



College of Arts & Letters



[Home](#) > [About the College](#) > [News](#) > Theatre Students Travel to Dubai for International Festival

Theatre Students Travel to Dubai for International Festival

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Eight undergraduate Theatre students recently traveled to the United Arab Emirates to participate in the [first International Theatre Festival at the American University of Sharjah](#), located about 15 miles from Dubai in the city of Sharjah.

"It was the most incredible week of my life and one of the most beautiful places I have ever been, especially Dubai, which was stunning," said Katelyn Wilson, a senior Theatre major. "I have never been somewhere so foreign to our customs. I consider myself very lucky to have had this experience, and I am just so grateful because I know we got a lot of help from CAL (College of Arts & Letters) and the American University of Sharjah."

The host institution covered everything while the students were at the festival, including their housing and food, while the College of Arts & Letters and Department of Theatre paid for all their travel and production costs.

"I was super happy because I knew I wouldn't be able to afford to go if that didn't happen," said Lucy Wagenaar, a sophomore with a double major in Theatre and Apparel and Textile Design. "I am incredibly thankful because it made this whole trip possible for me. And the fact that we were able to bring eight students is amazing. We were the biggest group there besides the host university."



The MSU students quickly bonded with other students at the festival and especially the students from the American University of Sharjah (AUS).

"We had theatre in common and that was an instant connection, which just acted as a bridge to build the foundation for more connections," Wilson said. "We got really close with the students from AUS and still keep in touch. Just working with them and hearing about their experiences in theatre

and how it differs from ours was very cool, especially because their program is very new, and for most of them, this was their first experience with acting.

"We ended up leaving knowing that we, and our backgrounds in theatre, inspired the futures of others and that this experience helped build the appreciation of theatre in that region of the world."

The MSU students also discovered they are not so different from the students at AUS.

"I had a lot of assumptions in going there and every single one of them was shot down," Wilson said. "The fact that I had such assumptions of these students who were just like us. They go to school. They go to the gym. They go get coffee. They have the same inside jokes. It was eye opening and was stupid that I was so shocked."

The MSU students who participated in the trip include:

- Joseph Lancour, junior set designer
- Ian Klahre, sophomore actor
- Katelyn Wilson, senior actor
- Trevor Earley, senior actor
- Taylor Blair, senior actor
- Lucy Wagenaar, sophomore costume designer
- Grace Hinkley, senior actor
- Raied Jawhari, sophomore actor

They traveled to the United Arab Emirates with MSU Department of Theatre Chairperson Kirk Domer and Associate Professor of Theatre Rob Roznowski, who were both actively involved in the festival. Domer worked with student designers and helped teach a series of design classes, while Roznowski worked with the acting students and lead workshops on *Inner Monologue in Acting*.

Presenting Their Work Abroad

As part of the festival, the MSU students performed a new play, *Be. Longing.*, which was written by Roznowski to go along with the festival theme, "cultural identity." The play consists of a series of vignettes that examine different aspects of cultural identity – socialization, work, adolescents, etc. – and how we become the people we are.

"We took them on a journey of all different feelings and styles," Wilson said, "and there was dance, song, comedy and drama."



MSU theatre students posing with students from the American University of Sharjah in Dubai.

The American University of Sharjah also presented a play based on the same cultural identity theme.

"Coming from two different worlds, it was interesting to see how they dealt with the cultural identity theme versus how we did it," Wagenaar said. "Surprisingly, their show was similar to ours. However, their's was more serious, while ours got the same message across but was more comedic."

For the student designers, they worked on a common script project, an American adaptation of *Arabian Nights*, where they designed costumes for characters in the play and completed cornell boxes to showcase their version of an *Arabian Nights* set. The student designers then presented these at the festival.

Department of Theatre alumnus Ted Rhyner, who earned an MFA in Production Design with an emphasis in Lighting from Michigan State University in 2010, is an Assistant Professor, Lighting Designer, and Technical Director at the American University of Sharjah. He suggested that MSU's Department of Theatre submit a proposal to the festival and it was accepted.

Students were selected as part of the department's theatrical season casting process among those Theatre students who indicated a desire to travel to the United Arab Emirates.

The group traveled to the United Arab Emirates Jan. 27-Feb. 5. During the trip, they got to see a lot of Sharjah and Dubai. They went on a safari tour in the desert where they saw falcon and belly dancing shows, rode camels, went sandboarding, and got henna tattoos. They also visited Global Village, a local market, the Sharjah Light Festival, and the Dubai Mall.

"It was such an amazing experience. A lot of us said we will be back," Wilson said. "I have no doubt that I will go back some day."



RT @cplong: Great to meet @_Muata__ (#Wittenberg '17) today & to see Professor Copeland, whose teaching @Wittenberg changed my life. [https://www.cplong.com/2017/05/13/college-of-arts-and-letters-theatre-students-travel-to-dubai-for-international-festival](#)
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