Andrew Cao
Diversity Statement

Rather than a formal statement, I believe my values and commitment toward advancing diversity, access, equity, and inclusion are best understood through highlighting some of the action I've taken during my 5-years-and-counting at The University of Florida....

Recruitment and Retention

A significant portion of my time and energy is on recruitment. I specifically focus on increasing access to our school and further developing our school's reputation as a competitive training program that supports students of/from all cultures, backgrounds, and identities. Some examples of the work I've done include…

- I visit dozens of schools and attend multiple large-scale Thespian Festivals connecting with thousands of high school students across the state of Florida every year. During these recruitment visits, I teach masterclasses in Broadway Dance, Musical Theatre Acting Styles, College Audition Prep, and other helpful elements as students navigate their transition from high school to college. For these trips, I actively seek out schools with underrepresented populations and schools without the traditional infrastructure or resources to bring in artists and educators like me.

- I designed, developed, and implemented a digital overhaul to our BFA Program's audition system which was specifically aimed and increasing access for students from underresourced communities and school districts. Previously, the only way to be considered for our BFA program was to travel and attend our on-campus in-person auditions. This created several access issues, as it meant students would need the resources to get to Gainesville and the finances to support the trip. This new, digital platform allows all students from across the globe to apply, regardless of their location, resources, or financial situation. For a video breakdown on the system I developed, click HERE. I am proud to say that the application processing fees from this digital system are being directed toward scholarships that further our school's goals as an anti-racist institution.

continued...

• I invest substantial time and energy towards getting students of color—whose educational resources may put them at a disadvantage and be unable to meet UF's incredibly high academic requirements—admitted to our school. Working extensively with the director of our School of Theatre + Dance (SoTD), the Associate Dean of our College of the Arts (CoTA), and UF's Admissions department, I moved many students of color successfully through our academic appeals process who did not initially get accepted to UF.

• To be sure that students who enter our school and program have the best chance at success, I developed THIS Academic Support Plan, specific to our BFA Musical Department. In addition, I have begun working with UF's Office of Academic Services (OAS) whose goal is to help students—particularly those who have not been previously exposed to college life—make a smooth transition to UF and thrive in subsequent years as they pursue their degree. The OAS emphasizes students from first-generation, limited income, or under-resourced backgrounds. In recent years, I was honored to be a part of the OAS event, "Meet UF," a networking opportunity for students to build the type of connection with faculty that can offer substantial and consistent support throughout their college journey. I also helped many of these students establish meaningful relationships with some of the campus resources available to them, like UF's Teaching Center and Tutoring Services, Center for Inclusion & Multicultural Engagement, Disability Resource Center (DRC), LGBTQ+ Affairs, among others.

Classroom & Curriculum

• In the classroom specifically, I include an historical, cultural, and societal analysis of the material we choose to study and actively comprise a larger portion of our class with material from underrepresented artists and creators. I believe presenting class material from a diverse collection of artists helps students from varied cultures and backgrounds feel that the class is more representative of the world with which they are familiar and sets a precedent to expect a professional entertainment industry that celebrates all cultures and identities. As a result of these efforts, I find that students are more likely to engage in the work, feel their unique identity is valued and supported, and find the motivation to fully commit and achieve their maximum potential in the class. Some examples of those who we have studied include Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, The Nicholas Brothers, Chloe Arnold, Sammy Davis Jr., Gregory Hines, Savion Glover, Ayodele Casel, Debbie Allen, George Faison, Baayork Lee, Louis Johnson, Camille A. Brown, Sergio Trujillo, Jamaal Sims, Sonya Tayeh, and Fatima Robinson.

• For our School of Theatre + Dance Community, I arranged for many of my culturally diverse friends from Broadway, TV, etc., to speak about their careers and experiences as artists-of-color in the industry. Artists include James Monroe Iglehart (Tony Award Winner), Amber Gray (Tony Award Nominee), Raymond J. Lee, Yurel Echezarreta, Dennis Stowe, Trent Saunders, Kathryn Allison, Nadia Quinn, and Brooke Ishibashi.

Continued Education...

• I also actively seek out an ongoing education in anti-racism and DEI for myself. My continued learning includes…

o A certificate in Multicultural Mentoring from The University of Florida's Center for Inclusion & Multicultural Engagement. I subsequently became a member of the International Mentoring Association and have worked with the UMMP (University Multicultural Mentor Program) to support first-year students from diverse backgrounds in their transition to The University of Florida and maintain excellence throughout the pursuit of their chosen degree.

o People's Institute of Survival and Beyond: 3-day workshop for educators centered around undoing racism and other forms of oppression.

o Biz Lindsay Ryan: 1 Day workshop focused on Gender and Sexuality in the Workplace

o Liz Lerman: Critical Response Process: 1 Day workshop to address systemic issues and roadblocks in the way of progress within our School of Theatre + Dance.

o UF's "Stronger Together: Promoting Racial Justice Through Awareness and Action": Attended workshops and webinars include:

-"A Very Brief History and Manifestations of Institutional Racism in America" with Dr. David Canton

- "An Interview with Dr. Katrice Graham on Race, Equity, and Diversity at The University of Florida"

- "Inside Out – Emotionally Intelligent Conversations About Race"

- "Understanding and Cultivating Cultural Intelligence"

- "Engaging in Productive Conversations about Race"

o "A Conversation With Warren Hoffman," (webinar) author of THE GREAT WHITE WAY

o "Bridging the Gap: A Look into African American Hair and Makeup" with Jerrilyn Lanier

o "American Musical Theatre and Contemporary Approaches to Golden Age Work" (classroom zoom discussion) with dramaturg Jordan Ealey

3. Promoting an Equitable & Inclusive Community

• I recently served on our SoTD Season Selection Committee and played an important role in choosing material that prioritizes inclusive representation across diverse identities, can authentically be cast from our student body, and furthers UF's College Of the Arts "Meta-Strategy." (more on the Meta-Strategy HERE). The invitation to join the Season Selection committee came after I recognized an oversight regarding the choice to produce a musical here in our SoTD that had the potential to be harmful to our students and the LGBTQIA+ community. I am proud that my efforts helped steer our SoTD away from this choice and introduced a relationship between our SoTD and UF's LGBTQ+ Affairs.

• My demonstrated commitment to DEI has encouraged my administration to assign me as "Provocateur" on two search committees, including a search for the Associate Dean of our College of the Arts. The role of the Provocateur is "to evaluate the candidate's aptitude in the area of the Meta-Strategy and ensure the committee's discussions include the college's most ambitious overarching goals."

• I consistently participate in our SoTD Accountability Pods, whose intent is to "create spaces for open dialogue on moments when faculty perceive themselves to be inhabiting a space of internalized racial oppression."

• I am the Musical Theatre Rep for our SoTD's Town Hall sessions. These Town Halls are designed for faculty to meet the call to stand with our BIPOC students and alumni for change and recognize the important steps that must be taken toward the goal of reparative justice within our school and within the theatre industry.

• I am a member of The SoTD Coalition, which is a multi-racial group of students and faculty who have come together to form a racial affinity group in our artistic community.

• My efforts in anti-racism helped our BFA Musical Theatre Program and our greater SoTD become an official ally with Broadway for Racial Justice.

• I am proud to have played an integral role in bringing more student agency into our SoTD Community. As a member of the Curriculum Change Committee—where we recently overhauled and implemented a new curriculum for our BFA Performance Degrees—I helped increase the elective options to provide students with more power to decide for themselves. This includes Mental Health and Wellness elective options from our Center for Arts in Medicine, like our Applied Theater for Health Certificate, which were previously not a part of our SoTD curriculum. I have also been fortunate to support student agency within some of our SoTD policies here, like moving our governance away from required casting assignments and officially giving students the option to accept or decline any role they are of-fered in class or a production.