



By Phoebe Dey

On a sunny Sunday afternoon in a Timms Centre studio, a group of 13 students was on a serious mission: to make people laugh. And there was no concern about making fools of themselves. For some, that was the whole point of the exercise.

These students were part of a clown convocation, which meant showing off the finished product of a three-week workshop to family and friends.

"We're helping baby clowns find their wings and take their next step," said Jan Henderson, instructor of the course put on jointly by the special sessions and drama departments.

Each clown, colorfully decked out in costumes ranging from tutus to cowboy suits, put on a one-minute skit using any props available, including the audience. There were diva clowns, clowns in the shower and bridal clowns all showing off



For Amber McGrath,

a University of Saskatchewan student who travelled to Edmonton to take the course, being a clown is much more than wearing a big red nose and floppy shoes.

"It is three weeks of exhaustion and exhilaration. You learn a lot about yourself—how you work and what's holding you back," said McGrath.

"It's even therapeutic in that it's like getting back to the inner child. You don't pick

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# Not just clowning around

Students take the art of laughing seriously at "clown convocation"

your character; you just find it through inner examination."

Actor Chris Bullough graduated last year with a bachelor of fine arts in drama, but after taking previous courses with Henderson, he decided to sign up for the clown workshop. It was well worth the return to the university campus, especially since it meant dispelling some myths about the clown, he said.

"You come in here with one expectation of what a clown is, and you have to let go of that," he said. "In



North America clowns are seen as scary, and there is a stigma attached to them. People would say to me, 'You're taking a clown workshop? What are you learning to do, put on big shoes?' But I found it so relevant to stage acting, and it allowed me to learn how to keep being fresh and new and creative."

Got a silly bone in your body? Another course in clowning begins this fall. ■

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their new-found characters while working hard to make the crowd smile.

"If you could have seen them yesterday, you would have been stunned," said Henderson after the show. "Before they didn't want to go on, and now I can't keep them off the stage. They've taken an enormous quantum leap."

While the majority of the class was made up of drama students, other clowns included a composer, religious studies students, political science majors and people just interested in trying something new.

"One of the ladies (Marty Anne Cool) works for the university in office management, and she's never performed before in her life," said Henderson. "I was amazed at some of the students. But with this type of thing you can legislate what you're going to do, but you can't legislate how you're going to feel. And the audience will only believe it's wonderful if the clown believes it's wonderful. There's so much truth to your character because it's something you just can't fake."



Photos: David Williamson