

Theatre Arts Diversity Action Plan September 2020

The unambiguous goal of the Department of Theatre Arts is to create an equitable learning environment and ensure a welcoming culture that supports all students. We seek to provide professional development in anti-bias and intercultural work for faculty and staff. We want to enrich student experience through broad and deep engagement with artistic and scholarly voices from a variety of under-served communities. We seek to strengthen our curriculum with We intend to listen carefully to student experiences and empower all students to participate fully in the life of the department. With these values in mind, the five main points of the current action plan are:

- 1. Provide meaningful and sustained education and training for faculty, staff, and students**
- 2. Host regular visits by diverse and enriching artistic guests**
- 3. Encourage open communication from current students regarding their experiences in the department**
- 4. Partner with College of Arts and Sciences and University resources and administration to improve enrollment and retention of BIPOC students**
- 5. Dialogue consistently with the faculty, staff, and students of the Theatre Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee (TEDI)**

1. Provide meaningful and sustained education and training for faculty, staff, and students

**We will offer departmental training opportunities
at least once a semester for the next 5 years.**

The faculty and staff are already engaging in various training programs and workshop opportunities designed to lead the department toward a culture of equity and inclusion. In August, interested faculty, staff, and graduate students began learning from the Safe Zone training program in partnership with TEDI committee members. This training educates and informs individuals about biases, assumptions, and privilege related to gender identity and sexuality. The training will continue to be offered by qualified department members. In September 2020 we hosted theatre professional and cultural worker Brisa Muñoz on campus for two days to provide cultural competency training workshops with theatre arts faculty, staff, and students. Currently, we are working with Intergroup Dialogue (Dr. Lorna Hernandez and Deirdre Johnston) to offer Anti-Bias training to faculty and staff in Winter 2020.

2. Host regular visits by diverse and enriching artistic guests

We will host diverse guest artists on campus at least once a year for the next 5 years.

The department has a recent history, over the last several years, of hosting guest artists who bring diverse experiences and viewpoints to campus. Our guests have included Dael Orlandersmith, James Yaegashi, Sheila Tousey, Prabin Villareesh, the cast and creative team of *The Fertile River*, Tim Miller, Quentin Earl Darrington, Kelsi Ervi, and Chris Cragin Day. The value of such visits has been undeniable, providing artistic exchange and deepening of our artistic conversations through enriching exposure to new voices. To make this an even stronger aspect of student educational experience, we will prioritize diverse guest artists in program planning and solicit recommendations for guests from across the department. Planning is challenging right now due to COVID-19 travel restrictions but we are eager to find ways to engage with outside artists despite the current conditions.

3. Encourage open communication from current students regarding their experiences in the department

We will pilot a student check-in procedure in the Spring and launch it fully in 2021-2022.

The department recognizes a strong need to hear directly from current students of color and members of marginalized groups regarding their experience of our departmental climate, production practices, interpersonal dynamics, and class content. The absence of good pathways to communication has been an obstacle to student growth and thriving. Yet we recognize the inherent obstacles that make it difficult for students to communicate on these topics. In response, we are creating a student check-in process based on industry standard best practices and designed to teach self-advocacy and honest professional communication. The procedure, once fully launched, will work in harmony with existing University rules and protocols from, for example, Title IX and the Equity Office.

4. Partner with College of Arts and Sciences and University resources and administration to improve enrollment and retention of BIPOC students

We will meet with the dean's office every Spring for the next 5 years to report on progress toward our internal goals for enrollment and retention of BIPOC theatre students and to request specific support still needed from the administration.

Increased enrollment and retention of BIPOC students has been stated goal of the department for over ten years. To that end, we have been regularly collecting and studying our enrollment statistics with an eye toward increasing the diversity of our student body in the department. Yet many of the solutions require broader institutional efforts. Specifically, we

have identified the following ways we could get closer to our goals for increase enrollment and retention of BIPOC students:

- Revise recruitment planning to increase BIPOC students in the auditioning pool
- Raise scholarships that could help recruit and retain BIPOC students
- Increase numbers of BIPOC faculty/staff to enhance department climate for student retention

Because the department is one part of a large and complex institution, these efforts will require broader support from College and University offices, administration, and resources. To that end, the chair will meet annually with the Dean's office to deliver a report about the state of progress toward our internal goals for enrollment and retention of BIPOC theatre students and to detail the specific support still needed from the administration to make our program a diverse and equitable place. Other offices that could be approached for similar progress meetings include the Vice-Provost for Faculty Development and Diversity, and Development for A&S.

5. Dialogue consistently with the faculty, staff, and students of the Theatre Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee (TEDI)

The Chair of the Department of Theatre Arts will be a standing member of the TEDI Committee faculty/staff branch.

The TEDI Committee (formerly the Diversity and Inclusion Committee) was founded in a grassroots manner through conversation among students, faculty, and staff of color who saw the need for an advocacy and advising group in the department. The department has benefited from the work of this independent committee. In its internal restructuring, TEDI is designating a faculty/staff branch which will offer feedback on curriculum and recommendations for departmental policy. To ensure that the wisdom of the committee is heard at the most influential level of department leadership, the Chair will serve as standing member of the TEDI Committee.

A good action plan must be reviewed as it develops and regularly assessed for effectiveness. We intend to revisit these points regularly, and vow to improve our plans as we learn and grow.

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Chair, Dept. of Theatre Arts**