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Thursday, August 14, 2014

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Theatre students form board to address women's issues within community



Photographed by Justin Barbin, Courtesy of Facebook

Students Anna Miles, Ashley Albert, and Juliana Sarah Del Prete perform as part of the Women’s Theater Ensemble. The group addresses women’s issues through its theater performances.

[Junnie Kwon](#), Reporter
January 8, 2013 •

There is a joke in the Northwestern theater community: “If you’re a guy, you coast,” Communication sophomore Ali Shields said.

Shields is the president of the Women’s Theatre Ensemble, a new theater board aiming to promote women’s issues in the theater community and support artists on and off campus.

The board held its first meeting on Dec. 3. The next day it hosted its first event, a feminist theater info session. It now has 13 members and on Monday held an organizational meeting.

Shields conceived the idea in November after speaking with a NU alumna who was a theater major. The alumna had been a member of a former NU women’s theater board that was started in reaction to a male-heavy season of theater shows, Shields said.

But it wasn’t until a conversation with her roommate and theater professor that Shields acted on her idea to start a women’s interest theater group.

“(My professor) asked, ‘If there was one thing about the department you could change what would it be?’ and my roommate said, ‘I wish there were more opportunities for women,’” Shields said.

Shields started reaching out to the student community looking for recruits to help her launch the board.

“I got a huge response, which was wonderful,” she said. “There’s no point in starting something if people don’t see a need for it.”

The board is working with Communication senior Anna Miles to help produce the second edition of her feminist play, “It was the Nightingale: Persephone’s Play,” which they plan to show in the spring. Miles and six of her friends first showed the play last Winter Quarter, but she said teaming with the board this year has made a significant difference.

“Having not only a producer and a production team but also an entire board behind me makes all the difference in the world,” Miles said. “Morale-wise it makes a huge difference to have people who share your passions and support the same things you support.”

She said that the play explores what it means to develop as a young woman dealing with societal pressures.

“I got here and I felt a little bit victim to the lack of opportunity for women, and as a terrified freshman I didn’t know where to go and how to make those opportunities for myself,” she said. “The reason why I’m really glad this exists is because we want to support those people.”

Although the group is focused on women’s opportunities, two of its members are male, and almost half of the likes on the group’s Facebook page are from male Facebook users, Shields said.

“I support that they’re trying to bring more of a women’s view on theater,” said Brannon Bowers, member of the theater board Arts Alliance. “I think we have enough theater boards, but I think they’re going to offer a new type of theater here.”

The group is working toward achieving Associated Student Government and Student Theatre Coalition recognition. In the works for this quarter is a possible female stand up comedy night and a burlesque show.

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Andy's Frozen Custard. It's been way too long. (14%, 10 Votes)

Seeing all my NU friends, with the added bonus of not living with my family. (29%, 21 Votes)

Football season. Go Cats! (47%, 34 Votes)

Norbucks. The coffee place near my work pales in comparison. (10%, 7 Votes)

Total Voters: **72**

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