

# Pulse

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## A whole new program

**WestConn:** Musical theatre degree incorporates dancing, acting, singing, music theory

By Sandra Diamond Fox  
Contributing Writer

Have you seen Andrew Hendrick's performance in the latest Broadway show? You may one day, thanks to the new Bachelor of Arts degree program in musical theatre he's in at Western Connecticut State University in Danbury.

Hendrick is one of only 11 students who got accepted into the four-year program, which incorporates classes from the university's music and theater departments.

"My dream job is Broadway. I'd love to have a career doing any kind of acting," says Hendrick, 20, of Fairfield.

The program incorporates acting, dance training, music theory, keyboard competency, auditioning techniques, and voice and diction. Other classes are in theater history, costume and makeup, body movement and mime, and play production.

According to professor Sal Trapani, co-chair of the theatre arts department, about 30 students auditioned for the program, which began in September.

"Students had to demonstrate talent in singing, dancing and acting," he says.

Interest in a musical theater program at WestConn began years ago, Trapani says. In response to the strong interest, "we talked to the music department about how we could make use of their instructional resources in theory, sight singing, keyboard competency and individual voice instruction to compliment what we do, in order to come up with a comprehensive B.A. in musical theatre.

"We developed a program where we don't have to generate new classes, new faculty, or new resources," Trapani says.

Musical theater students take existing courses taught by existing staff members.

According to associate professor Pam McDaniel, co-chair of the theatre arts department, two classes that have been created over the past few years with the new program in mind are cabaret performance — which studies style and personality — and musical theatre workshop, which is "the wedding of the acting concepts with the musical concepts

See WestConn on D8



CHRIS WARE/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

WestConn student Aline O'Connor, 20, of Colchester, is among the students in WestConn's new Bachelor of Arts degree program in musical theatre.

### Chat with musical theatre student Alexis Willoughby

Eighteen-year-old New Milford resident Alexis Willoughby, a 2010 graduate of New Milford High School, is one of the students in WestConn's new musical theatre program. In a recent interview she spoke about her background in the arts and about why she feels the program is a great opportunity for her.

**Q:** Why are you interested in this program?

**A:** I enjoy singing and I think that this is a big draw to musical theater. Being able to sing and dance adds an extra component to a show.

**Q:** What performing experience do you have?

**A:** Throughout high school, I've taken ballet, jazz, acting and musical theater classes at FineLine Theatre Arts in New Milford. I've performed in four plays in high school: "Seussical," "Guys and Dolls," "Fairly Modern Millie," and "Beauty and the Beast." I've performed in community theater as well. I started in three shows at the Thomaston Opera House.

**Q:** How are you enjoying your classes so far?

**A:** It's really exceeding my expectations! A lot of the teachers in the program are working professionals. Many of them have worked in the business and know what it's all about.

**Q:** What would be your dream job?

**A:** I want to teach for Broadway!

If this doesn't work out, my second love is teaching. I would love to teach children's theater for kids with special needs, as a way to allow them into the arts. Being onstage improves your self-esteem and helps you to become comfortable with yourself. It's important to let everyone be part of this experience.



CHRIS WARE/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Classes combine hard work and fun in the new Bachelor of Arts degree program in musical theatre at WestConn. From left to right are Anthony Mendoza, 22, of Stratford, Amy Jones, adjunct professor and choreographer, and Vincent McCoy, of New Hartford.

### Getting In

How to apply for WestConn's Bachelor of Arts degree program in musical theatre:

- Get accepted to the university.
- Send an e-mail to [walshk@wcsu.edu](mailto:walshk@wcsu.edu) to schedule an audition. Auditions for Fall 2011 will take place in February. For their audition, students will be required to perform a monologue, a ballad, and a dance routine. They will also take a music theory test and a sight singing ear-training test.
- For more information, and to learn about other requirements for the program, call 203-837-8250 or visit [www.wcsu.edu/theatreats/musical-theatre.asp](http://www.wcsu.edu/theatreats/musical-theatre.asp).

**"The comprehensive training, the performance experience both in New York and internationally, and the contact with industry professionals is what makes this program and degree unique."**

Sal Trapani, co-chair of the theatre arts department at Western Connecticut State University

# WestConn adds musical theatre degree

Continued from D1

that performers have to bring forward in a musical," she says.

One of the unique aspects of the program is that it allows students to practice what they're studying. They'll have the opportunity to participate in many off-campus productions, one of which is the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in Scotland. This is the largest international arts festival in the world, according to McDaniel.

"There will be productions from all over the world there, and our students will have the opportunity to perform there as well. The purpose of this experience is to enrich students' awareness of their training. It brings them to an international context, rather than just a national context, regarding theater," McDaniel explains.

Another performance opportunity occurs every spring when seniors produce a show in a small theater in Manhattan, N.Y. Students learn what it takes to perform in the New York environment.

One of the only additional costs of the program — amounting to \$300 per semester — is for weekly private voice lessons. All students in the program are required to take this in order to develop their specific vocal techniques and range for singing, McDaniel explains.

"The comprehensive training, the performance experience both in New York and internationally, and the contact with industry professionals is



CHRIS WARE/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

From right, Rachel Fournier, 18, of Shelton, Theresa Curran, 19, of Shelton, and Anna Giordano, 19, of Clinton, participate in the new Bachelor of Arts degree program in musical theatre at WestConn.

what makes this program and degree unique," Trapani says.

"Musical arts are my focus and my passion. Approximately 90 percent of shows you see on Broadway are musicals. When you look around the country, it's musicals that tend to be the most successful, as opposed to straight plays. That's why it's so important to have this degree," Hendrick says.

"I like that this is a Bachelor of Arts program, as opposed to a Bachelor of Fine Arts program. You get a regular program (of academic classes) in addition to theater classes," says Theresa Curran of Shelton, 19.

"My dream is to be on stage. If it doesn't work out with acting, this degree will give me experience in some other aspects of theater that I'm

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*Theresa Curran, of Shelton, 19.*

also interested in such as costume, lighting, and makeup," Curran says.

Eighteen-year-old freshman Rachel Fournier, of Shelton, is especially looking forward to her dance classes.

"I started dancing when I was 3, but I haven't taken formal dance classes in several years. I'm excited to get back into it again," she says. "I love the combination of singing, dancing, and acting. Being able to burst into song during a show is pretty cool."

Trapani says there is a lot of theater in Greater

Danbury.

"The state of Connecticut realizes that the arts bring in revenue. When you train kids in theater, you're training them as performers. They will always have a connection to Connecticut," he says.

"This is an exciting time for us," he adds. "The new degree is going to make us less of a well-kept secret and more of a force in musical theater education nationally."