

DRAMATIC CHANGES

Brian Haimbach gives LCC's theater program a facelift

Brian Haimbach waited, watched and learned. His first year as the lead theater faculty at Lane Community College slipped by as Haimbach got to know the college and the community.

Now, he's ready to bust out some change.

Haimbach's vision encompasses transfer degrees, acting competitions, community connections and the revamping of a vibrant old theater department.

LCC is one of the top community colleges in the nation, and Haimbach aims to run an excellent two-year transfer program, rather than pretend to run a student-leaking conservatory. Ultimately, Haimbach sees LCC as a place for students to begin their education in theater. He is working with the UO to streamline the transfer process and looks for opportunities to introduce his students to other advanced acting programs.

Thus, Haimbach is renewing LCC's connection with the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival. The KCACTF is a network of college theaters that provide feedback on productions, culminating in a festival of workshops, showcased plays and acting competitions. "It's a great opportunity for them to get to know schools so they know where they want to transfer." Aside from opening up options, Haimbach notes, participation in KCACTF "puts us back on the map."

This is not to suggest that drama at LCC was ever off the map. Anyone who sees a lot of theater in Eugene knows that some of the most interesting, passionate works are staged at The Blue Door Theatre. LCC's Student Productions Association (SPA), a unique student group that chooses and produces the plays, has managed well for years in the wake of budget cuts. But, "There was definitely a hands-off mentality," Haimbach says, continuing with a rueful smile, "I'm a bit more of a control freak."

Polite with a self-effacing sense of humor, Haimbach comes off more as a supportive older brother than a dictatorial director, and he notes that SPA has been very receptive to more guidance. To validate their energy, he

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LCC THEATER FACULTY

has created two work-study positions out of former SPA offices.

In addition to all this, audiences can look forward to an expanded Spring Inspirations — a festival that features 10-minute plays written by students — with new student-centered performance times like 4 pm matinees and a host of other small but significant changes.

I suspect Haimbach's most fundamental contribution will be the work he is doing to strengthen LCC's connections with the community. "It's a *community* college," he notes.

Haimbach is bringing in guest artists to direct and work with students in class and offering workshops free to the public, thus "providing students with great connections with professionals in New York City and other large markets."

From silent mimes to word-loving playwrights, Haimbach has invitations out all over the country. On Oct. 26 from 11 am to 3 pm, the New York-based theater director and teacher Willow Norton will lead an original works workshop, focusing on a combination of writing and performance.

In addition to bringing professionals in, Haimbach encourages his students to get out. He expects his students to participate in community theater and models this behavior by acting and directing locally. Storm Kennedy, who is currently working with Haimbach on Oregon Contemporary Theatre's *Who Am I This Time*, offered this insight: "As actors we all agree that the work we have done to prepare for this play has been phenomenal. We learned so much, gained so much insight from him before we even got on our feet." Kennedy continues saying, "He directs in a way that let us have the freedom to try things without being insecure about our choices, and is very direct when something doesn't work."

Haimbach will have his hands full balancing the needs of his students, the LCC administration, the program and the community. "Producing theater is really difficult," he says. "Teaching, when it's done right, is really difficult. You have to have a love and respect for what you do."

In his heart, Haimbach hopes that all his work will teach students how theater is done properly. "If I can send out students who know how things are done, the world will be full of better theater. And that would just make my soul happy." ■

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