

CCU Theatre EDI

—

“Everyone interested in personal or collective pursuits for liberation must look into themselves to investigate why they come into this work...Once we recognize our self-interest, we also have to humble ourselves to understand that what is at stake for us may not be pressing for others. ” -Charlene Carruthers

Meeting Agenda

- Share student and alumni concerns as indicated in response to EDI survey
 - BIPOC student support
 - Curriculum
 - B.A. / B.F.A. divide
 - Questions / next steps

Framework for each section:

(student support, curriculum, B.A. / B.F.A. Divide)

- State the problem
- Systemic roots
- Story circle
 - Give space to alumni to share their specific experiences in relation to each topic
 - Each speaker will be given 2 mins to speak
- Solutions

We ask that faculty abstain from speaking and use this as an opportunity to listen to the concerns of the alumni. We will hold space for dialogue at the end of the presentation.

Transformative Justice Model created by Kai Cheng Thom

- Listen
 - Without becoming defensive
 - Without minimizing or denying the extent of harm
 - Without trying to make oneself the center of the story being told
- Take responsibility
 - Engage critically with your actions and not delegating all of the thinking to somebody else
- Accept that your reasons are not excuses
 - Reasons help us understand abuse but they not not excuse it
- Take the survivor's lead
 - Needs of survivors can change over time
 - survivor-lead does not mean the oppressed are solely responsible for transformation
- Separate shame from guilt
 - Guilt is feeling bad about something you've done; shame is feeling bad about who you are
- Don't expect anyone to forgive you
- Forgive yourself

Paulo Freire Methodology for Liberation

1. SEE the problem
2. ANALYZE the factors (personal, cultural, institutional)
3. ACT to change the problem

EDI survey student and alumni feedback

-BIPOC Community Outreach

-BIPOC Support

-BIPOC Faculty & Guest Artists

-Atypical Casting

-Neglect of BIPOC Students & Representation on Stage

-Tokenism, Stereotyping, and Objectification

-Post-Grad Outreach

-Racial Microaggressions

-Campus/Student Culture

-Implicit Bias

-Disenfranchisement of BIPOC

-Disproportionate & Inequitable Student Attention, Guidance, & Reward Systems

-Lack of BIPOC Theatrical Education

-Production Diversity

-BIPOC Equitable Performance Opportunity

-Sexual Harassment

-BIPOC Financial Disparity

-EDI Training, Policy, & Mission Statement

-Relevant Theatrical & Industry Knowledge of Faculty

-Recruitment Process & Evolution

-Alumni Relationship

-Punishment of Non-Conforming/Outspoken Students

Racially Insensitive Productions

Picnic

HAIR

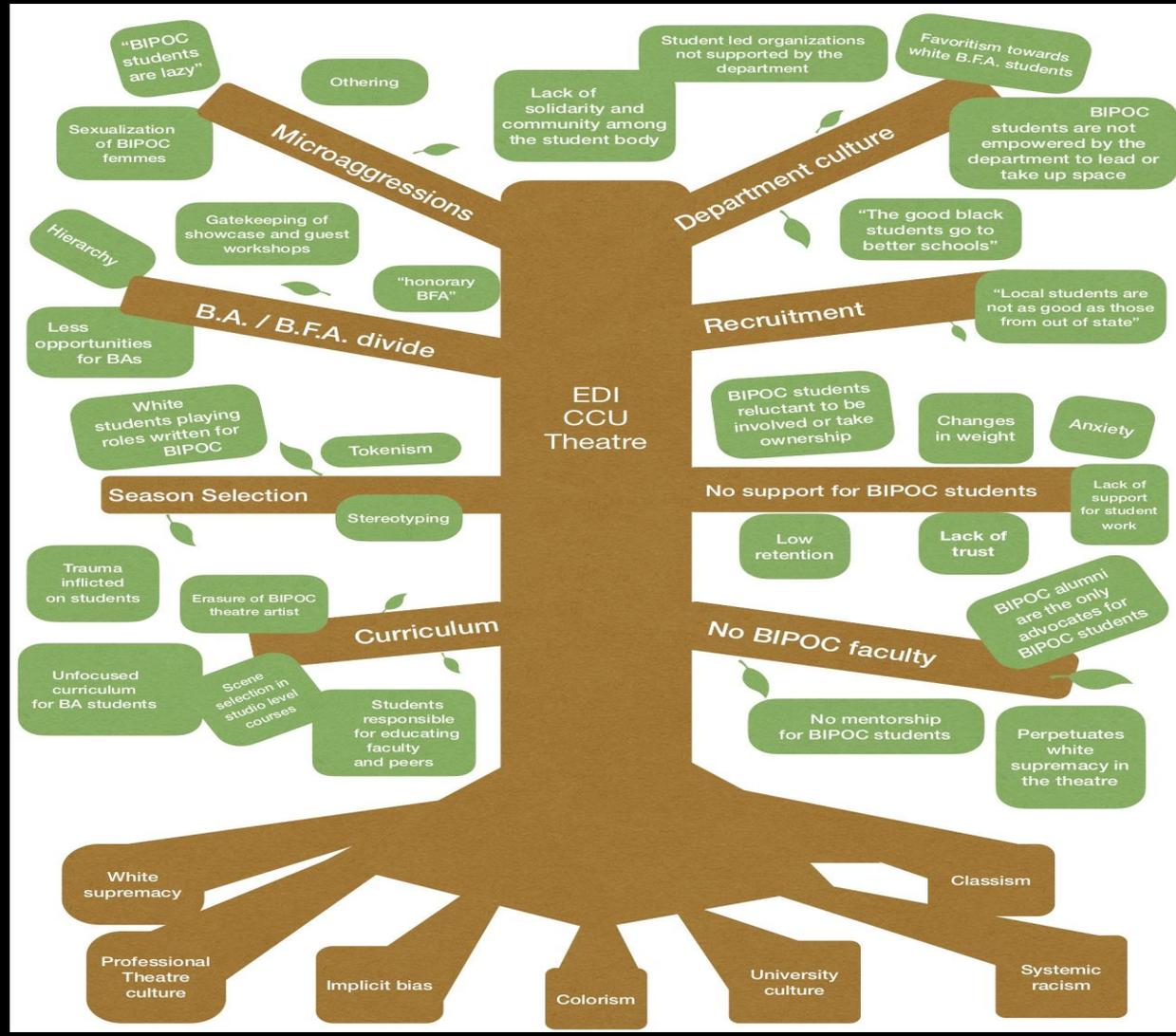
Pride & Prejudice

Oklahoma

Our Country's Good

The Crucible

Problem Tree



Student Support: The Problem

- BIPOC students are generally neglected and labeled as lazy, less disciplined, and less talented despite often having extenuating circumstances and needs that differ from the white student body — “
- This neglect compounded with financial, personal, and social obstacles often leads to the deterioration of BIPOC students’ mental health
- Students who seek guidance and assistance on ways to maintain and improve their mental well-being are dismissed without concrete or consistent support and are further ostracized by both faculty and staff, which creates a dangerous and hostile educational environment for BIPOC students, culminating in an ultimately traumatic experience
- This trauma manifests itself in many ways including physical and mental health deterioration, which can cause a lack of focus/drive, excessive weight gain/loss, mild to severe physical ailments, the inability to maintain basic living needs, and extensive deconstruction and unlearning of toxic practices upon leaving the program

Student Support: Systemic Roots

- BIPOC Recruitment & Retention
 - BIPOC students are “begged” (Robin Russell) and enticed to attend Coastal as Theater Majors, but are willfully neglected and left to fend for themselves financially, educationally, and emotionally once they are accepted into the program.
 - “Systemic racism is so glaringly obvious in the department and seems to be something faculty isn’t aware of.”
- Trauma and Mental Health
 - Inherent Bias, Gaslighting, Lack of EDI Training
 - Faculty speaking negatively in the classroom and to faculty members about BIPOC students who are struggling or are vocal about needs for change
 - ATIC
 - Disenfranchisement of BIPOC Experiences & Race Relations
 - BIPOC students experience a wide variety of traumatic events involving both faculty and students through racially charged interactions, tokenizing, objectifying, and stereotyping casting processes and consistent micro-aggression both in and out of the classroom
 - Picnic (Monica Bell), HAIR (Robin Russell & Becky Timms), Pride & Prejudice (Monica Bell), Oklahoma (Becky Timms), Our Country’s Good (Matthew Earnest - Guest Director), 25th Annual PC Spelling Bee (Barbara Hartwig & Steven Gross), The Crucible (John Woodson)

Story Circle #1

When did you feel safe or unsafe in this theatre community?

When did you feel or not feel supported artistically?

Student Support: Actionable Solutions

- In depth and continuous EDI training
- Counseling Services Resources and Basic Training
- Student and Alumni Diversity Panel
- Faculty to Faculty Accountability and Department Wide Policy Upholding Anti-Racism
- Department Wide Disciplinary Policies for perpetuating gossip, segregation between fields of study, defamation of character of students, and personal retaliatory action taken by faculty against students (both in the classroom and on stage) for reasons other than poor academic performance
- Faculty and Department Wide Support of all Student Run Organizations, Productions, or Projects both in and out of the department
- Quarterly temper checks with the student body to make public space for student questions, concerns, presentations, or general discussion pertaining to the department
- Welcome week initiatives similar to HAVEN that address Racism and EDI education specifically in the Department of Theater

Student Support: Final Thoughts

- Culture of Solidarity

Curriculum: The Problem

- 85% of alumni have called for curriculum reform.
- Little to no education on BIPOC artists or their cultural impact.
 - Alumni have mentioned two exceptions to this: Kevin Ferguson's Theatre History class, and Amanda Masterpaul's Applied Theatre/Theatre of the Oppressed.
- In scene work, BIPOC students are pigeonholed into stereotypical, traditionally racist roles, and are not provided with material written by BIPOC authors.
 - White students are given more opportunity to experiment outside of their type in class, while the same opportunities are not provided for BIPOC students.
- White students are encouraged to embrace ethnic ambiguity, and have been given material written for BIPOC actors.
 - White students are taught that it is an advantage to pass as a different race, and alumni have shared that they have had to take things off their resume or out of their book after graduation. Meanwhile, BIPOC students are neglected.
- Inappropriate class dynamic for BIPOC students, leading to micro-aggressions which harm and traumatize students.

Curriculum: Systemic Roots

- Professional Theatre Culture
 - The entertainment industry as a whole is complicit in whitewashing and neglecting the contributions of BIPOC artists. As a university educating the next generation of artists, and as a young program, there is a responsibility to change this notion.
 - Holding Broadway as the standard without discussing its problematic nature is neglecting the BIPOC students in the room.
- University Culture
 - The lack of BIPOC faculty/guest artists means the only perspective being taught is white.
- Implicit Bias
 - Implicit bias leads to the stereotyping, tokenization, and objectification of BIPOC students.
 - Implicit bias also leads to favoritism of white students, and unequal opportunity for BIPOC students.

Story Circle #2

How did the underrepresentation of BIPOC work in the classroom affect your development as a student and theatre maker?

How did the lack of BIPOC faculty affect your experience as a student?

Curriculum: Actionable Steps

- Integrate BIPOC artists, culture, and impact into the already required curriculum.
 - This has been brought up by an overwhelming majority of alumni and current students. We understand that the current course load, particularly for BFA students, is heavy. This work needs to be added to current classes for the short term, and in the long term, there should be room for both World Theatre History and Black Theatre History as required courses.
- Short term solution: Hire BIPOC guest artists, Long term solution: Hire BIPOC faculty
- Stop teaching white students to embrace ethnic ambiguity
 - Start teaching students how to speak with professionals when they are asked to do something offensive or uncomfortable.
- Make Applied Theatre with Amanda Masterpaul and Theatre History with Kevin Ferguson required courses
- Invest in the BA program
 - The BA program has the potential to be a huge strength for CCU Theatre. This will be discussed in more detail next.

Curriculum: Final Thoughts

- Educating the next generation of artists comes with responsibility. Neglecting BIPOC artists fails all students, and creates a harmful environment for BIPOC students.
- What is included in the curriculum is a direct way to change the theatre community at large by influencing young artists, and is something that you have direct control over.
- As educators, you have the power to adjust and change your curriculum. It is up to you to take these actionable steps for short term and long term solutions.

BA/BFA Disparity: The Problem

- The BA program has and continues to be treated as a lesser part of the department
- There is a culture of BA inadequacy that's spread through the entire department. It manifests in a pervasive belief that the BAs are lazy and are not as invested in the department
- Students are treated as an afterthought instead of a priority
- Program is marketed as a “course of study that is particular to your interests and pursuits while offering flexibility,” and students are “encouraged to take an active role in designing your own degree plan”
 - As it stands, there is no structure in place to uphold these claims and students are left to their own devices regarding their work in the department

BA/BFA Disparity: Systemic Roots

- Majority of BIPOC Students are in the BA program
 - The most underrepresented students reside in a neglected degree program. This speaks to a systemic repression of their voices and their work
- Racism and Classism pervade the program
 - Manifests in a caste system that leaves these students vulnerable and alienated
 - I.e. showcase rehearsals, honorary “BFAs,” becoming “one of the good ones”
- Lack of permanent faculty
- BA focused courses are not consistently offered

Story Circle #3

As a B.A. when did you feel seen or unseen by this theatre community?

As a B.A. when did you feel or not feel supported artistically?

BA/BFA Disparity: Actionable Solutions

- BA mentorship program
- Specificity and outlines of potential tracks students can follow
 - “Multidisciplinary does NOT mean unfocused”
- Tenured faculty put in place for BA students
 - Can advise BA students with more tact than a generalized advisor
 - Adjunct faculty lack the resources to make this a competitive degree program
- Create structure through intentional education and faculty review
- End the gatekeeping of showcase and of program specific guest artists
- Not confining the BA students to Social Justice Theatre by eliminating the multidisciplinary opportunities that the program *could* be known for.

BA/BFA Disparity: Final Thoughts

- The BA contains a predominately BIPOC population. The maltreatment of these students is indicative of the racial injustice in the department. Investing in the BA program is also investing in BIPOC students.
- There is a unique opportunity to highlight this program and its students. By investing time and effort into this community, the department could be heralded as a future-leaning community

Transformative Action dictated by Alumni and Current Students

- Agree to attend a minimum of two more EDI specific meetings focused on collective action
- Allow alumni to attend meetings with current students as the primary advocates for BIPOC students

Demands of Dean Bornholdt:

- BA students (all theatre students) need a theatre faculty member as an advisor.
- Anti-racism in FYE classes
- Tenured BA faculty
- Make public the specific actions being taken towards racial equity in the Edwards College
- A formal statement of solidarity explicitly using the words Black Lives Matter

Demands of Eric as Department Chair:

- Support of student groups
- Inclusion of students and alumni in season selection
- Bring in BIPOC guest artists
- Make public the specific actions being taken towards racial equity in the Department of Theatre
- A formal statement of solidarity explicitly using the words Black Lives Matter

Demands of the Department Faculty:

- Create a culture of solidarity that beings in the classroom
- Radical change in curriculum to include and uplift BIPOC artists
- Actively create systems of support, mental and emotional wellness