

In the wake of George Floyd's murder, global protests, and continuous violence against BIPOC people, the urgent need to dismantle the racist structures of our society is unprecedented. The following narrative is a timeline of our efforts to begin the deconstruction of these racist structures within the microcosm of CCUs Department of Theatre.

On June 4th, 2020, a 2019 BIPOC alumni, posted to the private CCU Department of Theatre Facebook group. Their post detailed the experience of unlearning the racism they had internalized while attending CCU, during their first post-grad year. This post connected BIPOC alumni and current students across the years who decided it was time to organize and put a stop to the cycle.

On June 18th, a few weeks after a poorly worded and insincere social media post expressing solidarity with Black Lives Matter and the department's BIPOC student body, the Department Chair announced a department wide "community meeting on Diversity and Inclusion" via Zoom. This meeting, scheduled for June 23rd, would be facilitated by CCUs Vice President for Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI). This would be the first time theatre students were introduced to anyone in the CCU office of DEI.

Due to the complete lack of diversity within the department faculty, a BIPOC graduate of the class of 2015, reached out requesting that alumni be permitted to attend this meeting as advocates for the BIPOC students. This request was refused by both the Department Chair and Vice President of DEI based on the assumption that the meeting would be a "venting session." In lieu of this, the Department Chair offered to schedule an additional meeting for alumni. This meeting was eventually scheduled for July 6th. Out of concern for the well-being and the expressed wishes of the current BIPOC students, a few alumni anonymously attended the June 23rd meeting as silent bystanders.

In this Zoom meeting, they witnessed the same defensive, gaslighting, consistently racist, and generally apathetic attitudes towards self-evaluation and wide-spread change from faculty members that has been experienced by numerous generations of students. This was painfully reflected in the use of time during the meeting. In a 2 hour meeting, faculty, staff, and university administration spoke for over 1 hour, white students spoke for 8 minutes, while BIPOC students only spoke for a total of 32 minutes.

The following day, the alumni covertly in attendance at the June 23rd meeting, sent out an anonymous survey to fellow alums to document the following: their experiences of racism while in the department, changes they would like to see, and whether or not they would like to join the movement for racial equity. After receiving multiple enthusiastic responses to join the movement, the CCU Theater EDI Panel was born. A few days later, the EDI Panel also sent out an anonymous survey to current students and conducted a private Zoom discussion with them to hear their concerns. You may see an analysis of our results on the "Testimony" page. The

responses we received thoroughly documented over a decade of traumatic racial harm inflicted on BIPOC students by the CCU Department of Theater's all white faculty and staff.

Armed with this knowledge, the EDI Panel began, in earnest, preparing for the upcoming July 6th meeting with the faculty. Basing our approach to the meeting on a transformative justice model we did the following: created a problem tree identifying each of the key issues compiled from the survey results, collected anti-racist educational materials and EDI training materials, and researched other professional theatres and collegiate programs. Equipped with an abundance of resources and the support and guidance of several mentors, the panel created a full presentation to clearly and concisely relay our experiences, concerns, and provide actionable steps for enacting positive change. Prior to our meeting, we invited the Dean of Edwards College to attend; and we forwarded the meeting agenda and guidelines to everyone invited, including the Vice President of DEI, and all CCU theater faculty/staff.

Much to our surprise, the meeting was nearly cancelled after department faculty received the agenda. We were informed that several faculty and administration members felt "this was no longer a safe space for them, and that our approach was hostile." They demanded we reformat the structure of the meeting, allotting 45 minutes at the beginning of the meeting for faculty members to speak; even though they initially stated, "this meeting is for you, the alumni of this program, to share your experiences."

The Zoom meeting with the department faculty/staff, Department Chair, Dean, and Vice President of Diversity Equity and Inclusion proceeded on July 6th. 130 alumni and current students attended. The faculty, however, did not. The Department Chair, Dean, and Vice President of DEI were the only representatives of the college in attendance. The Dean attempted to take responsibility for the faculty's absence, reporting that she instructed them not to attend. However, this was not a convincing explanation to those in attendance who'd spent years in the program and had experienced the faculty's disdain for change personally. Once the presentation concluded, the Dean apologized for the faculty's absence and commended the professionalism of the presentation and the thoroughness of the information we provided. The Department Chair agreed to schedule a faculty meeting the following week, which all faculty/staff would attend and review the recording of the July 6th Zoom presentation.

After this meeting, we shared the same recording of the Zoom call to the private CCU Department of Theatre Facebook page for those who were unable to attend. Our post and the video was immediately taken down, citing that it was a "breach of trust" to share this recorded meeting on social media. Settings in the Facebook group were changed, now requiring admin approval of all posts, and the department no longer allowed future Zoom meetings to be recorded. A few professors deleted their social media profiles entirely.

The next Zoom meeting was scheduled for July 23rd. The faculty and Department Chair finally agreed to allow us to share our presentation and to "practice holding space for BIPOC voices." The day prior to the scheduled meeting, we were informed, for a second time, that several faculty members did not "feel safe" and may possibly not attend. It was explained that their

concerns were due to week(s) old private social media posts, made by individuals (not participating in our presentation and not BIPOC) calling out professors for sexual misconduct and Title IX violations. After conveying our groups lack of knowledge of these posts, as well as discussing the importance of the meeting and the implications of the faculty refusing to attend for a second time, we hoped for the best and prepared for the worst. Over 150 alumni and current students showed up to the second meeting. Although we were unsure if they would attend or not, the faculty and staff were present. For the first time, in an open space with no interruption, over 15 BIPOC students and alumni courageously shared personal testimony of the trauma they endured during their time in the CCU Department of Theatre directly to those who had inflicted the harm upon them.

After this meeting, we received an email from the Department Chair thanking us for our presentation and stating he would reach out at the start of the academic year to reconnect and collaborate further. CCUs academic year began on Wednesday, August 19th. We have had no communications or updates from the department since July 24th.

This website was launched on October 1st, 2020. We have worked tirelessly for months to foster communication with the CCU Department of Theatre to very little avail. Thus resulting in the decision to go public with our experiences and warn prospective students that the Coastal Carolina University Department of Theatre is currently a harmful environment for BIPOC artists.