

News Release

Fall Musical Production "Next to Normal" Runs November 19-22, 2014, at U of M Crookston; Show times are at 7 p.m. Nov. 19-21 and 2 p.m. on November 22 in Kiehle Auditorium

By Itoltefs on Wednesday, November 5, 2014 The cast has been rehearsing since September, and for Senior Alissa Hernandez, that has

meant juggling rehearsal schedules as the director while learning the lyrics and lines as one of the characters in the fall theater production of "Next to Normal" at the University of Minnesota Crookston.

Described as a contemporary musical, "Next to Normal" runs Wednesday, November 19-21 at 7 p.m. and Saturday, November 22 at 2 p.m. in Kiehle Auditorium. A live orchestra supports the performance, which showcases the vocal talent of the six-member cast. Admission is \$8 for adults and all students are \$5 with the exception of U of M Crookston students who are free with their U-card. The production is recommended for audiences in high school and older and not suitable for young children.

A focused student, Hernandez is a double major in equine science and animal science with a minor in ag business from Savage, Minn. Musical performance has been a part of her life since she was in elementary school and a member of the sixth grade honor choir. Her love for acting grew as she took to the stage in junior high, and over the years, Hernandez has been involved in some 25-plus musical or theatrical productions since junior high--five of them alone as a student at the U of M Crookston.

"I am finding it challenging to direct and act," Hernandez smiles. "When you are the director, you can sit and watch and see what your cast needs, but while you are on stage, you are focused on performing and it has been both interesting and fun to combine the two roles as actor and director."



Hernandez and cast mate, Alex Conwell, are seasoned performers, but for a number of the others, "Next to Normal" is a first time experience in a musical, as part of a cast at the Crookston campus, or the first time ever on stage. Cassie Hagg, a sophomore majoring in health sciences from Pillager, Minn., joins Hernandez as the assistant director and together under the guidance of Associate Professor George French the musical is taking shape.

Other members of the "Next to Normal" cast are Michael Laurich, a senior majoring in biology from Lansing, Ill.; Jiwon "Peter" Park, a junior majoring in accounting from Changwon, South Korea; David Melichar, a freshman majoring in elementary education from Richfield, Minn.; Alex Conwell, a post-secondary enrollment student from Red Lake Falls, Minn.; Erin Rudstrom, a postsecondary enrollment student from East Grand Forks, Minn.

The production--serious, yet at times, humorous--has minimal props and focuses the audience on life in the Goodman family. "Next to Normal" tells the story of a mother, played by Hernandez, struggling with bipolar disorder and its effect on her family. Addressing such issues as grieving a loss, ethics in modern psychiatry, and suburban life, "Next To Normal" takes audiences into the minds and hearts of each character as they cope with crisis and mental illness.

"This performance is different from anything we have done on campus before," Hernandez says. "It is a story that everyone can relate to and in many ways, the family we portray has something in common with every family."

French who leads the music and theater department on the Crookston campus describes the music as "sophisticated rock" and believes audiences will enjoy it.

Hernandez encourages audiences to see "Next to Normal" because as she explains, "it is real and raw with a fast pace that hits home." To learn more about "Next to Normal, visit www.nexttonormal.com.

Today the University of Minnesota, Crookston delivers 29 bachelor's degree programs, 20 minors, and 36 concentrations on campus--as well as 13 degrees online--in the areas of agriculture and natural resources; business; liberal arts and education; and math, science and technology. With an enrollment of 1,800 undergraduates from more than 20 countries and 40 states, the Crookston campus offers a supportive, close-knit atmosphere that leads to a prestigious University of Minnesota degree. "Small Campus. Big Degree." To learn more, visit www.umcrookston.edu.

In the photo at right, left to right, back row, are Michael Laurich, Alex Conwell, Cassie Hagg, and Alissa Hernandez. In the front row are Jiwon "Peter" Park, Erin Rudstrom, and David Melichar.

In the photo at left are, at top, Alex Conwell, and left to right on stage are Michael Laurich, Alissa Hernandez, Jiwon "Peter" Park, Erin Rudstrom, and David Melichar.

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