

Diversity Statement
Christine Cummings

Three years ago a brave student sent me an email with a question that shook the very foundation of my social consciousness. They asked me if I believed that black lives mattered. They asked because I had not openly stated my feelings on social media. I realized in that frightening and humbling moment that, though I knew in my soul that my answer was, “yes, of course I believe it and fully support the movement”, my not having SAID it, not having been a vocal social justice advocate, my having remained hidden behind the comfort of my own privilege, meant I was unwittingly complacent in the injustices against members of the BIPOC community. I purposefully began to change this in that very moment.

I became an outspoken advocate and educated myself in multiple ways including completion of the CORA Equity in Education Certificate Program in Unconscious Bias and Racial Micro-Aggressions Certifications. I then served on the Orange County Theater Guild Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Committee. I joined a DEISA faculty group who helped me revamp my classes to make them more equitable and representative of our student demographic.

When I became Chair of the Theater Department and as the first female Chair this Department has ever had, and the first LGBTQIA+ member, my main goal was to make our Department Equity Mission a priority. I have taken the following steps to ensure an inclusive and equitable environment for our students: I created a Virtual Suggestion Box so students could communicate with the Department and have their voices heard and opinions valued. We have established a Season Selection Committee made up of a diverse collection of faculty members with the goal of selecting plays to produce that will be equitable in terms of gender parity, communities of color, LGBTQIA+ communities and writers with disabilities whenever possible. I wrote a Land Acknowledgment which is now read at the start of our bi-annual Student Meetings.

The most inspirational event was our 1st Annual Equity & Diversity Forum which I held to give a safe space for students to discuss with us how the Theater Department faculty are doing in terms of treating students with respect and creating safe and welcoming environments in our classrooms and rehearsal spaces. For students who would rather remain anonymous, I sent out an Equity Survey to all Theater Majors. The student’s comments and feedback were eye opening and have helped us continue to improve our Equity and Diversity practices. My Dean asked me to share our work with the entire Arts Division, the Vice President of Instruction shared this work with the Board of Directors and I am currently working with the Equity Center to bring this work to other academic departments on campus. A fortunate aspect of my teaching experience has been the wide diversity of student demographics I’ve been called upon to teach, and my commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion practices in my classroom have done more to make me a better educator than, perhaps, any other experiences in my career.