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'Hamilton' **Means to Me**



ASU students get inspired and get informed

By Sarah McCarty

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When the national tour of “Hamilton: An American Musical” hit the stage at ASU Gammage this year, it was the first time Lin-Manuel Miranda’s Broadway smash was performed on a college campus.

“Witnessing a live performance of one of the most groundbreaking musicals of this century to date was an opportunity that I thought I’d never have,” said Sofia Alvarez, a junior studying theatre design and production at ASU.

Alvarez was one of a select number of students who received a free ticket thanks to the forward thinking of Tiffany Ana López, director of the School of Film, Dance and Theatre, and the support of ASU Gammage. Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, ASU Gammage executive director and ASU vice president for cultural affairs, made blocks of seats available throughout the show’s run in order to engage students across campus while the influential work was in Tempe. López used discretionary research funds to purchase a number of the coveted tickets for some Film, Dance and Theatre students.

“One of the glaring problems in the arts is when amazing work gets made and it is not accessible to the intended audience,” said Kelly Joyce Fielder, a graduate theatre for youth student who was also selected. “By allowing us access to this work that we otherwise would not have had the opportunity to see, we are able to participate in this global conversation about the phenomenon that is ‘Hamilton.’”

López called the tickets the “icing on the cake” for the larger project she organized — “What ‘Hamilton’ Means to Me.” The real treat was participating in a series of interactive workshops that explored “Hamilton” as an important work for artists.

“The inspiration came from knowing how many students would want to see ‘Hamilton’ and wondering about the incredible work that could evolve if students had the opportunity to see ‘Hamilton’ in conjunction with participating

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School of Film, Dance and Theatre students, musical theatre students from the School of Music, and ASU's College Assistance Migrant Program students were invited to submit a one-minute video on what "Hamilton" means to them for the chance at being selected.

In her submission, Alvarez said "Hamilton" means representation.

Undergraduate film student Francisco Monarrez said, "'Hamilton' reminds us that we should never ever give up on what we truly believe in and what we love."

"It is proof you can take artistic risks, telling stories in new ways and challenging societal expectations while still creating really successful theatre," said undergraduate theatre student Jordan Mattson.

Daniel Zemeida, also an undergraduate theatre student, submitted a short rap to the tune of "My Shot" from "Hamilton."

Even Herberger Institute's Dean Steven Tepper joined in, sharing a video on what "Hamilton" means to him — "the triumph of inclusion over exclusion."

López and a panel of community and national arts leaders selected the students to participate in the workshops and receive a ticket to the show, which they saw together along with López, workshop leaders and other project mentors.

"Seeing the show opened my mind to the questions asked on stage," Alvarez said. "And through the facilitation of Dr. López, I had the chance to share these thoughts and opinions with my peers in such a constructive way."

Workshop leaders included David Ivers, artistic director of Arizona Theatre Company; Clyde Valentin, director of Ignite/Arts Dallas at Southern Methodist University Meadows School of the Arts and former executive director of the New York City-based Hip-Hop Theater Festival; Aliento, a Phoenix-based organization that creates community healing through art leading to collective power; and Patricia Herrera, associate professor of theatre at the

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“The goal of the project is for students to find themselves inspired and informed about how to create work born from their own cultural experiences and the forms of artistic expression that make them feel passionate about telling their stories,” López said.

And telling those stories is something Alvarez sees as a critical mission.

“It is important that our generation of artists learn to tell stories that aren’t frequently told,” she said. “As students of art, we carry the responsibility of being responsible and thoughtful creators.”

What Hamilton Means to Me





ASU students discover 'Hamilton' through show and tell-your-story workshops

February 7, 2018

History has its eyes on "Hamilton." And so too does a group of storytellers honing their craft at Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts at Arizona State University.

Straddling the disciplines of film, dance, music, theater and transborder studies, 80 “young, scrappy and hungry” students are getting their shot (and taking it) to experience ASU Gammage’s presentation of the Broadway hit "Hamilton: An American Musical" on Feb. 15.





Tiffany Lopez

The opportunity comes through the “What 'Hamilton' Means to Me Project,” a four-part workshop series facilitated and organized by Tiffany Lopez, director of Herberger Institute’s School of Film, Dance and Theatre.

“The project is the first of many projects that will give students the opportunity to connect with artists and activists through workshops designed in conjunction with a major touring production at ASU Gammage,” Lopez said. “The goal of the project is for students to find themselves inspired and informed about how to create work born from their own cultural experiences and the forms of artistic expression that make them feel passionate about telling their stories.”

The room where it happens

The first workshop, led by Arizona Theatre Company artistic director David Ivers, included an interactive exchange that expanded on the phenomenon of the musical, its cultural impact and on the idea of taking creative risks.

“'Hamilton' to me is our planet’s masterpiece of the era,” Ivers told students gathered for the Feb. 2 workshop at the Lyceum Theatre on ASU’s Tempe campus. “It has an inevitability to it that makes us examine everything we have ever known, everything we have ever seen.”

Ivers' words resonated with film, dance and theater junior Maryam Ishaya. She said the racially diverse cast of Lin-Manuel Miranda's revolutionary retelling of America's Founding Fathers re-invigorated her passion for theater and has helped her push back against the typecasting she says she has experienced as an actress of Middle Eastern descent.

"Lin-Manuel wanted to show the diversity from his community through the story of 'Hamilton' and we talked about how he did that by highlighting the great success that immigrants bring to this country," Ishaya said. "'Hamilton' has actually inspired me to write about a queen in my culture who was the very first woman in my community to give herself the right to do what a man can do. Not a lot of people know her story and so I would like to write about it and make it a musical."

Rhett Gajcak, a freshman majoring in theater, said he was first turned on to "Hamilton" by a friend who showed him a video of the show's cast performing at the White House. Gajcak, who admits to having experienced just one musical, said he is excited about participating in the "Hamilton" workshops and sees the opportunity as a fresh start for his focus in life.

"For the few plays that I have seen, they have been phenomenal," Gajcak said. "If I am able to see 'Hamilton,' it would be like a stepping stone to a new life of chasing theater. I see this workshop as a great opportunity for me to get accustomed to musicals and theater and what I want to do."

(Embedded Video)

My shot

Students participating in the "Hamilton" workshops have the option of taking them for credit as part of a dynamically dated course. The tickets they receive to see the musical are really just the icing on the cake, said Lopez, who thoughtfully set aside discretionary research funds to bulk purchase the hard-to-come-by "Hamilton" tickets when they went on sale in fall 2017.

Brandon Riley, a second year dramatic writing graduate student, said he jumped at the chance to participate in the workshop series.

“Since a lot of us can’t afford 'Hamilton' tickets, it was a golden opportunity to learn about the effects of this phenomenon and to be able to see the show at the same time,” Riley said. “In a country where we are so divided, 'Hamilton' represents what America could be and should be — having diverse cast members unite to create one show.”

And while it was not quite the duel-to-the-death event between the show’s historical namesake, U.S. statesman Alexander Hamilton, and his political rival Aaron Burr, the selection process for students to participate in the “What 'Hamilton' Means to Me Project” was a competitive one. Each student had to submit a one-minute video essay about what "Hamilton" means to them as artists, storytellers and cultural voices. Freshman theater major Daniel Zemeida offered up a creative take on the "Hamilton" song “My Shot” for his essay.

(Embedded Video)

Students in ASU’s College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP)✚

, like nursing major Andrea Patino, were among the interdisciplinary students invited to submit a video to participate in the "Hamilton" workshop project.

(Embedded Video)

The second "What 'Hamilton' Means to Me" workshop is slated for Feb. 16+

— the day after the students see the musical at Gammage. It will offer a look at the history of hip-hop theater and the role of "Hamilton" in the work of building community. The final two workshops — on Feb. 23+

and March 2+

— will link themes in "Hamilton" to contemporary issues related to immigration and social justice.

"We cultivated participants from these programs to foster our goal of bringing together a diverse group of students who are deeply and differently invested in thinking about the power of art to build and transform community," Lopez said. "We wanted to bring a range of engagement to the workshops in order to generate new work and new conversations with students who are well versed about 'Hamilton' as a work of art and students who know very little about the play and have never seen a musical."

While priority seating will be given to students selected to participate in the project, the workshops are open to the public on a first-come, first-served basis.

Who lives, who dies, who tells your story?

Through "Hamilton's" recurring themes of storytelling and seizing the moment, Lopez hopes the "What 'Hamilton' Means to Me Project" will inspire the students she calls "'Hamilton' ambassadors" to be storytellers "in the here and now." She offers the reminder that Lin-Manuel Miranda was still just an undergraduate at Wesleyan University when he conjured up "In the Heights," his first Broadway success story.

"The Herberger Institute's School of Film, Dance and Theatre is committed to developing storytellers who want to make a difference in their communities and create art as a means to transform how people think about making art and making the world," Lopez said. "We task our students with thinking about how they most want to create work that has the power to transform the ways we think about history, art, music, poetry, dance and visual aesthetics, among other things."

Lopez and 19 other mentors associated with the workshops will also join the students in seeing the Feb. 15 performance of "Hamilton" at ASU Gammage. The musical runs through Feb. 25 and has inspired a number of **other ASU courses and lectures (<https://asunow.asu.edu/20171204-creativity-hamilton-musical-new-asu-classes>)** built around the "Hamilton" phenomenon.

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