New play to grace Winedale

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For the first time in its two-decade history, the University's Shakespeare at Winedale company this summer will perform a play not written by the Bard — a departure some actors said they had trouble getting used to.

The Shoemaker's Holiday, a Renaissance play by Shakespeare's contemporary Thomas Dekker, depicts a shoemaker's rise from shop owner to lord mayor of London.

James Ayres, a professor of English and the founder of the Winedale program, said he has wanted to do the play for some time, particularly because of the common people it portrays. "The play shows a different side of life," he said.

But Ayres said the 13 student actors, who will begin performing the play Thursday, felt hesitant when they started rehearsing because the play is written mostly in prose — not in verse, like Shakespeare's dramatic works.

Ayres said, however, that the players eventually came to like Dekker's play because it is "energetic and comedy-like."

Angela Breckenridge, who plays the queen of England at the end of the play, said she was biased against the work at first, but grew to like it during the 1½-week of rehearsals because of its forthright portrait of the working class in England.

"I wasn't sure I wanted to do it," Breckenridge said. "Instead, I wanted to work on Much Ado About Nothing by Shakespeare, but I've grown to like it — not for eloquent language but because it is honest."

She said the play might also appeal more to people who are not familiar with the language used in the plays of Shakespeare and other Elizabethan playwrights.

The other plays of the 1989 season, The Two Gentlemen of Verona and The Merchant of Venice by Shakespeare will begin Friday and Saturday respectively. Each of the three plays will be performed six times.