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Students to perform virtual reading of women's suffrage play

HOLYOKE – Students from Holyoke Community College this week will perform a virtual staged reading of *Failure is Impossible*, a play celebrating women's suffrage.

The free performance, directed by HCC theater professor Pat Sandoval and history professor Diane Beers, will be hosted on Zoom on Thursday, Jan. 14, starting at 6:30 p.m. in conjunction with Holyoke's Wistariahurst Museum.

First performed in 1995 to celebrate the 75th anniversary of women's suffrage, the play by Rosemary Knower dramatizes the debate leading up to passage of the 19th Amendment, which granted women the right to vote.

Knower's script draws upon archival sources, including the Congressional Record, petitions to Congress, newspapers, personal letters, diaries, and memoirs. The cast of characters include Abigail Adams, Sarah Grimke, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, Clara Barton, and Frederick Douglass among others.

The play was originally scheduled to be performed live on the stage of HCC Leslie Phillips Theater in March 2020 during Women's History Month, in honor of the 100th anniversary of the



Theater professor Pat Sandoval leads an acting class at Holyoke Community College in 2019.

Submitted photo

19th Amendment. But that show was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I think it's even more significant now that we're doing this piece," Sandoval said. "The play is not a work of fiction. It is filled with historical facts, so it's educational and important and timely. Everybody should know the struggles of the suffragettes. We take it

for granted, but, as we know by recent headlines, democracy and rights are not just handed to us."

The performers are students from an HCC Learning Community class taught jointly by Sandoval and Beers titled "She Persisted," which combines women's history and acting.

The title adopts the now-familiar expression used in 2017 by U.S. Senate

majority leader Mitch McConnell in defending the Senate's vote to silence Senator Elizabeth Warren's objections to the confirmation of Jeff Sessions as U.S. Attorney General.

"We chose 'She Persisted' because all the women we study show this determination to keep on persisting and it's particularly true of the suffragettes," Sandoval said. "It's only been 100 years since we've had the right to vote, and the country's been around since 1776, so women have been struggling since the beginning for the right to vote."

Sandoval and Beers will be teaching the class again this spring.

The HCC cast includes Alex Santiago of Holyoke, Cassi Broga of Chicopee, Diamond Smith of Easthampton, Hannah Labreche of Holyoke, Nathan Rodriguez of Holyoke and Roxy Murphy of Easthampton.

To see the show, attendants must register in advance through a link on the Wistariahurst Museum website: wistariahurst.org/events

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