

SEGUE

SIUE departments combine forces in 'Are UR?'

Production centers around artificial intelligence in society

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For the Intelligencer

EDWARDSVILLE — From Apple's personal assistant software Siri to autonomous vehicles, artificial intelligence is rapidly evolving. Coming this April on campus at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, one play will ask "what will happen when the artificial intelligences stop taking your demands and take over instead?"

On this week's episode of Segue, SIUE's weekly radio show, co-host Greg Budzban, College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) dean, excitedly speaks about one of SIUE University Theater's upcoming productions, "Are UR?"

we taught it, we wanted to use a piece of science fiction that introduced the idea of robots, and the ethical and metaphysical issues that surround them," Ruchk explains. "Karel Čapek's work from 1920 was famous for introducing the word 'robot' into the vernacular as an artificial replicate human being.

"We taught the course and used the piece of theater. Each time, we had success in using it. However, when you read theater, it is different from seeing theater. It was clear to me that there was an opportunity to go to the Department of Theater and Dance, and stage the show. Not only is this

me, that is my greatest impulse, to explore the interaction with artificial intelligence technology and consciousness itself, but in a way that would be meaningful for young men and women on our campus."

Harper goes on to explain that the common themes that exist in works of fiction about artificial intelligence, commonly seen in films and television shows such as "The Matrix," "Westworld," "Metropolis," and "Blade Runner," it seems that Čapek knew that his creation of an autonomous helper would always revolt against its creators.

"It's amazing how thorough Čapek was for every story that would ever be told," Harper exclaims. "In our production, we have been deeply involved in adapting the script and fitting it to a universe that our audience can relate to."

This episode, which features an interview with Chuck Harper, MFA, chair of the Department of Theater and Dance, Eric Ruckh, PhD, associate professor of history and director of the Honors Program, and Igor Crk, PhD, chair of the Department of Computer Science, will air on Sunday, Jan. 13, on WSIE. 88.7 FM The Sound and sue.edu/wsie.

"I'm pleased to be here today to talk about one of the most interesting ideas in our current society," Budzban says. "It is all tied up in an event hosted by the Department of Theater and Dance that surrounds the notion of artificial intelligence, robots and its effect on our society."

In the first part the interview, Budzban explains that the original play, "R.U.R." was written in 1920 by Czech writer Karel Čapek.

"Chuck, how did you decide to produce this play?" Budzban inquires.

"I have always loved this play," Harper mentions. "But Igor and Eric came to me and suggested the play for me, so I'll let them share their story."

"Igor and I had been teaching this honors course on artificial intelligence for a number of years, and the first time

important for thinking about artificial intelligence, but it is also important for thinking about a larger University, national and community context. We talked about the possibility, went to Chuck, and the rest is history!"

"I'm glad you did!" Budzban exclaims. "The notion of artificial intelligence and its effect on our society is simply wondrous. We have people talking to their computers nowadays ... Hey Google, find me this, hey Google, do that! Even if that is rudimentary intelligence, it is a different relationship that affects technology in new ways."

"Artificial intelligence is even more deeply entwined with the lives of our students," Ruckh says. "The opportunity to not only teach a course and understand the concepts of artificial intelligence, but also to see it staged and manifested in art struck me as a great opportunity to do some of the things that the Honors Program is interested in doing."

"We are interested in integrating the curriculum, showing the connection between the arts and the sciences, the social sciences and technical sciences, and putting those things together in a way that would be relevant to those students' lives. To

Crk will be utilizing students in his course in a fundamental way through adapting this work. "We are looking to bring the cast and the class together, or welcome those who want to participate in a seminar as those who experienced a near-end of humanity or robots witnessing a rebirth of new conscious machines conjuring up the new phase of intelligent revolution."

"We honestly do not know where that's going to go right now, but they are going to be able to be involved in creating it!" Crk says.

"I wonder if those replicants sit around and think about the past, will they lament the extinction of the human race the same way humans lament the extinction of the dodo or something similar?" Budzban inquires. "If only we were more intelligent, we would have kept them around!"

"Are U R?" will be performed beginning 7:30 p.m. April 24-28 in the Dunham Hall Theater. Tickets are available at the Dunham Hall Box Office, room 1042b, or can be purchased by calling 618-650-2774.

To hear the entire conversation, tune in to Segue at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Jan. 13, on WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound or sue.edu/wsie.