

To Dean of the Arts, UCSC Theater Arts Department, Vice Chancellor Lori Kletzer,

We the students of the African American Theater Arts Troupe, Rainbow Theater, and the Cultural Arts & Diversity Board of Directors were recently informed about changes to the Theater Arts Department. These changes were developed without the consent or consultation of anyone involved with the African American Theater Arts Troupe during this process. We asked for more details and were told by administration:

- The Theater Arts department has proposed to move the Arts Games and Playable Media (AGPM) faculty into a new administrative structure within the department. This includes moving four divisional colleagues from Games into a more stable departmental structure. Theater Arts may be renamed “Department of Performance, Play, and Design.”
- The Theater Arts Department is in the process of confirming a replacement hire for the Professor of Directing position. This hire is intended to have a focus on "Directing with a specialization in anti-racist, decolonial practice." [...] which noted: "Historically, Theater Arts has struggled to disrupt marginalizing traditions of tokenism and ghettoization, which reinforce hegemonic and institutional power by centering Whiteness and Eurocentric modes of thought, practice, and aesthetics. [...] This hire would also seek to clarify and deepen relationships with African American Theater Arts Troupe, the Cultural Arts and Diversity Resource Center, and other interdisciplinary, identity-forward student performance organizations on campus. [...]"

Despite the intentions of this proposal, we view their language and the resulting solutions as another example of the university taking actions that “reinforce hegemonic and institutional power” over students, staff, and faculty of color. We are disturbed by the eager attitudes of Theater Arts to merge and embrace an outside program when AATAT has been asking for space and embrace for the last 30 years. We have been continually denied a seat at the table. We are thankful to the individual faculty and admin members that have demonstrated support of our organization and we do believe that the Department of Theater Arts’ acknowledgement of their racist behavior should be used to catapult tangible actions to stop the mistreatment of Black students and Black organizations on campus.

However, members of elite staff at Theater Arts, whom students are required to work with, do not recognize these issues of race. In fact, they perpetuate racism in their classes and in their work on productions at Theater Arts. These faculty and staff have created and continue to create a hostile and racist environment, having caused trauma and suffering for generations of students, staff, and faculty of color.

To state a few examples:

- Our shows are not publicized with welcome, our posters for AATAT are taken down, yet Theater Arts uses photographs from OUR shows for online publicity to promote a sense of diversity and inclusion where it doesn’t exist.
- Our students have experienced a multitude of discrimination from faculty and admin, such as, a costume design manager stating that costumes are “too good for us...”, and faculty stating “We didn’t even need the money, we just charged them...” in regards to us paying for advertisement.
- On different occasions, our students were told they would not be cast because they are Black. • There are a lack of outlets that address our real issues or outlets to even discuss trauma incurred by the department.
- Our yearly outreach to Black and POC communities is constantly threatened to be stopped by Theater Arts.

The mission of our community-centered organization is to uplift Black students and other students of 1

color. Disrupting “whiteness and Eurocentric modes of thought, practice, and aesthetics” is endemic to our mission. It would make much more sense to supply resources and power to our organization in order to uphold our mission, ultimately benefiting the Department’s desire to adhere to the growing national trend of diversity. It makes little sense for the Department to put their hopes on rebranding a faculty position, or extending those resources to a program that is in no way rooted in diversity.

We ask for the Department and the University to honor your new commitment to “clarify and deepen relationships with African American Theater Arts Troupe, the Cultural Arts and Diversity Resource <sup>2</sup> Center, and other interdisciplinary, identity-forward student performance organizations on campus” by hearing and meeting the requests from AATAT and CADrc as follows:

- Actively work and meet with student representatives to build rapport between AATAT and Theater Arts
- Let us use Theater Arts costumes, equipment, and resources that we’ve been denied in the past ● Give AATAT a year-round office to occupy at Theater Arts to serve as a resource to foster and retain a positive relationship between Black students and Theater Arts
- Coordinate the usage of Mainstage by AATAT during our season-runs
- Integrate the creation of an African American Theater Arts concentration of study within the Theater Arts Department
- A appropriate office space at the University for Cultural Arts and Diversity to sufficiently work as the Resource Center it is

We are tired of the lack of embrace from Theater Arts and the University. We expect both parties to stop overlooking and disrespecting the history, labor, and dedication that AATAT students have committed over the last three decades. We will not continue to be subjected to the University’s employment of the “trickle down” approach to deal with organizations of color. If the Theater Arts Department and the University really want to catch up with society and create safer spaces for its students, resources should be allocated where those students had to fight to create room for themselves. If Theater Arts wants to create positive change and provide support for organizations and students like us, let us lead that conversation and hear our proposal.

We look forward to your response,

The African American Theater Arts Troupe



CAD Chair Cameron Rivers, AATAT President August Stevens, CAD Vice Chair Kayla Ybarra, CAD

<sup>1</sup> Cited letter: [Email response from Dean of the Arts May 17, 2021](#)

<sup>2</sup>Ibid