

The ELC GLOBE

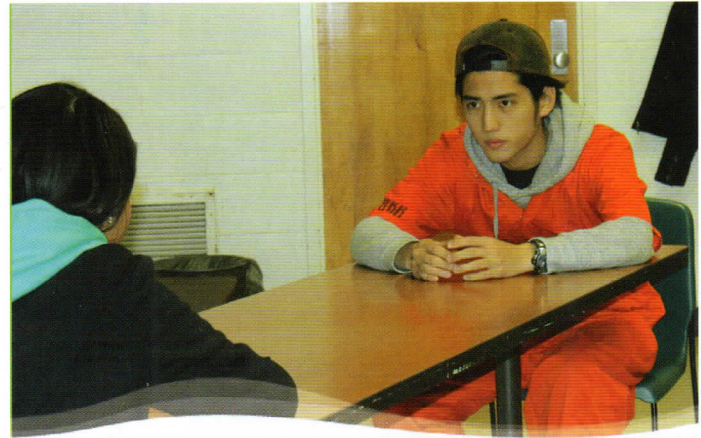
MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

College of Arts & Letters
English Language Center

New Content Class Practices Language through Acting

By Carmela Romano Gillette

This year, ESL 093 students have an exciting new option for the content segment of their studies. Along with the American History class, the ELC is also offering an American Performing Arts class for those students who want to learn more about drama in its various formats and also get a chance to try out their acting skills. Assistant Professor Deric McNish, from the MSU Department of Theatre, co-taught the class with the ELC's Carmela Romano Gillette. Dr. McNish has experience in stage and television acting and his research focuses on new and inclusive approaches to actor training, giving the students a great opportunity to learn from an expert, native speaker and university professor.



Drama students reenact a scene from the TV show Prison Break

At the start of the fall semester, students were asked to write their reasons for wishing to join the performing arts section and were chosen based on their responses. Many students hoped for a chance to improve their speaking skills while having a great deal of fun. They got what they hoped for, and more: a great deal of work! Dr. McNish presented lectures on Dramatic Structure, the History of American Musical Theatre, and the History of Acting. After the lectures, we spent time discussing the language and cultural references in the material in order to prepare for the exams. We also talked about good ways to listen to class lectures and to prepare for tests on the material. The lectures connected to practical performance activities. Students in this class all went to see a live production of *Carrie the Musical* at the Wharton Center, interviewed the star of the show, and engaged in a conversation about the musical with American students enrolled in an acting class.

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Drama Class *(continued from Page 1)*



Drama student plays prison inmate Michael from Prison Break

Other projects were related to two television shows selected based on student interest: *Big Bang Theory* and *Prison Break*. Students were required to analyze the dramatic structure, dialogue and cultural references in them. Students rehearsed, analyzed, and performed short scenes from these shows. We worked on elements of pronunciation in order to effectively convey the nuance of meaning within the script. Dr. McNish provided students with props and costumes to help them get into character. For example, in the *Prison Break* scene, the main character, Michael, is visited in prison by his lawyer, Veronica. Those playing Veronica came to class in their best lawyer suit, while the men were given a prison jumpsuit to wear. The scenes were videotaped and analyzed by the class, providing feedback for students on their acting and language skills. Even our grammar lessons in-

involved elements of the performing arts. While studying the passive structure, students watched scenes from television shows (*Lost* and *The Good Wife*) and discussed the reasons each character used the passive and the meaning that was conveyed. A warm-up game called '*What are you doing?*' gave us an opportunity to talk about present progressive structure in questions and responses, and supplied an opportunity for authentic practice.

Our final project is a culmination of elements studied throughout the class in our own spoof movie trailer, which the students wrote, performed, and filmed. The result will supply entertainment for the end of the semester party. We have been overwhelmed at times by the level and breadth of talent we discovered in our students this semester and hope that they have enjoyed and learned as much as we did.



The drama class is taught by ELC teacher Carmela Romano Gillette and Deric McNish from the MSU Theater Department