

Dorothy Trigg
Feature Profile

Very few professors are able to invoke applause from their students.

Professor Cara Gabriel can.

When she stood up during her theatre history class' discussion of Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus*, she was visibly excited. Her hands were shaking. She was jittery. She couldn't stand still.

The students were discussing the need to update Plautus in order for contemporary audiences to understand him. They had compared *Miles Gloriosus* to *30 Rock*.

In response, Gabriel said, "Theatre professionals don't trust the intelligence of their audiences. Popular entertainment already does a good job of dumbing itself down to the lowest common denominator. If theatre's going to do the same thing, then what's the point?"

She spoke with such passion about theatre as a form of art instead of theatre as a form of entertainment that her students couldn't help but applaud. They left the classroom inspired.

This was not the only class period that had students hanging on her every word. "She had me on the edge of my seat a couple weeks ago during a lesson on ancient Sanskrit theatre. That's so cool!" says sophomore Katie Andrew.

Gabriel's passionate teaching stems from her desire for learning. When she directs plays, she chooses unusual works that challenge her. She focuses on a play's fundamental problem rather than on aspects that she loves, and then builds her directing concept off of that problem.

College was the first time Gabriel got excited about unusual plays. In high school she was exposed to musicals, Shakespeare and other popular playwrights, but "in college, they were doing plays that blew my mind," she says.

In her doctoral program, her professors specialized in the historical avant-garde. "All my questions were suddenly answered," Gabriel says. She discovered why the plays were so unusual, what the historical context was, and what the productions were like. "I was moved by the knowledge of how they were created."

Gabriel wrote her doctorate on Spanish-language vaudeville in the American southwest. She wanted to change her topic because she wasn't in love with it, but she couldn't. Instead, she had to find something to love about it.

"I try to do that with every play I teach because if you're teaching stuff that's boring to you, then it won't be interesting to your students," Gabriel says.

Gabriel's classes are discussion-based in order to inspire critical thinking and self-motivated learning in her students. They have the opportunity to work answers out for themselves. She aims to give students the tools to continue to learn more on their own.

"Cara is one of the most passionate professors I have ever had," says sophomore Allie Glickman. "She inspires me to learn more and be a better student and artist."