

Workplace DRAMA

Acting experiences shape careers for two alumni

BY CLAIRE L. HALL

Almost from the moment she could talk, Allison Clark '05 wanted to become a veterinarian. But something magical happened when she auditioned for a play her first semester at Quinnipiac. "I could understand organic chemistry, but I didn't find joy in it," she said. "With acting, I found I could express myself. It helped me find my own voice."

Today she is a child counselor/drama therapist. She uses her acting skills to help children who have been physically abused or sexually assaulted process their experiences and feelings.

"I realized that I could use drama as a tool to heal, and I just loved that feeling," Clark said.

The drama program at Quinnipiac offers students more than the skills and experience they need for the performing arts, said Professor Crystal Brian. It also is sending them into the world with the knowledge that will enable them to make a good living, even if that "big break" takes years to achieve.

"There are many, many jobs out there, from production to management, from lighting to props," Brian said, adding that a stage manager can make more money than most actors. A good props specialist or lighting designer will never lack for work, she added.

Tricia Thelen, a professional scenic and costume designer and technical director, has joined the drama department as associate professor of theater in design and technical production. Brian said her talents will add depth to the program and noted that Thelen, who has many connections to the theater industry, will assist students in obtaining internships.

Real-world play therapy

Dolls, stuffed animals, puppets, masks and improvisation are all tools that Clark uses to coax her clients—ranging in age from 3 to 13—to face horrors ranging from incest to beatings.

"Children process, explore and communicate through play," she said. "By granting them a safe space to utilize their imaginations, kids can safely examine events in their lives, and the feelings connected to them, in hopes of beginning the healing process."

It can be very difficult to hear about the terrible things that have



Allison Clark '05 uses puppets to encourage children to express their feelings.

happened to children, Clark said, noting that particularly traumatic cases are difficult to forget. On a typical day, Clark checks in with parents, teachers, caseworkers and legal guardians to find out what is new with her clients. She then counsels about five children.

“Each child knows the reason they are seeing me is because I help kids with their ‘worries,’” she said. “I usually start with a check-in of the week: What was best? What was worst?”

Younger children will color; older kids tend to chat at the table or on the bean bag chairs. Then Clark moves into a more creative intervention, keeping in mind the objectives of providing emotional support, psycho-education and creating a safe space.

“Afterward, we focus on closure and relaxation. We catch the ‘worries’ that came into the room that day and place them in ‘worry bags’ on the windowsills,” Clark said.

She notes that therapy is about breakthroughs, but with children and trauma, therapists strive to help their clients make connections, recognize feelings and begin the healing process.

“When I am lucky enough to witness these moments, I am reminded of the resiliency of the human spirit. Those moments are what inspire me the most,” Clark said.

After graduating from Quinnipiac in 2005 with a double major in media production and theater performance, Clark took courses toward a master of fine arts in performance and society at Rhode Island College and then did an internship at the Veterans Administration Medical Center in West Haven, Conn., helping veterans work through post-traumatic stress. She went on to earn a master’s in drama therapy from NYU this year, writing her master’s thesis on drama therapy and the hospitalized child.

The play’s the thing

Kevin Daly ’04, who graduated with a degree in criminal justice, is now a part-time professor at the University and a full-time playwright. Daly and Clark played the title roles in Quinnipiac’s 2004 production of *The Troubles of Romeo and Juliet*.

In September, Daly’s own play, *In Kings and Fools*, was read by professional actors at The Manhattan Theatre Club, a Broadway and off-Broadway producing theater. The full-length drama centers on a lower-middle class family as it prepares for its annual Labor Day weekend barbecue. The patriarch and his wife are struggling to make sense of a younger son who has all but cut ties with them and an older son who is quickly becoming the neighborhood outcast. The reading has opened doors in terms of the play being considered by other theaters.

“My goal right now is to get a professional production,” he said.

After graduating from Quinnipiac, Daly backpacked through Europe. On long train rides between destinations, he wrote plays. After returning home, two key things happened. A long-anticipated job interview with the U.S. Marshals office got postponed. And, Daly was invited to visit Indiana University by a professor who was impressed with the plays Daly had sent. Daly brought some of his newer ones written in Europe. Days later he was offered a full scholarship to the three-year graduate program. He earned his master of fine arts degree in 2008.

“When you’re 17 or 18, you’ve got so much pressure from your parents or your school to choose a major. By the time you graduate,



Kevin Daly '04 reads from his new play, *In Kings and Fools*.

you’re a different person,” Daly observed. “I didn’t take my first playwriting class until my senior year in college. I think a lot of seniors wake up at night thinking, ‘Is this what I want to do for the next 5 or 10 years or longer?’”

Today he enjoys teaching an eclectic mix of students, some committed to a career in theater, others who are just doing it for fun. Teaching, he said, is a way to give back to those, including Brian, who helped him achieve his goals.

CAREERS FOR THEATER MAJORS

- Become a lawyer. A dramatic presentation gives you an advantage in the courtroom.
- Begin a teaching career. Trying to hold the attention of children in the video age requires a knack for drama and creativity.
- Pursue lighting design. You can earn a great deal of money lighting NYC’s prestigious shop windows during the holidays.
- Become a set designer for TV or theater.
- Become an expert in theater technology. You can create a trap door or figure out how Peter Pan is going to fly over the audience.
- Become a director or stage manager, a high-paying job that’s in demand.
- Become a drama therapist, using drama to help people heal from or cope with problems.
- Become an expert in theater administration, handling everything from public relations to casting.