

Identity Conscious Casting Statement

The Texas Tech School of Theatre & Dance embraces identity-conscious casting as a best practice. Recognizing that “colorblind” casting (i.e., casting without consideration of race) has failed to redress questions of access and representation for marginalized communities, color-conscious casting acknowledges that there is no “neutral” body in performance (or in life). Each performer brings unique lived experiences and perspectives that inform their work, regardless of the expectation that the performer will “transform” to become a character or role.

Identity-conscious casting invites us to consider, respect, and care for the whole humanity of the performer when casting decisions are made. Directors, choreographers, playwrights, designers, and other artists are tasked to think critically about the narratives, stereotypes, and power structures that casting, concept, and design decisions reinforce or challenge. For example, who is asked to embody a hero or an antagonist? Who is asked to embody a servant? What messages about diversity and inclusion do audiences receive from seeing who is onstage and how they are asked to perform? Can we be mindful of those choices? Even when a piece is more abstract, as many contemporary dances are, race and ethnicity read onstage, and we need to be conscious of power dynamics among the performers that we choose to put onstage.

Identity consciousness should extend to the choice of material, as well, and critical conversations about artists’ intentions, representation of diverse experiences, and cultural competency, and cultural humility are necessary. In short, we look forward with hope to creating a casting culture that is mindful of the playwright’s or choreographer’s intention; creates opportunities for performers from marginalized communities to perform substantial roles, especially those created for those communities; and strives to affirm performers across the diverse experiences of race, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, sexuality, disability, social and economic class, and neurodiversity.

Finally, we urge us all to continue to explore these issues, in order to spur intentional action.

The resources below provide additional perspectives (with thanks to the Bowling Green State University Department of Theatre and Film).

“Color-Conscious Casting: Three Questions to Ask” by Lavina Jadhvani

“Whats and Whys of Whitewashing” by Andrea Merodeadora

“Hampshire College’s Notes on Race and Casting” by Will Macadams

“Standing Up for Playwrights and Against ‘Colorblind’ Casting” by Diep Tran

“On Casting ‘In the Heights’ by Quiara Alegría Hudes (and Lin-Manuel Miranda)

“Conscious Casting and Letting Playwrights Lead” by David Valdes Greenwood

“A Message from TAPS Chair, Dr. Patricia Ybarra”

“Authenticity in casting: From ‘colorblind’ to ‘color-conscious,’ new rules are anything but black and white” by Jessica Gelt

09/23/2023