BRETT JOHN OLSON

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Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement

My Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) philosophy centers on continuous growth for myself and my students. Theatre, as an empathetic art form, requires practitioners to work toward a more inclusive and equitable society, honoring our differences and commonalities. This involves honest self-reflection about my journey and future goals. Ultimately, I aim to decolonize curriculums and dismantle patriarchal programming, fostering empathy as an ongoing practice.

My DEI journey began in rural North Dakota, where powwows introduced me to Native American traditions. Visiting 34 National Parks across the U.S. deepened my understanding of Indigenous history and the impact of colonization. Now in New York City, I plan to study at the National Museum of the American Indian. At each stage of my life, I've reassessed how, as a professor, I can support a more just society. I strive to inspire my students to stay curious and understand their past, present, and future, much like the dancing circle represents lifelong learning.

Academia and theatre have historically centered dominant voices, sidelining diverse perspectives. As an educator, I embrace change and acknowledge my responsibility within it, often stepping back to make space for others. At Stephens College, I've been revamping online analysis courses since 2022, diversifying content in dramatic literature and focusing on global theatre history. In performance courses, I use students' lived experiences to create relevant and engaging assignments. During my time at the University of North Dakota from 2018-2020, I participated in workshops on using theatre for advocacy, pronouns and gender, and leadership for change. My study with Intimacy Directors International focuses on creating consent-based environments.

Arts access has always been important to me. In 2019, I led a tour of low-income rural North Dakota schools, providing free workshops and performances. As Associate Artistic Director for North Dakota Shakespeare, I received a 2018 grant to offer free professional theatre for low-access patrons. My participation in Western Illinois University's annual Dealing with Differences Institute deepened my understanding of the relationship between violence, police, and BIPOC people. As a director, I am committed to conscious casting practices and recruiting cultural consultants as needed.

DEI is an ongoing process, and I am dedicated to personal growth. Some of my current practices include using proper pronouns, land acknowledgments, and supporting the LGBTQ+, BIPOC, and Neurodivergent communities. My future goals include completing certification with Intimacy Directors International to provide students with the most current consent-based practices and implementing Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed in the classroom and on stage. Most importantly, I am committed to continue having challenging conversations that promote growth for myself, the theatre community, and in academia.

With appreciation,

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