



Theatre Production Showcases Interdisciplinary Work

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Much work from College of Arts & Letters students, faculty, and alumni has gone into the Williamston Theatre's current production – Michael Gene Sullivan's adaptation of *1984* by George Orwell.



Kirk Domer, Chair of the Department of Theatre, on the set of "1984" at the Williamston Theatre.

Kirk Domer, Chair of the Department of Theatre, was the set designer for the play. Several other Department of Theatre faculty, students, and alumni also are associated with the production as part of the department's professional partnership with the Williamston Theatre. The following is a complete list of all those from the Department of Theatre involved in the play:

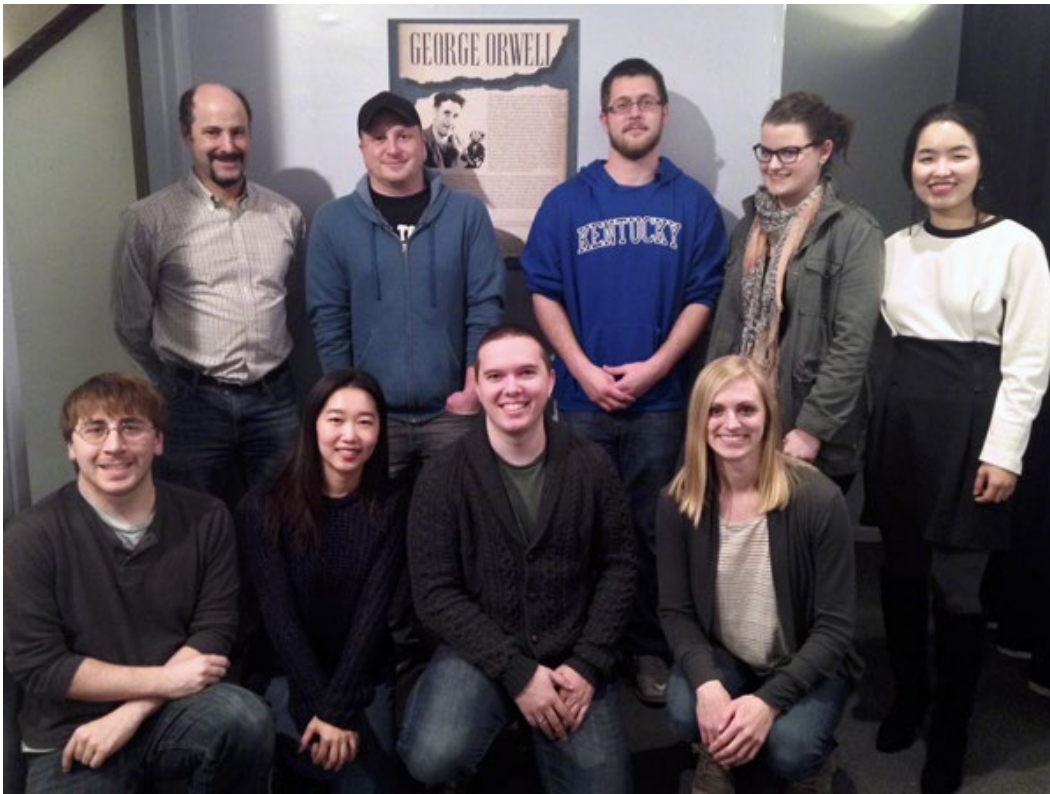
- Sarah Botruff, Production Intern and B.F.A. 2015
- Paige Conway, Stage Manager and B.F.A. 2015

- Kirk Domer, Scene Designer and Chair of the Department of Theatre
- Curran Jacobs, Actor and M.F.A. Acting student
- John Lepard, Actor, Executive Director of the Williamston Theatre, and B.A. 1988
- Mike Merluzzi, Assistant Scene Designer and B.F.A. Acting Student
- Anna Morreale, Production Intern and B.F.A. 2014
- Jason Price, Sound Designer and MSU Assistant Professor of Theatre
- Shannon Schweitzer, Lighting Designer and MSU Assistant Professor of Theatre
- Emily Sutton-Smith, Voice Over Artist and M.F.A. Acting alumna
- Christina Traister, Fight Choreographer and MSU Associate Professor of Theatre
- Karen Vance, Assistant Stage Manager and M.F.A. Acting student
- Elspeth Williams, Technical Director and M.F.A. 2016

In addition to the play, theatregoers also have the opportunity to learn more about Orwell and *1984* through the work of one Department of English class that is now on display in the theatre's two main lobbies.

Eight doctoral students in Associate Professor Steve Rachman's ENG 802 class (Literature, Politics, and Time: Rethinking American Literary History, 1838-2038) examined the political and aesthetic vision that Orwell created in *1984* as well as the problems and challenges of utopian/dystopian fiction. The students also read the *1984* script by Michael Gene Sullivan and talked about its relationship to the novel.

Taking their scholarship one step further, the students – Soohyun Cho, Sean Guynes, Zack Kruse, June Oh, Christine Pepper, Mitch Polskonka, Justin Wigard, and Emily Yates – then created exhibition materials to coincide with the Williamston Theatre production. They worked on posters, a video that plays during intermission, a tablet display, and even bathroom art.



Steve Rachman and the doctoral students in his ENG 802 class pose in front of a poster they created for the Williamston Theatre's "1984" production.

This was a great opportunity to create a collaboration between academic work and public outreach.

STEVE RACHMAN

“The project was built into the syllabus where we would do some public outreach and think about ways in which we could continue to show the importance of the humanities by having graduate students working in a public mode rather than just a scholarly research mode,” Rachman said. “This was a great opportunity to create a collaboration between academic work and public outreach.”

The four main posters that are part of the exhibit include one on Orwell and *1984*, one on the Panopticon developed by Jeremy Bentham and theory of surveillance cultures, and two other posters that show how *1984* has been represented in different book editions, both in the United States and internationally, as a way to encapsulate it visually and conceptually through time.

The video showed various images from 1984 in popular culture, including the 1983 Apple commercial, and the tablet display allows viewers to think about and explore different outcomes of the novel, allowing them to think through the problems of dystopia.

“The play itself feels very immersive; you are right there, and the exhibit kind of continues it,” Peffer said. “It doesn’t give you a break from the theme. You are still thinking about those themes of surveillance and technology even when you are on a break from it. There is even art in the bathroom, so there is no escaping it. The characters have no escape, and the audience kind of has no escape.”

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ZACK KRUSE

While working on the project the students thought about how they could make the exhibit materials valuable to the people who would be coming to see the play so as to enhance the overall experience.

“Because of the work we did together as a class, the project came together really well,” Kruse said. “This was a terrific opportunity to do some community outreach and stretch some academic muscles that we don’t normally get to, but actually is what we are supposed to do and that is to be public scholars, or rather public disseminators of knowledge.”

As part of the project, the students went to the Williamston Theatre to observe the space and sat through a reading of the script. Also, Tony Caselli, Artistic Director of the Williamston Theatre and Director of the play, visited the class and talked about his ideas for the production.

“It was nice being behind the scenes and coming in to see a reading from the cast in a very preliminary stage to get a sense from them the kind of mood they wanted to convey, which helped us put everything together,” Peffer said. “It also was nice to collaborate as colleagues and friends on a project like this. So often in our classes we are wrapped up in our own individual research agenda. This was a nice way of bringing all of our interests together to bear on something that we all could see the results from and that the public could enjoy.”

The Williamston Theatre production of *1984* runs from March 23-April 23. For more information on the play or to purchase tickets, see the [Williamston Theatre website](#).