

Theatre Student Says “Yes” to Career Success in Performing Arts Field

By Naomi M. McMillen



Nicole Campbell, a senior double majoring in theatre and gender and women’s studies, credits her career success to her willingness to pursue and say “yes” to opportunities outside of her comfort zone. Campbell’s tenacity and openness to trying out new ventures has enabled her to maintain continuous employment in the performing arts field since her freshman year at DU.

“The most valuable lesson I’ve learned during my time at DU is to say yes no matter how busy, tired, or overwhelmed I’ve felt. Pushing myself to say yes has led me to many opportunities that were definitely outside of my comfort zone,” Campbell said. “As a theatre major, it’s all about putting yourself out there and making connections.”

In the four years she has spent at DU, Campbell has been cast in numerous leading roles in productions throughout the Denver area. As a freshman, she played the female lead in DU’s *Urinetown: The Musical* as well as her first professional lead as Ulla in *The Producers* at the Littleton Town Hall Arts Center. Nicole is also a member of the Denver sketch comedy group, *Urban Brain*. Since starting at DU, Campbell has been cast in 22 different productions, including plays, musicals, films, digital shorts, and even a web series.

Of all her experiences, Campbell’s role in *The Producers* has made the most significant impact on her life and career trajectory.

“All of my counterparts (cast and crew) were established and seasoned in the industry,” she said. “It was between me and one other actress who was probably more age appropriate for the role, but what I think put me over the top was that I could do the splits!”

At DU, Campbell has found ways to combine her love of theatre with her interest in women and gender. During her sophomore year, she took a gender and women’s studies course and before she knew it, she had enough classes under her belt to double major. She chose to double major because of the flexibility and diversity in the gender and women’s studies program, and because it intersects with the performing arts field. Campbell particularly likes how the program allows her to explore issues that crisscross gender, race, class, sexuality, and other themes and how theatre allows for a richer understanding of these important issues. She is currently completing her senior capstone project on a topic that combines her love of theatre and passion for gender and women’s studies: Women and Comedy.

“Nicole is one of the strongest major we’ve ever had. She’s smart, talented, and a great collaborator who knows how to articulate an artistic vision and get it done. She consistently demonstrates how to manage multiple details while never losing sight of the big picture. Nicole succeeds comprehensively, with each project or production,” Theatre professor Rick Barbour said.

In addition to her exploits on the screen and stage, Campbell has also served as a DJ for the student-run radio station, KXDU, and as a weekly news anchor on KVDU, the student-run television station. For the past three years, she has worked as a teaching assistant in the scene shop in the theatre department, where she gained behind-the-scenes production experience. She is also the membership committee chair for DU's Mortar Board National Honor Society chapter.

Campbell advises other students to never give up on their professional aspirations. She believes that keeping her options open has contributed to her career success.

“Because I always keep my options open and I say yes as often as possible, I’ve made new contacts and established relationships that have led to other projects down the road. Not everyone will get the dream role every time, but just keep trying and it might happen,” Campbell said. “Take risks, challenge yourself, and explore every medium you can because you never may know what life has in store for you.”

After graduating Cum Laude this June, Campbell plans to stay in Denver to complete her responsibilities in local productions, and then move to either Chicago or Los Angeles to pursue a professional career in the performing arts field, where she hopes to eventually become one of the lead artists for the comedy group *Second City*.

Campbell would like to follow in the footsteps of great women comedians and eventually be on Saturday Night Live.

“More than anything, I aspire to be the next Tina Fey or Amy Poehler. I hope to make people laugh as I perform, write and direct new projects designed to entertain the masses. There is no doubt that I will look back on my experience here at DU as something I will treasure as it has shaped so much of who I am today,” Campbell said.