

Report on Diversity at WIT

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Purpose of this Report

This report is to provide transparency around the current status of Washington Improv Theater's ongoing efforts to increase diversity at WIT.

WIT reports out on this topic in detail the interest of transparency and in hopes of informing an ongoing conversation about diversity in the DMV improv community. This report is about WIT specifically -- we don't attempt to present data or draw conclusions regarding the region's entire improv scene. This report isn't conclusive; it's a snapshot of things recent and current. As we gather and track more data, more trends may become apparent, tactics may prove effective or not, etc. We'll report out on those things in future. We continue to strive for diversity in all aspects of WIT, and are actively working on efforts, and developing new efforts, to progress toward this goal.

Values around diversity at WIT

A core value of WIT's is that improv has something to offer everyone, and everyone has something to offer through improv. Improv itself creates connection through the agreement, sharing, and collaboration it manifests. We aim to provide an accepting and safe environment for people of all backgrounds and identities to explore this exhilarating, life-enhancing craft. We believe that in order to create our best work we need diverse participants and diverse voices. Having diverse students enriches learning. Having diverse performers enriches the art form of improv and helps a larger audience find the work welcoming and relevant.

Achieving greater diversity in WIT's classes, its performer ensembles, its staff, and its board has been part of our goal-setting and planning for several years. We have tried a lot of different tactics and have achieved some successes, but have also experienced setbacks.

We've found that making lasting progress on this takes time, but we remain encouraged. It's an ongoing learning process. Numerous internal and external challenges can slow our progress, some of which we may control, others not. Many of these challenges were brought to light in the Dec. 10, 2016 community conversation linked just below. We consider it our responsibility to become and remain aware of how our own biases, tendencies, and actions may hinder diversity, and to take active steps to work around or push through them.

Notes from previous Community Conversations on Diversity can be found here:

[12.10.16 conversation at Source](#)

[2.12.17 conversation at Source](#)

WIT Actions to Foster Diversity In ...

Gender

We know anecdotally that overall gender parity at WIT has always been strong compared to many other cities' improv scenes. WIT's founding artistic director was a woman (Carole Douglass), and the original playing ensemble of WIT, later called onesixtyone, was for most of its life half or nearly half women. Two other women, Catherine Weidner and Katie Carson, both served as WIT's artistic director prior to Mark Chalfant taking the position.

What we're already doing:

Performance

New Updates

- We presented Vagina! An Improvised Monologue Show, a one-night-only all-female show to benefit House of Ruth, an organization that provides comprehensive services to victims of intimate partner violence and their children
- 7 of 16 new Harold team players cast in September 2017 are women (44%). May Harold team auditions added 10 players, of which 5 are women (50%). January auditions added 15 players, of which 8 are women (53%). As of this reporting date, 32 of 62 Harold team players are women (51%).
- In FY17, 34% of coaches/directors of Harold teams, ensembles, or Project shows were women.
- We pursue gender parity in Harold team casting and have achieved it. Since 2013, the percentage of women performing in our Harold teams and ensembles has gone up from 36% to 51%.
- WIT debuted its Rise Up! series which highlighted diverse performers/groups, including all-female ensembles like The Bechdelprov Project , Rancy Neagan, The October Issue, and Sweater Kittens, as well as a multi-city women's mash-up cast gathered to play the weekend of the Women's March (aka Inauguration weekend).
- We started tracking gender diversity among auditioners so we can monitor progress over time, our statistics from 2016-2017 can be found [here](#)

Continued Efforts

- Publicizing Bagelz & Jam events (for female-identifying improvisers) on our website under the "Student Center" tab
- Performances from all-female ensembles like The October Issue and Sweater Kittens
- WIT is proactively seeking to develop more women coaches and directors

Education

New Updates

- The percentage of classes taught by women increased from 33% in FY16 to 42% in FY17. Currently, 30 of the 67 teachers at WIT are women.
- Notably, spring 2017 saw the first time more than half the classes were taught by women.

Continued Efforts

- We try to include images with women in our social media posts and in online or print materials -- the intent here is to broadcast our diversity/intent and to help women see themselves as someone who would be welcome.
- We deliberately work to recruit and train female teachers.

Staff & Board

New Updates

- This year female staffer Jordana Mishory joined WIT's full-time staff as Operations Manager, overseeing projects across all areas of WIT's programming.
- WIT's Board of Directors is majority women (10 of 16). The board chair is a woman (Ceci De Robertis).

Continued Efforts

- Company ensembles and WIT project shows are encouraged to be mindful of gender parity in casting.
- We have intentionally cast guest acts in WIT runs with an eye toward gender parity
- We feature all-female guest acts including The Cast and GIRLish
- WIT has recently become more transparent about this by including cast gender make-up questions in the show submission query.

Future goals:

- Recruit and retain more women as Harold team coaches, ensemble coaches, and directors.
- Keep women's enrollment in classes strong through all levels of the curriculum (currently higher levels have fewer women, 33% of Level 4 students are women, and 41% of Level 5 students are women).
- Achieve a faculty ratio of 60-65% women. This would facilitate the goal of having women teach 50% of classes offered during a year. On average, the members of the faculty with the greatest schedule flexibility and availability are men which can lead to an disproportionate amount of classes ment being taught by men without active management.
- Continue supporting community efforts such as Bagelz & Jam with marketing.
- Recruit women for future staff roles.

Race, Ethnicity, Religions, Nationalities, Cultures

What we're already doing:

Performance

New Updates

- We started tracking diversity among auditioners so we can monitor progress over time, our statistics from 2016-2017 can be found [here](#)
- 3 of 16 new Harold team players cast in September 2017 are people of color (18%). May Harold team auditions added 10 players, of which 3 are people of color (30%). January auditions added 15 players, of which 5 are people of color (33%).

- If the casting otherwise makes sense, we have explored clustering players from similar backgrounds to create new scenic possibilities. For example, 3 Latinx players in one team creates a different set of possibilities than 1 such player on each of 3 teams.
- We continue to program guest teams and projects that bring diversity, such as Sábado Picante: Casa Blanca!, White Privilege, Black Power, Improvapalooza's Kanye's Sistas, Bombay Vindaloo, and Lena Dunham .

Continued Efforts

- We pursue racial, ethnic and cultural diversity in Harold team casting.
- Company ensembles and project show decision-makers are encouraged to be mindful of racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity in casting, as well as cultural biases that may influence the auditions monitoring process.

Education

New Updates

- We debuted a Diversity Scholarship with the specific aim of increasing racial and ethnic diversity. The scholarship covers the cost of the entire curriculum for selected students. As of winter 2018 we have awarded a scholarship to 14 students. The first two sessions of applicants were made up of students who had already completed some classes at WIT. This winter we have five Level 1 students enrolled.
- WIT's success in serving people of color has increased in our training program, with 26% of students identifying as people of color in FY17 (up from 16% in FY 15).
- WIT expanded the scope of its Improv For All workshops, which continue to reach every ward of DC, during FY16 we held more than 50 free workshops. We do not formally track ethnic and racial identity among Improv For All participants but we know anecdotally that they reach a range of participants diverse in many ways (racially, geographically, socioeconomically, and by age).
- We offered discounted WIT classes at Anacostia Arts Center in an attempt to reach more students of color. In November 2016, a cohort of eight students finished the WIT curriculum entirely at Anacostia Arts Center with Education Director Jonathan Murphy personally teaching the cohort's final two classes.
- We are have a scheduled Improv For All workshop for ESL students and plan to offer more.

Continued Efforts

- We conduct free Improv for All workshops at venues throughout all eight Wards of DC with the intent of sharing improv with new and varied communities.
- We are trying to increase the number of people of color who teach on our faculty. 20% of the teachers who have taught in the past year are people of color.

- We are planning on offering workshops and classes in Spanish and in ASL.

Staff & Board

New Updates

- WIT's board is 37% people of color, up from 33% in 2016. Additionally, our chairperson is a person of color.

Continued Efforts

- WIT's core staff of 4 full-time-employees, four identify as white. Of two part-time staffers, one is white and one identifies as Latino. Our contracted bookkeeper is a person of color. Diversity is a goal in recruitment.
- WIT's Board of Directors includes 6 members who are people of color and diversity is an ongoing goal in recruitment.

Future goals:

- Connect education programming to greater DMV area, by continuing partnerships in all eight wards to share Improv for All workshops.
- Explore improv workshops for Spanish-speakers, finding new venue partnerships in MD and VA communities, and partnering with close-by DC school/s for in-school improv clubs or summer/school break improv camps.
- Target messaging around opportunities (performance, staff, board) to reach more individuals of racially, ethnically, and/or culturally diverse backgrounds (blogs, Facebook advertising, newspapers).
- Work to keep enrollment levels in upper level classes stronger for students of racially, ethnically, and/or culturally diverse backgrounds.
- Encourage and empower teachers, coaches, and directors to be proactive in giving extra TLC to helping people of color develop their skills
- Pursue performance and Improv for All workshop opportunities in venues and communities with larger communities of color.
- Directly encourage players of racially, ethnically, and/or culturally diverse backgrounds to audition for Harold teams, special projects, company ensembles.
- Include players of diverse backgrounds in audition panels.
- In auditions or casting, interrogate cultural biases which may be inherent in one's own assessment of craft by discussing such biases before auditions.
- Support community efforts such as the Diversity Jam however possible, with marketing and/or venue support.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender

What We're Already Doing:

Performance

New Updates

- We have intentionally cast shows and guest acts in WIT runs with an eye toward LGBT inclusion, and have recently become more transparent about that by including a gender and sexuality self-identification question in the submissions query.
- During our September round of auditions, WIT added three new Harold performers who identify as LGBT, 19% of the total new players. This is an increase from our May auditions where we did not add any new LGBT cast members. This element was not tracked in previous auditions.

Continued Efforts

- LGBT players are well represented on Harold teams and company ensembles.
- We have intentionally cast shows and guest acts in WIT runs with an eye toward LGBT inclusion. Some of our shows that emphasize inclusion are Ugh, Going to the Movies Alone, and Invisible Knapsack, additionally, our team Conversion Therapy is features all-LGBT cast members.

Education

Continued Efforts

- Anecdotally it appears LGBT student enrollment is strong (we only recently began collecting this demographic data from students).

Staff & Board

New Updates

- We have recently become more transparent about this by including gender and sexuality self-identification question when we collect information on staff and board, and when we solicit interest in board membership.

Continued Efforts

- WIT's core staff includes two LGBT full-time members and one LGBT contractor.
- WIT's Board includes two LGBT-identified individuals.

Future goals:

- Create LGBT-focused event/s such as a jam, a special performance night, workshops.
- Community outreach workshop/s with the DC Center for the LGBT Community.

People with a Physical Disability

What we're already doing:

Performance

Continued Efforts

- We do not maintain statistics on students or players with disabilities.
- Ensemble and project show casts have included a player with severe visual impairment, a player with MS, a player with a speech disability, and a player with mobility issues requiring a walker/stabilizer.
- Whenever possible we program performances in an ADA accessible space.
- We accommodate audience members in wheelchairs with reserved front-row seating.

Education

Continued Efforts

- We almost always offer classes and workshops in ADA accessible space, and will make special arrangements if necessary to accommodate a student.
- Our teachers have accommodated students with numerous physical disabilities (including students in wheelchairs and visually impaired students).
- Our Education Director proactively assists teachers with students requesting special accommodations, to create a learning plan that makes sense for both the student and the class.

Future goals:

- Ensure that WIT's future performance and classes venues are all ADA accessible

WIT Diversity Snapshot (TL;DR)

Staff

4 full-time employees, of that there are 3 white males, 1 white female. 2 are LGBT. 2 part-time employees, of which 1 white male and 1 Latino male. One contractual bookkeeper is an LGBT woman of color.

Board

16-member Board is 10 women, 6 men. Five board members are people of color. Two are LGBT.

Performers

Company ensembles, Harold teams and Project shows are now 48% female (combined average). These casts are 86% white, 6.5% African American, 3% Latin American, 3% Asian American, and 1.12% other non-caucasian.

Teachers

The percentage of classes taught by women increased from 33% in FY16 to 42% in FY17.

Students

Across all classes over the FY2017 fiscal year, the average student body breakdown across all levels is: 10.53% African American, .78% Biracial, 5.26% East Asian or Asian American, 70.96% white, 3.90% Hispanic/Latino, 1.36% Middle Eastern or Arab American, .58% Native American or Alaskan Native, .19% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 4.09% South Asian or Indian American, and 2.34% preferred not to say.

Audience

We do not currently track audience by gender or other identifiers.

Educational resources

The following resources have provided both suggestions and strategies for fostering diversity, as well as first hand accounts from people of color who were underserved by their improv communities. These resources suggest some directions this initiative can take to be most effective, as well as demonstrate the potential consequences for our community members if we do not take responsibility and make concrete steps to address the lack of diversity in the larger DC improv community.

<https://medium.com/@britajames/why-i-m-quitting-ucb-and-its-problem-with-diversity-961f1195a7>

<http://improvresourcecenter.com/news/2016/08/22/punching-up-feels-like-getting-punched/>

<http://kevinmullaney.com/2015/09/09/why-isnt-your-improv-theater-diverse/>

<http://kevinmullaney.com/2015/09/14/diversity-works-best-from-the-top-down/>