

Statement on Diversity and Inclusion
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One thing I've appreciated about academia is challenging myself to check my privilege at the door, engage with activities that challenge my worldview, and make conscious efforts to inform myself about all walks of life. In doing so, I have become more empathetic, understanding, and able to relate to those around me. This is an honest statement of how I view diversity and inclusion in academia, and how I make efforts to include different voices in the classroom and department. It is based on my past experiences, and how I apply them in the classroom.

Growing up in rural America, my early experience in diversity and inclusion was limited. It was not until I went to college that I met LGBTQ individuals. During a class on devising performance I had the opportunity to create performance pieces based upon the experience of marginalized members of the LGBTQ community living in the deep south. I gained an appreciation and was able to emphasize with their experiences. Additionally, I found empathy for a community I didn't know existed. Positive relationships were established as a result of this experience.

In graduate school, I made efforts to attend shows at a HBCU in Greensboro. I would frequently be the only white person in the audience. The first show I saw made me feel extremely uncomfortable due to being the only white person in the theatre. However, in speaking with cast members after shows, they would share their stories of being the only POC in all white audiences. We were able to relate to each other through a shared life experience. This led to respect among artists from different walks of life.

Those experiences in my undergraduate and graduate career, helped inform how I teach courses at Avlia University. I challenge my students to engage with works of theatre they are unfamiliar with. In my time teaching at Avila, I find the students working to expand their horizons; often becoming fans of playwrights from underrepresented communities. The students also open up about their own unconscious bias, and expand their horizons.

Once COVID-19 hit our world, we had to adapt. As a professor, I had two options: adapt and overcome or submit to despair. I've never been one to give up. I shifted to online learning, and thought about ways to expose students to a broad array of diversity in theatre. We started an online play reading series that met weekly. We read contemporary shows by playwrights such as Taylor Mac, Ngozi Anyanwu, Paula Vogel, and Stephen Karam among others. The shows read provided students with a broad worldview of culture and playwrights from different backgrounds.

Higher education should expose students to different cultures, force them to confront uncomfortable situations, resulting in open-minded students who embrace other walks of life. One phrase my students hear from me is that I want them to be better than I was. Making efforts to expose students to different cultures enables them to be better artists and human beings.