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DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION STATEMENT

I've been a professional director and theatre educator for more than twenty years. During that time, I've realized a few points that serve me best as an artist and educator that exists within a global society of diverse human beings:

Practice inclusivity in casting. There is an unfortunate assumption – sometimes with my students and sometimes with my colleagues – that Caucasian is the “default” choice; that, if a role is not specified as being of a certain race, then the author must have *intended* that the role be white. My belief is that race should not be given a priority in casting unless that play is about race and/or race relations (i.e. a play such as *Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry, *Chinglish* by David Henry Hwang, *Stick Fly* by Lydia Diamond, etc.). Similar inclusivity must be extended when it comes to actors with disabilities and actors from the LGBTQA+ community. Working extensively in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles with students from a wide variety of backgrounds, I've found that this policy serves university programs best.

Choose plays that serve and reflect the community around you. Whether choosing plays for your syllabus or selecting a theatrical season, it's important for your students' education to acknowledge the richness of the traditional Western theatrical canon but also to look beyond it for inspiration and possibility. I often tell students that theatre is both a reflection and a response to the society we live within. A university theatre exists within an educational community as well as a geographic one; the work we produce must entertain this community as well as inspire it towards reflection and/or action.

Don't forget the women in your department. I have directed in theatre departments for years; one of my greatest frustrations has been the number of women interested in studying acting contrasted with the number of quality roles for women available in the “usual suspects” of narrative plays. This has often resulted in a number of quality student actresses competing fervently for a handful of roles while a greater number of men are given the opportunity to grow in their craft due to greater opportunity. Theatrical production is the lab component of a theatre student's education. As an educator, I maintain that our student constituency should be the driving consideration when choosing a season – and that the opportunity for the women in a theatre department be a significant deciding factor.

Celebrate your international students. One of my great joys over the past three years has been the number of international students I've had the opportunity to teach during my tenure at The New York Film Academy. A majority of these students are from Eastern Europe, China, Korea or Africa; each of these students provide their classmates a broader understanding of the world while also proving the universality of much of the human experience.

Welcome military veterans into your student body. I've had the opportunity to instruct a number of veterans since joining the faculty of NYFA. Each of them joined the military

for different reasons. For some, it was an economic decision; for others, it was because of family tradition or due to a sense of responsibility. Some even joined up because – as they have put it to me – they didn't know what they wanted to do with their lives. *All of them* leave the military with an inherent understanding of the power of choice...and, as Stella Adler put it, "Your talent is in your choice." Consistently, the military veterans I've instructed in my acting classes have a strong sense of responsibility, a fierce work ethic, and an overwhelming desire to learn the skills for compelling artistic expression.

Continue the conversation. Inclusivity isn't inherently easy. Terms change. Times change. Despite the fact that it often feels like we're taking a ridiculous number of steps backwards as a nation, things have improved in a number of ways. When I was starting my career in Chicago, I directed a production of Diana Son's *Stop Kiss* – a groundbreaking work that explored the risks and truths of beginning a lesbian relationship. Years later, we have national commercials for major credit cards that show gay parents marveling at their kids interest in cleaning the kitchen – and it's just treated as part of the world. This is progress and it's worth celebrating...but we're not done. It's imperative that we continue talking about how we can improve – both as individuals and as a society.