

"It's always nice to have someone who's never done a position before, because they bring a new perspective on what you might not normally see," Hackworth said.

**"The 39 Steps" will be performed at 8 p.m., April 25-27 in the Black Box Theatre in Ophelia-Parrish. Seating is first come first served.**

# Truman offers summer class in STL

New summer course taught in St. Louis, Mo. might serve as model for future courses

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Summer does not mean an end to school for a few students who will get the chance to pursue their education during the summer in their hometown.

Truman State is offering a new Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar course this summer. Course instructor Kelsey Wiskirchen said the course, titled "Art, Environment and Community," will be offered in St. Louis during the summer — the first time a Truman course has been offered in a classroom setting outside of Kirksville.

Wiskirchen said the course is designed to teach students art history, different art mediums — such as paint and clay — and how to create a piece of contemporary artwork. Reading and writing will be done online using Blackboard, but students will meet with the instructor once a week at different locations throughout St. Louis, Wiskirchen said. These places will include the Missouri Botanical Gardens, the Missouri History Museum and the St. Louis Art Museum, she said. Wiskirchen said at the end of the course, students will collaborate to create a work of art that will raise awareness of ecological issues and be a permanent fixture in St. Louis.



Submitted photo  
Art professor Kelsey Wiskirchen uses a sewing machine to complete one of her artworks. Wiskirchen will teach a JINS course located in St. Louis, Mo. this summer.

Wiskirchen said she wanted to start the course because she thinks it is important for artists and students to consider the ways their actions affect the environment and to consider the context and the way greater ideas about all topics can affect art making.

Even if a student is not an art major, Wiskirchen said she thinks that student still will gain valuable experience from the course.

"The combination of studio art students and non-art majors will provide an exciting collaborative aspect," Wiskirchen said. "The more experienced art students bring skill, but less experienced students bring a fresh take on things and find new ways to express ideas."

Scott Alberts, Office of Interdisciplinary Studies director, said Wiskirchen came up with the idea for the course. He

said Wiskirchen wanted to teach a summer course, but was not able to teach in Kirksville during the summer. Alberts said they decided to make the course available in St. Louis because Wiskirchen lives there during the summer.

The course capacity is 25 students, but Alberts said the course will be taught as long as five students register, because it is an experiment. Alberts said anyone interested can sign up for the class, and registration will close once the class officially begins in June.

"We're giving this a trial," Alberts said. "If we get enough students interested and enough positive feedback, we may have another course in St. Louis next semester. We may even branch out to other cities if it generates enough interest."

Sophomore Danielle Naeger, an art major, said she thinks the course is an excellent idea. She said since many students at Truman are from the St. Louis area, it would be much easier for them to take the JINS course in their hometown.

Naeger said she prefers having a summer course outside of Kirksville. She said it can give students new opportunities Kirksville doesn't have to offer, like trips to the Art Museum and Botanical Gardens.

Even though she does not live in St. Louis, and she is not enrolled in this course, Naeger said she would prefer attending a future course in St. Louis rather than her hometown.

"My hometown is very small," Naeger said. "I live about an hour south of St. Louis. I think it is better that the course is being held in St. Louis because there are more opportunities to learn."