



June 17, 2020

Dear Maereg and Co-Signing Students & Alumni,

Thank you again for your letter. Your frank questions and urgent calls for change have illuminated the Theatre & Dance Department's complacency about systemic racism, and the fact that we have not incorporated anti-racist practices. The letter has provoked a necessary and overdue process of individual and collective self-examination across Theatre & Dance, with particular responsibility among the white faculty and staff who have helped determine the department's practices. They collectively offer the following:

As a department, we know we can do better, and regret that it has taken the momentum of a national justice rebellion to illustrate to us the depth of the problem. It is deeply unfair to you, as students and alumni, to need to call us to account.

The concerns of our Black and brown students and colleagues have neither been listened to adequately nor heeded. We have not created the culture of inclusion to which we aspire. In particular, the white faculty and staff in the department are coming to see that they have benefitted from and perpetuated systems that disadvantage nonwhite people, including Black, indigenous and people of color. They are sitting with the painful implications of this truth. The department acknowledges that faculty members Michael Chin, Heidi Cruz-Austin, Samuel Antonio Reyes, Leticia Robles-Moreno, and Randall Anthony Smith have been doing this work with great dedication for years, and that white faculty are the ones who need to step up if there is to be meaningful systemic change.

The white faculty and staff members of the department pledge to undertake the personal and collective work necessary to ensure the establishment of anti-racism and the confrontation of anti-Blackness as fundamental departmental values and practices, and to begin to restore your trust in them as artists, educators and leaders.

This means committing the department to an honest reckoning with its past, which may be particularly uncomfortable for white faculty and staff members. But as your letter makes clear, the department must interrogate many of its longstanding operating practices, as well as the assumptions that underpin them. A full process for this is still being devised, but it will necessarily involve significant participation from students and alumni, and will necessarily be transparent.

Many statements like this are circulating now, and there is good reason to suspect this letter as a form of managerial containment or virtue signaling. The faculty and staff of the department hope you will accept as a sign of our seriousness the following initiatives for the coming year and beyond. Some are articulated with more detail than others. Responding expediently to your letter with concrete action steps has been a priority, but in some instances more time is needed to arrive at the best formulation of a particular idea. This list is brought to you as a starting point, and a foundation for ongoing work.

CURRICULUM:

It has been a departmental norm that the introductory, foundational courses for both the Theatre major and Dance major have disproportionately privileged European traditions and white cultural production. Students majoring in Theatre and in Dance have not been required to critically encounter racism or xenophobia elsewhere in their major coursework either. Many departmental faculty need to be more effective in using best practices for inclusive teaching and need to design coursework so that anti-racism is a course value and practice. Therefore, we propose the following initiatives:

- 1. In the 2020-2021 academic year, the introductory courses for the Theatre major, Dance major, and Dance minor will center: (1) the experiences, perspectives, scholarship, movement traditions, and performances of Black, indigenous and people of color, and people of otherwise non-Western cultures, and (2) critiques of whiteness and white supremacy that underpin disciplinary work in Theatre and Dance education, technique, and performance.**
- 2. Beginning with this fall's incoming first-year class (the class of 2024) and going forward for all future class years, in order to meet degree requirements, students majoring in Theatre will be required to take at least one course beyond the 100-level about minoritized or marginalized theatre/performance traditions.**
- 3. Theatre majors in the class of 2023, 2022 and 2021 will be given the opportunity to waive some degree requirements in favor of taking additional coursework about minoritized or marginalized theatre/performance traditions.**
- 4. Going forward, the department commits to offering more such courses per semester, and to providing incentives for all students to take them. Courses taught by instructors whose lived experience is outside the minoritized or marginalized traditions being studied (such as a white male-identified instructor teaching *Black Feminist Performance*) will include special course guests from within those traditions, supported by the department. Additionally, syllabi will outline course practices that foreground that instructor's outside positionality as an informed co-learner about the tradition.**
- 5. Going forward, all syllabi for departmental courses will feature: (1) learning goals for inclusive teaching and anti-racism, and (2) statements in which instructors outline**

specific course practices supporting those goals, and how they (and students) are accountable for adhering to those practices.

CO-CURRICULUM:

Season planning for departmental productions has historically relied upon an “Artistic Director” model with a low level of transparency. As a result, students have not had a voice in production or repertoire selection. Due to the whiteness of the Theatre & Dance faculty, this has contributed to a devaluation of non-white storytelling, and the marginalization and tokenization of Black, indigenous and people of color in the department. The department has not taken an overt stance on cultural appropriation in performance, or on combating the representation of harmful stereotypes. The department does not have equity guidelines governing casting, nor does it have a clear process for students, faculty and staff to dialogue about season work. Therefore, we propose the following initiatives:

- 1. The department will revise its approach to: (1) season selection for departmental productions, and (2) the selection of guest artists, in favor of more collaborative and transparent processes inclusive of students and Equity Advocates. This will begin with a reevaluation of the Theatre Program’s selections for the 2020-2021 departmental production season, as well as the department’s consideration of guest artists. Those 2020-2021 reevaluation processes will center the voices of nonwhite people, including Black, indigenous and people of color.**
- 2. The department will compose a defined, public equity and accessibility policy that clarifies considerations of race and color in auditioning and casting processes for departmental productions. This policy will also necessarily consider ethnicity, gender expression, gender identity and disability.**
- 3. For all departmental productions, a practice of post-production community discussions will be instituted. This initiative seeks to organize a repeatable structure of community engagement and dialogue around production work, to enable individual and collective growth, and to reveal the multiple meanings and receptions of our work as it’s experienced by different people, and different kinds of people.**

EQUITY, ACCESS & SUPPORT:

The department is not simply “predominantly white,” it is culturally white. Anti-racism is not yet a fundamental departmental value in Theatre & Dance. This has made it comparably more challenging for students, faculty and staff who are Black, indigenous and people of color to thrive and flourish here than their white counterparts, resulting in a consistent pattern of attrition. Going forward, anti-racism must be a fundamental departmental value; the departmental community must be diversified, not only through highly intentional recruitment and retention practices, but through the destabilization of whiteness as the cultural default. Therefore, we propose the following initiatives:

1. In 2020, the department will begin conducting a nationwide search for a full time, tenure-track acting professor. The position will seek candidates with specializations in actor training informed by the experience and cultural production of Black, indigenous, and people of color. This process will involve a trained faculty Equity Advocate, and will enlist significant feedback from students.
2. The department will engage College leadership in an ongoing process to plan for new opportunities to diversify full time and part time departmental faculty and staff in future hiring processes.
3. The department will audit its own procedures for hiring guest production artists, with the goal to diversify the group of recurring designers, musical directors, dialect coaches and other artists who are contracted to work on departmental productions.
4. In determining departmental work loads, the department will take into consideration the student mentorship and other service demands that faculty and staff of color often disproportionately do, and lessen departmental service expectations accordingly.
5. Across the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 academic years, the department will prioritize Black, indigenous and people of color in its student recruitment efforts.
6. Muhlenberg has a confidential online reporting process for students to request that incidents and concerns related to bias, diversity, equity and inclusion are addressed. The process protects students from retaliation and awkwardness. The department will centralize this reporting process in its operations so that students are empowered to use it consistently to address departmental bias concerns.
7. In the fall of 2020, the department will work with Theatre & Dance students to: (1) compose an official departmental statement on diversity, equity and inclusion, and (2) revise [the department's Mission Statement and Learning Goals](#).

CULTURAL COMPETENCIES OF WHITE FACULTY & STAFF:

White faculty and staff are committed to receiving anti-racism training. As a group, they will do sufficient collective reflection on the nature of systemic racism and its impact on their teaching, mentorship and collegiality. White faculty do not habitually enter campus spaces where multiculturalism and anti-racism are foregrounded. Therefore, we propose the following initiatives:

1. The department will establish an ongoing working, reading and discussion group for white faculty/staff members about identifying and combating white supremacy in theatre and dance education. This group will convene regularly for work throughout

the 2020-2021 academic year, and reconvene at least annually afterward to renew, recommit, and replenish knowledge and practices. In the first year, topics investigated may include racial gaslighting, white fragility and racial microaggressions.

2. **Before the fall 2020 semester, white faculty/staff in the department will undergo training for inclusive educational practices and anti-racism, and will begin discussions specific to applying these practices to departmental contexts.**
3. **The department will cultivate a commitment plan with white faculty to engage more fully with the College's culture of multiculturalism by consistently attending/supporting campus events sponsored by or concerning nonwhite experience.**

As he has stated previously, Troy will share a series of short videos in the coming days to provide answers to some of the informational questions posed in your letter.

In addition, the faculty and staff of the Theatre & Dance Department wish to express full support of [the statement drafted on June 9, 2020 by the Black Faculty of Muhlenberg College.](#)

We are grateful for the leadership you have shown here. It is our responsibility to assure that these changes occur, but to the extent you are able, we hope you will work with us going forward. Though it may feel hard to trust this right now, your voices are invaluable to us, and we not only pledge to provide you more opportunities to use them, but we promise to actually listen.

Sincerely,

The names of signatories to this document can be found [in a separate document on this webpage.](#)