CAL FAMOUS
AFFILIATES PROGRAM
Designed to Enhance Distinction

The College of Arts & Letters recently established the Famous Affiliates program to support a vibrant intellectual and artistic culture that establishes sustainable relationships with well-known artists and writers, prominent faculty members, and public intellectuals as affiliates. Famous Affiliates is designed to enhance CAL programs and departments, create more visibility and national prominence, and expose our students, faculty and the community to outstanding minds of the time in the areas of arts and humanities. Associated initiatives can take the shape of short intensive visits, Master classes, or other unconventional arrangements.

The first two Famous Affiliates relationships—one from the arts and one from the humanities—were set in motion in 2011 and continued in 2012.
The Department of Theatre created a three-year limited residency (4 weeks per year) with professional Broadway director Jen Bender to work with CAL students and faculty and develop a new work for musical theatre that resulted in a world premiere production at Michigan State University. Ms. Bender also offered graduate seminars and public workshops during her visits.

The partnership with Jen Bender began in 2011 through a grant secured from the Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation (SDCF), the not-for-profit foundation affiliated with the Stage Directors and Choreographers (SDC). The foundation’s guest artist initiative program awards matching funds of up to $5,000 for a guest artist fee for a director or choreographer for a specific project. An SDCF panel comprising professional directors and choreographers, arts administrators, and college educators select productions for the award.

Michigan State University’s partnership with Ms. Bender was one of the first two projects funded through the SDCF program; the other was at Arizona University. In January 2011, Jen Bender directed a multi-media production of “The Wizard of Oz” at Michigan State University.

“What a great success it was having Jen Bender here,” says Associate Professor of Acting Rob Roznowski. “We were expecting her professionalism and high standards — what we did not expect was her kindness, compassion and sincere interest in our students’ education. It was a resounding success.”

Ms. Bender’s work with students in all areas of theatre resulted in an environment of excellent expectations where she pushed designers and actors to work in the rigors and demands of professional theatre. Resulting benefits include connections to today’s top professionals in the field.

Ms. Bender is also artistic director of Broadway in South Africa, a non-profit organization that aims to develop a cross-cultural exchange between youth in need and artists who seek to use their change for good. The organization believes that all children deserve the opportunity to explore their own creative potential and build skills necessary to develop productive lives. The Department of Theatre sees potential opportunities for CAL students and faculty to become involved in this exciting exchange.

Ms. Bender’s numerous Broadway and New York credentials are impressive, and her résumé can be found on her website: www.jenbenderonline.com.

“THE WIZARD OF OZ”
Interview with Jen Bender

So, this visiting artist or Famous Affiliate position was one that you had to apply for, right?

Yes, I originally learned about it because my agent knew that Michigan State was looking to hire a director for this production. So I wrote a proposal that I sent to the Theatre Department, and then, based on that, I had an interview, and they liked what they heard.

And, then, because I live in New York City, we had most of our production meetings on Skype, where the creative team would sit in the theatre conference room looking at the big screen and I would sit in New York with my computer and we’d talk back and forth like that.

Which is actually a really efficient and fun way to do it; I’ve never done that before. But, what’s nice is they were able to send me documents and drawings on e-mail so I could look at those pictures as they came in and then we could discuss them. So, it wasn’t like they were holding up a set model to the screen, but they could e-mail me actual ground plans and costume renderings and research materials and then we could be looking at them at the same time while we discussed them.
So, when did you actually have to come to campus?

Well, I came here November 1st and 2nd to do auditions. Then, I came back in January, and we started rehearsals on the 11th.

So, you guest directed “The Wizard of Oz.” Had you tackled this musical before?

Of course, I’m familiar with the movie like everyone in America, and I love the movie like everyone in America, but this is the first time I’d ever directed the show.

The idea for this version of “The Wizard of Oz” came mostly from the desire by MSU to incorporate a lot of media. Allison Dobbins, who is responsible for the multimedia in the department, was looking to do a show that incorporated a lot of media, and Rob wanted to know how I would incorporate media into this production. And my concept was that I wanted to see what today’s version of going from black and white to technicolor would be.

So, did you see this as an update to the original?

Although we set the story in the same time period that it was originally done, it’s not an update of the story in terms of the time period. But, modern audiences are not wowed by black and white to color in the way that they were in 1939. So, I thought, what could we do that will feel to a modern audience the way that transition felt in 1939?

And, I thought the big change nowadays is that things go from being sort of everyday to multimedia and digital. Technology is advancing so quickly that with every new thing that’s created, it feels new and exciting. You know, every time a new iPad comes out, or a product like that, we all say, “Ooh, it’s this new thing that didn’t exist a year ago.”

So, I wanted to capture that feeling to a contemporary audience without changing the timeframe of the original show. So, when we first meet Dorothy on the farm, it’s presented as a very traditional show. There’s traditional lighting, traditional costumes and set pieces, and it will feel like we are doing what I think is the expected production of “The Wizard of Oz.”

And when Dorothy lands in Oz, we start incorporating multimedia elements. So, the first time we meet Glinda, she appears in video form.

What are some of the challenges you faced?

One of the challenges I was trying to solve in the first Munchkin Land scene was, how do we make the Munchkins small? I didn’t want to cast children, I didn’t want to cast little people, and I didn’t want to have a company of adults on their knees. I felt like that had all been done before. So, I thought instead of making the Munchkins small, let’s make Glinda big. And that’s something we were able to do with multimedia that we can’t do with actors only. So, the first time Glinda’s revealed, she’s a giant prerecorded video version of Glinda. So we establish initially that she’s much bigger than everyone else. And then, because she’s magical, she’s able to change her size. So that when she does step forward as a real actress, we’ve already established that she can be bigger than the Munchkins, and the idea that she has shrunk herself to be their size in order to interact with them in their own height.
And, then, that was really the jumping-off point about how could we incorporate technology so it felt that the further Dorothy and her friends go down the Yellow Brick Road that the journey into Oz would become less familiar to Dorothy and more and more technology would be incorporated.

Because I wanted it to feel like it would have felt for someone going from a black-and-white world to a world full of color, but what must that feel like for a person to experience? So with Dorothy, it’s not only that she’s meeting new people like the Scarecrow and Tin Man and Lion, but that she’s entered into a world that is completely unfamiliar to her experience up until then.

In a very real—or unreal—sense, it sounds like you created a new world within the world we all know in the movie version of “The Wizard of Oz”?

Yes. I wanted to create a world that she doesn’t quite know what the rules were, that things appeared and changed in a way that was different—that felt different—than the world she’d known up until Oz. So Oz didn’t only have new people in it, but also functioned as a world that was unfamiliar to her.

So, in this production, the further she goes down the Yellow Brick Road, the more the world changes and becomes more unfamiliar to her. And in order to make it more unfamiliar, we’re incorporating more and more media elements the farther she gets down the road.

Can you share some examples?

Sure. So, when we first arrive in Munchkin Land, it feels fairly traditional except for the addition of Glinda as this first multimedia element. By the time she gets to the Scarecrow’s cornfield, the background has become multimedia. When she gets to the Tinman, we’ve incorporated a background that further involves that kind of multimedia surrounding.

And the further and further she gets into the world, it gets more complicated and by the time she gets to Oz, it feels very advanced in a sophisticated technology kind of way. So the Ozians she meets aren’t just green, they’re dealing with bells and whistles and computers, and things that she never would have seen before.

I really wanted to capture that feeling of what it would be like for a girl to go from Kansas to New York City, where she’s experiencing not only bigger buildings and more people, but buildings that look completely unlike she’s ever seen, people who move and dress completely unlike anything she’s ever seen.

So, the technology and effects extended to the buildings as well?

Yes, by the time we get to the Witch’s castle in Act II, that’s the height of how much technology we’re using in the show. The Witch, because she has magical powers, is able not only to come and go as a person, but she can manipulate her environment more so than any other character we’ve met up until this point.

So, when Dorothy and Scarecrow, Tinman and the Lion get to the Witch’s castle, not only is it dark and scary, but it operates in a way that is the furthest removed from anything they’ve seen before. So, the Witch is able to manipulate her environment; she’s able to turn the room upside down, she’s able to split herself up and appear in more than one place at the same time.

And, then, we also expanded her castle so that when her Winkie soldiers appear, not only are they seen as real actors, but they then appear on the screen walking in different directions including walking upside down, walking sideways. It’s like they’re in an M.C. Escher painting, and are able to walk in all different kinds of dimensions that you could never do with only actors and a stage. So, again, we’re trying to create a world that is advanced in a way beyond what Dorothy has experienced up until then.

A world that is as far removed from Kansas as it could be?

Right. And, then, when she comes home to Kansas at the end of the show, it should feel new and exciting if only because we’re revisiting the real world in a way that we haven’t seen since the beginning of the show.

So, by the time she gets back to Kansas, the lack of technology and media is what feels new to her. Because she’s now become so accustomed to things functioning a certain way in Oz, that the thing that was so familiar and unexciting to her, initially, now actually feels the fullest and most realized of anything she’s seen.

So, how did the production turn out?

Oh, it went great. I have absolutely loved working at MSU. The faculty has been so welcoming and wonderful. The design team that I worked with was absolutely outstanding. Their ideas and their willingness to sort of go on this journey with me, where I came in and said, “I have these ideas, this is my concept. This where I’d like to go with this production.” And they were all so quick to jump in and say, “Oh, we could do this. And what if we added this? Oh, what about this?”

“That’s a director’s dream. That I can captain a ship, but get to work with people who can do things so well in their special areas so far beyond what I could ever do as an individual.”
The Department of Philosophy established a relationship with the renowned philosopher of science Sandra Harding. Harding’s field of expertise is situated at the intersection of science and technology studies, postcolonial studies, and feminist critique.

In her book, “The Postcolonial Science and Technology Studies Reader,” Harding puts those fields in critical conversation to explore strategies for cultivating new visions of a multicultural, democratic world of sciences and for turning those visions into realities. The Philosophy Department established a reading group centered on “The Postcolonial Science and Technology Studies Reader.”

During the fall 2011 and winter 2012 semesters, Harding, who is a professor, Social Sciences and Comparative Education at UCLA, met with students in selected courses and graduate students whose work overlaps with hers, as well as presented associated lectures. In her “Philosophies of Science: Agendas for the 21st Century,” presented in March 2012, Harding noted that the modern-day philosophies of science we’ve all learned were created 60 years ago in the era of the brand-new National Science Foundation, the emergence of the United Nations, and of the Cold War, and that, today, we live in a different world. Harding went on to address new directions in philosophies of science that arose from multiculturalism, globalization, Third World development, and postcolonialism.

Harding followed up with a lecture presented by CAL’s Department of Philosophy and the Center for Gender in Global Context titled “Feminist and Postcolonial Science and Technology Issues: Convergences and Dissonances.” In that lecture, Harding noted that women’s movements in the West, and postcolonial movements around the globe, are both more than four decades old, and that their criticisms of how modern Western sciences do not serve well the groups they represent, as well as their programs to improve scientific practice rely on conflicting assumptions about what are the relevant social relations on which to focus. This is a problem since the majority of women are not in the modern West, and the majority of peoples affected are not adult men. How can these movements better engage with each other’s projects?
Professor Harding’s affiliation with the MSU Department of Philosophy comes at a time when the Department has consolidated distinctive strengths in many of her areas of interest.” —Dick Peterson
Department of Philosophy Professor

科学传统需要更新；而且谁应该并且能够领导重审科学实践，使其更紧密地与社会正义项目挂钩。

Ms. Harding表示，这是一个问题，因为女性在现代西方社会中占多数，而且受影响的人群主要受到殖民主义和新殖民主义的影响，而这些人中多数不是男性。每一个运动需要成功的另一个因素来保持自己的成功。她问，这些运动是否能更好地与彼此的项目合作？

“Professor Harding’s affiliation with the MSU Department of Philosophy comes at a time when the Department has consolidated distinctive strengths in many of her areas of interest,” says MSU Department of Philosophy Professor Dick Peterson. “She has already created a stimulating presence in the Department and promises to be a helpful voice in collaborations with students and faculty and in discussions of the evolution of the Department’s commitments to a socially engaged philosophical enterprise.”

ON SANDRA HARDING

Sandra Harding is one of the most important figures in the emergence of a feminist rethinking of academic philosophy both in the United States and in the wider global intellectual community. Trained in conventional philosophy of science, she developed the idea of standpoint epistemology to highlight the role of context, perspective, and social relations in the generation of scientific and technological knowledge. Her notion of “strong objectivity” has remained an important point of reference in attempts to think about rationality in historically concrete ways without losing sight of genuine achievements in science.

Though perhaps best known for her contributions to the rethinking of the role of gender in knowledge and the impact of assumptions and practices of science and technology on women, Professor Harding has also made significant contributions to rethinking similar issues as they bear on race and racism. Her recent work has broken new paths by extending these insights into the discussion of science and technology in a global setting as she develops the argument for a “post-colonial” understanding of science and technology. Her many books and articles continue to be influential, and the many anthologies she has edited in the areas of her interest have opened up debates and intellectual possibilities for numerous scholars and students.