



July 19, 2020

To the BIPOC students of the Department of Theatre, past and present, and their allies:

Thank you for this. We hear you. We are listening.

First, we are grateful—grateful that you reached out, for the directness of your statement, and for the clarity of your vision.

Second, we hear your call for definitive action to educate ourselves, and to represent the stories and amplify the voices of theatre artists who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, both within our institution and in our industry. We must speak up for and work toward change and justice, both in the world and in our own house. We must do better and we will do better.

Third, we are listening. A statement from the Department of Theatre is both forthcoming and long overdue. Our anti-racism work has already begun and we are currently engaged in discussions, pursuing continuing education, and developing methods and venues to collaborate with and recruit BIPOC faculty, staff, and students in the pursuit of both current solutions and future innovations. We will soon issue a mission statement that includes concrete actions and goals to advocate and embrace anti-racism, equity, inclusion, justice, diversity, and representation—not only as tenets of the University of Utah and the College of Fine Arts, but as necessary principles of the Department of Theatre. In these and all future efforts we are determined to seek and honor student input, and we will commit to providing improved support for public and private communication.

At this moment, we ask for your patience as we take the time to absorb and learn from your extraordinary letter. As we move forward as a department and a community, we will dedicate ourselves to the work of anti-racism and institutional change—not as a one-time event, but as an ongoing, cumulative process.

We look forward to continuing and expanding this conversation with you. We look forward to working together to find ways to meet and exceed the standards you have communicated—standards that you have always deserved. We look forward to creating the future with you.

We hear you. We are listening. Thank you for this.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sydney Cheek-O'Donnell'.

Sydney Cheek-O'Donnell, PhD
Interim Chair, Department of Theatre