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Ray Schultz trades professorship for a crown

Summary: The theatre arts professor is playing King Claudius in Austin Shakespeare Company's production of Hamlet.

(October 3, 2011)-It is far from common for someone to trade a professorship for a crown, but University of Minnesota, Morris Associate Professor of Theatre Ray Schultz is doing precisely that during his fall 2011 sabbatical. Schultz is playing King Claudius in Hamlet at the Austin Shakespeare Company in Austin, Texas. The company's mission is to bring to the public "performances that are fresh, bold, imaginative, thought-provoking, and eminently accessible, connecting the truths of the past with the challenges and possibilities of today."

Once Schultz received leave for the 2011 fall semester, he contacted a colleague, Ann Ciccolella, inquiring about available acting work. Ciccolella is the artistic director of Austin Shakespeare.

"I really wanted to act professionally because it had been several years since I had been able to do so, and it's something I really love doing," says Schultz. "Because of our academic calendar, and the fact that Morris is so far from the Twin Cities, it is difficult to audition for acting work. So I try very hard to seize those rare opportunities."

To his delight, Schultz was offered the chance to play Claudius who poisons his brother, takes over the throne of Denmark, and marries the king's widow, leaving his nephew, Prince Hamlet, to seek revenge.

"I am thrilled to get the chance to do this role because Claudius is a villain, yet, as with most of Shakespeare, he's a villain with dimension—you see him wrestling with his conscience but still going forward at all costs to cover up his crimes. Shakespeare is one of my favorite playwrights, and while I have directed his work at UMM three times since I have been teaching there, it's been quite a long time since I have gotten to act in a full production of one of his plays."

Schultz feels that it is enormously important to practice his craft professionally on a periodic basis in order to relate to his students. "Acting informs my directing, and that's a big part of my interaction with students, both in the classroom and rehearsal hall. I want and need to know how it feels to inhabit a character and to meet the challenges of a particular role or technical issue. My experiences help me to anticipate and sympathize with the things my students may need help with."

This specific opportunity to act in Hamlet will be of special use, since Schultz teaches Shakespeare in both his acting and directing classes. "It's really important for me to exercise those muscles in a formal way from time to time—I relearn and practice many things I've already done, which is never a bad thing, but I also learn new things from the experience, which I can hopefully pass on to my students."

The Austin Shakespeare Company's production of Hamlet runs until Sunday, October 9.

Enjoy a [slideshow of scenes](#) from the production.

Photo above: Schultz in the "prayer scene" from Hamlet.

Photo credit: Kimberley Mead

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