

From Ithaca to Qatar, *Antigone* is Cornellians' topic for discussion

By Franklin Crawford

It's become an annual Orientation week rite of passage at Cornell -- the New Student Reading Project, which involves programs surrounding the reading of a text in common by all first-year students as well as many other Cornellians. And once again, members of the Ithaca community will be taking part, as well.

The 2003-04 reading project kicks off Sunday, Aug. 24, with a Barton Hall faculty panel discussion on this year's required text, *Antigone* by Sophocles. More than 3,500 new students, as well as many faculty, staff and continuing students, will attend the discussion at 3:30 p.m. in Barton Hall. And it will be broadcast live on Time Warner Cable Channel 10.

Cornell faculty panelists in Barton Hall will include: David Feldshuh, professor and artistic director of Cornell's Schwartz Center for the Performing Arts; Michelle Moody-Adams, professor of philosophy and director of the Ethics and Public Life Program; and Jeffrey Rusten, professor of classics.

Feldshuh, who is directing an adaptation of *Antigone* at the Schwartz Center (read about the play later in the story), will discuss the creative process involved with staging such a work; Moody-Adams will discuss the timeless ethical themes the play addresses, such as family commitment and political ethics; and Rusten will speak in general on Greek society and politics and the role of gender in the time of Sophocles.

On the following day, Monday, Aug. 25, first-year students will discuss, critique and evaluate the play during about 235 small-group discussions, led by faculty, administrators and staff. As classes begin, students also will have opportunities to write about some aspect of the play in their first-year writing seminars.

And the project is not limited to the Cornell campus in Ithaca. The entire campus community at Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar also is reading the play.

The New Student Reading Project is overseen by Cornell Provost Biddy Martin and Vice Provost Isaac Kramnick along with Susan Murphy, vice president for student and academic services, and it is sponsored by the Provost's Office. Cornellians have been reading a special Cornell edition Penguin Classics translation of *Antigone* by Robert Fagles, professor of comparative literature at Princeton University.

Members of the Ithaca community also are reading the play. Kramnick said the town-gown connection established through the *Frankenstein* New Student Reading Project last year continues. Cornell has given 1,500 copies of the special edition of *Antigone* to the Tompkins County Public Library, and they now are available; 900 copies will be distributed to 10th-grade students throughout the county; and 600 will be made available for reading groups and other community members.

Free tickets for the Cornell Schwartz Center's innovative production of *Antigone* will be made available to Cornell freshmen who are accompanied by their faculty discussion group leaders. Performances will be staged Sept. 18-20 and Sept. 25-27. The cast will combine the talents of four resident professional actors with 21 undergraduate students. The production includes original music by Cornell alumnus Andrew Waggoner, DMA '86, and a set created by Kent Goetz, chair of the Department of Theatre, Film and Dance. And Norman Johnson, professor of theater at Ithaca College, has designed masks for the cast members.

"The unique theatrical challenges of *Antigone* make it an especially exciting project," said Feldshuh. "It's a

brilliant work that is at the same time a formidable theatrical risk. ... Our goal is to use the power of ritual, mask, text, original music, singing, movement and spectacle to spark the religious intensity that must have accompanied the original production. What a great opportunity this is for our theater artists and students. It's also a privilege to be part of an adventuresome experiment in teaching and learning as a community."

Antigone was selected from a number of possible works for this year's reading project because "it is a timeless text that raises timely issues," said Kramnick, "and it also serves as a tribute and an honor to Hunter Rawlings' eight years as Cornell's president." Rawlings stepped down as Cornell president in June and has returned to the faculty as a professor in the Department of Classics.

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[| Cornell Chronicle Front Page](#) | [| Table of Contents](#) | [| Cornell News Service Home Page](#) |