

Ashley Elizabeth White

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Statement of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

As an educator and director, diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility are fundamental pillars of my work. I am committed to cultivating an inclusive and equitable environment that embraces and celebrates DEIA. My teaching style reflects these values as I view my role in the arts as a powerful platform for fostering empathy and understanding. I strive to create spaces where students, colleagues, artists, and collaborators feel emboldened to share their truths and bring their full identities to their work. By prioritizing safety, consent, compassion, and respect, I aim to ensure that everyone feels welcomed, appreciated, and empowered to contribute authentically.

My classroom and rehearsal spaces are built on a human-first, ensemble-first, and consent-forward approach. From the outset, my students and I establish "Community Agreements" to collectively define how we will collaborate, work together, and support one another in creating a foundation for equitable and productive work. Thereafter, each class or rehearsal begins with checking in on access needs, followed by a grounding exercise that fosters a sense of community, safety, and belonging. Mindfulness practices are integrated to enhance focus and preparation as an opening practice.

In the classroom, I center the voices and perspectives of historically marginalized groups in the curriculum. I select plays written by BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ playwrights, incorporate an inclusive range of directors, actors, and production styles; share supplemental materials, specifically on diverse new works; model inclusive language; and, encourage students to express their full identities, including preferred pronouns and names. I explore themes of social justice and equity in performance pieces, and provide opportunities for students to engage with material that reflect a wide range of human experiences.

I have actively served on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committees, working to drive DEIA initiatives that make meaningful impacts within organizations. Through coordinating pre-show discussions and curating season lineups that reflect a wide range of identities, I have witnessed the effect that intentional DEIA efforts can have in arts education. By actively participating in such initiatives, organizations and individuals contribute to creating environments where every individual feels valued and respected.

With consistently participating in ongoing professional development, I stay informed about best practices in DEIA. As a certified Consent-Forward Artist with IDC, Mental Health First Aid Certified with NCMW, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Workplace Certified from USF, along with over 123 hours of training in Anti-Racism, DEI, Gender Identity, Bystander Intervention, Mental Health, and Trauma Stewardship, I am equipped with the tools to lead inclusively and with intention. I believe, through open dialogue and reflective practice, artists, educators, colleagues, and students can work to dismantle systemic barriers, confront biases, and foster a collaborative spirit.

Supporting DEIA initiatives is a deeply held value that shapes every aspect of my work, resonating with my commitment to confronting and challenging all forms of discrimination and oppression. I am dedicated to uplifting historically marginalized voices, advocating for justice, and leading with gratitude, empathy, and a focus on safety and consent. With DEIA at the core of my approach, I strive to create spaces where every individual feels celebrated, respected, appreciated, and empowered to share their authentic self and unique perspectives.