

Jeffrey B. Cunningham MFA

1300 Jefferson Street Kerrville Texas 78028

JBCunningham75@gmail.com

(830) 329-2940

On Inclusion

It does not show outwardly, but my mother's family is Spanish and Mexican American. I stated in my own college applications that furthering the success of Hispanic theatre was a professional goal. This remains true. I currently work at an HSI (Hispanic Serving Institution) with a strong Title V program. For many years the majority of my theatre students have identified as Latina and my programming reflected that fact. My proudest project was the Schreiner Latina Playwrighting Contest that encouraged writers who identified as female, Latin, or Hispanic to write dramas based on their experiences, observations, and ideas.

Theatre has always been a place where the marginalized could succeed. Everyone who studies or works with me is expected to work hard, focus on the discipline of Theatre, and commit to excellence in the craft. No one is excluded because of their identity, and I believe my programs are some of the most inclusive in our community. Students of color, LGBTQ students, and neurodivergent students make up the vast majority of my university program, and the program is stronger for this fact.

I have actively attempted to further my own education and understanding of inclusion and diversity in both a university and professional setting. I assist Dr. Adolfo Mora of the Schreiner Communications Department in his role as a leader in the IDEA (Inclusion Diversity and Equity Awareness) program. Likewise, I attend workshops on inclusion and diversity in theatre through TNT (the Texas Network of Theatres Inc.).

What I have learned is this: No theatre led by privileged individuals should invite marginalized artists just to further the program's voice or message. Rather, they should strive to broaden their message by providing a platform where marginalized artists can use their own voice. For example, one should not say "come play the black character in our (otherwise white) play." Instead, they could ask "Will you join our company and add your voice, thereby improving and increasing the plays we can produce in the future."