

Rollins

THEATRE & DANCE

ROLLINS COLLEGE DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE & DANCE AND ANNIE RUSSELL THEATRE ANTI-RACISM ACTION PLAN

For far too long, institutional and internalized racism have been a cornerstone of our society and systems, including the institutions and the culture of the Rollins College Department of Theatre & Dance and the Annie Russell Theatre. As we are made aware of the far-reaching impact of racism—within our cherished organizations and within ourselves—we can no longer remain complacent or silent. We cannot ignore the harm white privilege causes to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students, alumni, colleagues, patrons, friends, and loved ones. We, the current faculty and staff of the department of theatre and dance, want to express our sincere apology for any impact that our actions or words have had in continuing bias, micro aggressions, and disenfranchisement of our BIPOC students.

We recognize that the 88 years of instruction and performance at the Department of Theatre & Dance and the Annie Russell Theatre have fostered and reinforced implicit biases that have permitted a culture of racism and white privilege to pervade our classrooms and theatre spaces. Privilege is often invisible to the privileged; we have learned to look past it or explain it away. BIPOC students and alumni have known this for decades, and many have tried to bring their concerns to us and to share their experiences, only to be granted cursory recognition and an inevitable return to policies and procedures that render them third-class citizens, silenced and ignored.

The Department of Theatre & Dance Values Statement avers “we promote a healthy environment that fosters diversity, inclusion, and civility,” yet BIPOC students—once again—have made clear that we systematically and historically fail to meet this goal for every student, faculty, and staff member. Our Department is not the open, friendly, and caring space that all students expect and deserve. This is unacceptable.

We must adhere to our Values Statement. We must work harder to ensure that this Statement applies to and supports everyone. We must face our own shortcomings and identify our personal and professional blind spots regarding racism in our classrooms, in our productions, and in ourselves. We must become anti-racists.

Beginning now, in the fall of 2020, we commit ourselves and our program to call out systemic racism and to actively promote a truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment onstage, in rehearsal, in the classroom, and among each other. BIPOC students and alumni can no longer be expected to point out enculturated racism, and they can no longer be asked to wait for substantive change.

We will institute racial healing practices in every aspect of our Department and in everything we do in the classroom, from mentoring to season planning, from casting and all elements of production to budgeting and hiring. Anti-racism must suffuse our Mission Statement to “...inspire students’ artistic, intellectual, and personal growth.” We must question our priorities and reorganize our values in ways that may prove uncomfortable to those who have not acknowledged systemic racism in their professional and personal lives. It will require an unflinching commitment from everyone: faculty, staff, students, alumni, and the community that supports the Annie Russell Theatre, to ensure that anti-racist practices are integrated into our mission.

Such transformation is not easy: it requires focus, honesty, time, and resources. We must commit to do everything we can right away to affect real change, change that can be seen and felt by everyone, including BIPOC students and alumni. We must create an environment where racial reconciliation and true diversity, equity, and inclusion are possible; we must embody an artistic and scholarly life free of racism in all its forms.

We will work to establish restorative racial reconciliation in the Department of Theatre and Dance, in the Annie Russell Theatre, and within ourselves.

Department of Theatre & Dance faculty and staff established three working groups (Production, Academic, and External Relations) and worked alongside current BIPOC students and BIPOC alumni during the summer of 2020 to craft this document.

This list of action items is neither complete nor comprehensive. It is a living document: it will require continual updating and revising as we evolve—but we acknowledge that our community must hear from us now, that this important work must begin now.

The Department is indebted to the Rollins Theatre Students and Alumni of Color Action Group for initiating this discussion and jumpstarting this important work.

**PRODUCTION
WORKING GROUP**

Lisa Cody-Rapport,
Robert Miller, Nicole Ponce,
Eric Zivot, Grace Zottig,
Thomas Ouellette (Chair)

**ACADEMIC
WORKING GROUP**

Faith Artis, Missy Barnes,
Caisey Cole,
Alexandra Feliciano,
Kevin Griffin (Chair)

**EXTERNAL RELATIONS
WORKING GROUP**

Hilary Cooperman,
Robin Gerchman, Jordan Lewis,
Alliyah Thorpe,
Chelsea Hilend (Chair)

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| THE PRODUCTION RACIAL JUSTICE WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDS ADOPTING THE FOLLOWING <u>IMMEDIATELY</u> |
| THAT the Department produce at least one play each ART season written by a BIPOC playwright and/or one which centers on the BIPOC experience |
| THAT the Department connect with BIPOC Rollins alumni involved in the development of new work to identify plays written by BIPOC playwrights for ART programming consideration |
| THAT the Department faculty join with students to organize informal play readings from the National New Play Network (and other sources like Beyond the Canon: http://www.beyondthecanon.com/) written by BIPOC playwrights for ART programming consideration |
| THAT the Department examine all play titles under consideration through a color-conscious casting lens; to eliminate from consideration all plays in which <u>no</u> BIPOC students could be cast |
| THAT the Department eliminate from consideration plays in which students are cast in roles that foster stereotype; that do not intentionally interrogate stereotype |
| THAT the Department faculty, and especially the ART Producing Director, participate in student-led discussions about ART programming and strongly consider plays suggested by students |
| THAT the Department respect BIPOC playwrights’ original intent regarding race when considering BIPOC plays and BIPOC characters |

THAT the Department look at the diversity-conscious casting practices of professional theatres and similar best practices from Rollins' peer and aspirant institutions and work to bring these practices to Rollins

THAT the Department keep a record of students who have been cast (and in which productions) to encourage faculty directors to take risks in casting and discourage the practice of over-using the same students from show to show and from season to season

THAT the Department adopt a casting policy wherein all roles are available to all students, with no regard for the character's ethnicity and gender identity—unless the playwright or play includes specific directives regarding these descriptors

THAT the Department reach out to local professional theatres that produce new works (in full productions or staged readings) to request scripts of new plays for ART programming consideration; that the faculty attend such productions whenever possible

THAT the Department post online the expectations for scholarship students

THAT the Department be guided by these questions when selecting BIPOC plays: what story does this casting tell; is the story clear and supported by the text; is the story appropriately complex; and do I have the right players?

THAT the Department allow scholarship recipients with performance and musical theatre emphases to be released from the requirement that they accept all roles as cast in cases wherein a specific play, playwright, or role is objectionable to the student. The scholarship recipient must make this case to the Producing Director (PD) and the case must be adjudicated before general auditions for the play in question. If the request is approved by the PD the student must agree to serve on a production crew, as assigned. Students may choose a faculty advocate to support their case to the PD. If the request is granted, renewal of the student's scholarship will not be affected

THE PRODUCTION RACIAL JUSTICE WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDS ADOPTING THE FOLLOWING EXPEDITIOUSLY

THAT the Department prioritize the outreach and recruitment of BIPOC directors to direct plays written by BIPOC playwrights or plays centered on the BIPOC experience and redouble its efforts to involve current BIPOC students as assistant/associate directors and dramaturgs in these productions

THAT the Department prioritize outreach and recruiting of BIPOC guest directors, guest artists and guest designers to work on all ART productions

THAT at least one member of the current theatre and dance faculty become certified in Intimacy Direction and Choreography.

THAT the Department create as a resource a directory of BIPOC alumni who are current theatre practitioners to encourage networking and collaboration among current and former students

THAT the Department use funding sources like the Thomas P. Johnson Distinguished Visiting Scholar and Artist Fund to expand opportunities for BIPOC theatre artists, particularly BIPOC alumni, whenever possible

THAT the Department enlist support from on-campus resources like the Division of Student Affairs and the Office of Title IX to provide sexual harassment and implicit bias training and petition the Dean of Faculty's office to provide resources to engage an off-campus firm with expertise in such training for Theatre Departments or small college environments. This work should result in the creation of a set of Department-specific expectations regarding perceived instances of sexual harassment or unconscious bias. These expectations should be articulated at the first departmental meeting of each academic year to students, faculty and staff.

THE **ACADEMIC RACIAL JUSTICE WORKING GROUP** RECOMMENDS ADOPTING THE FOLLOWING IMMEDIATELY

That we commit ourselves to anti-bias, anti-racism awareness development for all faculty, staff and students throughout each academic year

That we commit ourselves to the department pledge of Racial Reconciliation as stated in the preamble to the department action plan and to hold ourselves and each other accountable to this action plan

That we commit ourselves to marketing open faculty and staff positions via the BIPOC alumni committee and to having at least one applicable member of the BIPOC alumni committee on search committees for these positions

That we commit ourselves to the development of a Diversity & Inclusion Council comprised of current students, faculty, staff and alumni to address and communicate issues of bias and racism within the department

That we commit ourselves to continuing our education, by expanding our personal knowledge and understanding through continued dialogue about biases faced while in the classroom and production

That we commit ourselves to a greater inclusion of BIPOC and marginalized voices, ideas and themes in our academic courses and lean less on white European centric models of theatre education

That we commit ourselves to active listening and to addressing the concerns of racist words and actions that anyone experiences in the Department of Theatre & Dance and the Annie Russell Theatre

THE **EXTERNAL RELATIONS RACIAL JUSTICE WORKING GROUP** RECOMMENDS ADOPTING THE FOLLOWING IMMEDIATELY

Work deliberately and consciously towards achieving a more diverse body of theatre students

Designate at least one work study position to assist with student recruitment, in an effort to grow and diversify our applicant pool for the Priscilla Parker Scholarship and, resultantly, incoming students in general. This position would work in concert with the Department's Administrative Assistant to

- build and maintain a database of contacts in high schools, community colleges, college preparatory (Upward Bound), and other relevant environments
- focus on Jones HS and Dr. Phillips HS, where Rollins can offer full ride scholarships to Black students through Rosen Foundation
- communicate with these contacts regularly
- ensure the transfer of information between the Department and the Office of Admissions

Invest more personnel and resources into the Florida State Thespians conference, where we are likely to intersect with a diverse group of potential students. Current students should receive financial support to attend the conference and assist with recruitment efforts

Provide increased print and digital collateral surrounding financial aid opportunities (snapshots of typical financial aid packages, work study opportunities, etc.) in order to reduce the initial perception of financial barriers that prevent BIPOC students from accessing a Rollins education

Ensure that student scholarship awards are inclusive of BIPOC students

Connect incoming BIPOC students with a community of support by:

- Linking them to current BIPOC students and alumni via the existing Facebook group

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Matching them, and all incoming students, with a student mentor |
| Create partnerships with departments and organizations on campus comprised of BIPOC students, such as the Black Student Union. These partnerships should inspire and guide programming that exists inside and outside our traditional four-show season |
| Provide access to at least one master class from a BIPOC artist each academic year, partnering with other departments and organizations on campus to make this resource available to students outside our department |
| Showcase the wide range of theatre and dance student experiences (in the classroom, across emphases, etc.) on social media, in an effort to present a broader image of what it means to be a Rollins theatre and dance student and consequently, to present more diverse student identities |
| Make space for BIPOC voices to respond to print and digital materials, at least once annually through an audit process involving a panel of BIPOC alumni and current students, and throughout the year as needed. Be particularly cognizant and critical of print and digital materials that neglect to include BIPOC students |
| <p>Communicate more intentionally with BIPOC alumni in order to facilitate connections between BIPOC alumni and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ other BIPOC alumni ○ current students ○ productions and classes ○ print and digital platforms that celebrate Rollins' success stories (inside and outside the Department) |
| Recognize and highlight significant contributions to the field made by BIPOC alumni and make space to showcase their artistry as a professional resource at Rollins when possible |
| Ensure community members deeply connected to the Department, such as the Annie Russell Theatre Guild, are equally committed to racial justice and invited to attend the anti-bias, anti-racism training offered to faculty, staff, and students |
| Acknowledge our commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equity on our website, in production playbills, in the curtain speech, and in ticket order confirmation emails. Link to the racial justice action plan where appropriate |
| Consider a land acknowledgement as part of the curtain speech and/or the production playbill |

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| <p>THE EXTERNAL RELATIONS RACIAL JUSTICE WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDS ADOPTING THE FOLLOWING EXPEDITIOUSLY</p> |
| Work to secure a donor to create a BIPOC-specific theatre and dance scholarship |
| Use the tool provided by the Office of Alumni Engagement in early 2021 to facilitate connections with BIPOC alumni, and between BIPOC alumni and students. Use information from the platform to build and maintain our own database of alumni divided into categories that best serve our needs (master classes, etc.) |

Draft: November 05, 2020