

Dr. Hannah E. Collins
Statement of Commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

Historically underrepresented and economically disadvantaged groups confront myriad obstacles in their access to higher education, and even once access has been achieved, are frequently marginalized within academic institutions by the Western civilization-focused, sanctioned knowledge commonly taught in collegiate environments. The discipline of music education and musical training holds its own particular challenges to DEI initiatives: we must confront a history that is replete with racist and exclusionary practices, and redirect a performing genre whose recent attempts at inclusivity have frequently been assimilationist or tokenizing.

Creating a society or, more specifically, a university environment that is a more diverse, accessible, and inclusive space requires systemic change at all levels, from decision-making processes to budgeting, curriculum, student support, public programming, and community engagement. At the heart of all change must be the deep consideration of the university environment as a reflection of community ecosystems. The university must be willing to engage with larger issues of public health and community wellness and develop robust pathways through collaborations and partnerships with national, regional, and local organizations to achieve accessibility and equity goals.

In terms of students, DEI issues must be addressed at all points on the timeline of a potential student's life: before, during, and after their degree-seeking experience. In recruiting post-secondary students, we must work harder to design programs that respect the differences in privilege, opportunity, and resources that communities and individuals are subject to and create multiple paths towards achieving learning objectives and matriculation. During university training, dedicating real resources to support students with what they need in order to learn effectively, whether it be physical space, mental space, safety, time, funding, mentorship, or community support is essential. As artist-teachers, we are training community leaders, entrepreneurs, arts advocates, and fellow teachers who will carry these values forward throughout their lives and we must continue to support our alums in this work as well with continuing resources.

The key to progress is accountability. This means making clear statements of values, listing actionable goals, devoting resources (such as funding, personnel, work hours, or external support) to make those goals attainable, and creating networks of accountability throughout the wider community in order to keep the focus on progress. In the university system, a network of accountability may include students and alumni calling for faculty and staff to use their collective power to make policy changes and direct resources, and for faculty to bind together across departments and campus entities to hold administrators and institutional leaders accountable to the promises and value statements they have made, demanding that these values be represented in budgets and strategic plans.

To fully address the notion of belonging, a community must not only welcome, but truly value diverse perspectives. This requires personal growth in addition to structural change. Much of the work of committing to diversity and inclusion is done at the individual level and can be the kind of quiet, internal work which does not appear on a CV: modeling through action, normalizing broader perspectives, expressing support for policy changes, voting, serving on committees, attending meetings and events, listening to colleagues and students, programming performances with context and balance, and voluntarily seeking out educational experiences such as DEI training, conferences, and literature. I am a queer, multiracial woman who brings a certain perspective to the table, but my own experiences with both discrimination and privilege do not qualify me as an expert. I am committed to building environments where all can live their truth. In order for this goal to be achieved, I believe that listening and power-sharing must be an active practice and that we all need to seek guidance in our efforts. I am personally committed to consistent engagement in anti-racist and anti-bias education, serving on problem-solving task forces, sharing decision-making opportunities, and cultivating spaces of mutual respect for all viewpoints.