



NELSON MULLINS

COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF ARTS – DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE

**Internal Review
Investigation Report**

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I. INTRODUCTION

On or about June 19, 2020, Columbus State University (“CSU”), by and through the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia, retained Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough LLP (“Nelson Mullins”) to investigate allegations of racial bias and discrimination in the College of Arts’ Department of Theatre (“Theatre Department”). CSU received complaints alleging instances or patterns of racial bias or otherwise discriminatory conduct in the Theatre Department.

Nelson Mullins was retained to make factual findings regarding instances or patterns of racial bias or otherwise discriminatory conduct in the Theatre Department (“Department”). Nelson Mullins was not retained to provide CSU with legal advice as part of this investigation, nor was Nelson Mullins retained to draw or express any legal conclusions from the facts discovered during the investigation. Anita Wallace Thomas, Esq., of Nelson Mullins, served as the lead investigator of this investigation (the “Investigator”). She was assisted by Shaniqua L. Singleton, Esq., also of Nelson Mullins.

II. SCOPE OF INVESTIGATION AND INVESTIGATIVE PROCESS

The investigation consisted of interviews of individuals currently or formerly associated with the Theatre Department as well as a review of selected documents. Between June 6, 2020 and August 31, 2020, the Investigator completed fifty-one (51) interviews conducted exclusively as videoconferences using the GoToMeeting video conferencing platform.¹ During the investigation, the Investigator interviewed:

- Seventeen (18) current students of the Theatre Department;
- Thirteen (12) former students of the Theatre Department;
- Fourteen (14) current faculty and staff members of the Theatre Department;
- Four (4) former faculty and staff members of the Theatre Department;
- Two (2) administrators associated with CSU’s Human Resources and Institutional Research departments; and
- One (1) current faculty member associated with CSU’s Department of Biology.²

¹ Of the fifty-one (51) individuals interviewed by the Investigator, one (1) individual, a former student, agreed to speak with the Investigator on the condition of anonymity.

² During the Investigator’s interview with a former faculty member of the Theatre Department, Jamila Turner, she suggested that the Investigator speak with a faculty member in the

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In addition to the interviews described above, the Investigator reviewed the following documents: (a) various charts and data regarding the demographics of students in the Theatre Department in the five (5) years prior to the investigation; (b) various e-mails and documents regarding the selection of musicals and “straight plays” by the Theatre Department’s faculty and staff; (c) various e-mails, social media postings, and documents recording and reporting on allegations of racial bias and discrimination in the Theatre Department; (d) scripts, casting data, and fitting sheets for musicals and “straight plays” produced by the Theatre Department in the five (5) years prior to the investigation; (e) documents and information regarding the recruitment and hiring of faculty and staff in the Theatre Department; (f) self-evaluations and performance evaluations for faculty and staff in the Theatre Department; (g) syllabi and other information for courses taught by faculty and staff in the Theatre Department; and (h) CSU’s policies regarding the procedure for conducting internal investigations. In total, the Investigator reviewed one hundred and eleven (111) e-mails and documents collected from various custodians during the Investigation. These documents are attached to this Report as Appendix A.

Finally, witness summaries or recordings of the interviews were provided to each witness, including current and former students and professors. All witnesses were allowed to review the summaries of their interviews to confirm their accuracy.

III. STATEMENT OF COOPERATION

CSU’s leadership and administration, current and former faculty and staff members associated with CSU and/or the Theatre Department, and current and former students associated with the Theatre Department were cooperative with this investigation. The University and Theatre Department were forthcoming with documents and information related to allegations of racial bias and discrimination in the Theatre Department. The University and Theatre Department assisted with the Investigator’s inquiries into the Theatre Department’s demographics and academic curriculum, and procedures for selecting musicals and “straight plays” for the Theatre Department’s productions. The University also assisted with the Investigator’s inquiries into the Theatre Department’s hiring practices, the collection of various documents and e-mails related to this investigation, and the provision and contact of various individuals identified for interviews throughout this investigation. Current and former faculty, staff, and students were forthcoming with their experiences in the Theatre Department and perceptions of the allegations raised in this investigation. Throughout this investigation, the Investigator also interviewed individuals who were not initially identified as witnesses but learned about the investigation from colleagues and approached either the University and/or the Investigator to make a statement.

Department of Biology, Monica Frazier, Ph.D., regarding efforts to encourage the hiring of diverse individuals in the Theatre Department. The Investigator was able to speak with Dr. Frazier on July 29, 2020.

IV. STATEMENT REGARDING EVIDENTIARY STANDARD EMPLOYED

This investigation and the factual findings included in this Investigation Report are governed by a “preponderance of the evidence” evidentiary standard. Black’s Law Dictionary defines the “preponderance of the evidence” as:

The greater weight of the evidence, not necessarily established by the greater number of witnesses testifying to a fact but by evidence that has the most convincing force; superior evidentiary weight that, though not sufficient to free the mind wholly from all reasonable doubt, is still sufficient to incline a fair and impartial mind to one side of the issue rather than the other.

Preponderance of The Evidence, BLACK’S LAW DICTIONARY (11th ed. 2019). “This is the burden of proof in most civil trials, in which the jury is instructed to find for the party that, on the whole, has the stronger evidence, however slight the edge may be.” *Id.* Though the Investigator has not been retained to provide legal advice to CSU, its faculty and staff, or its students, the Investigator has employed this evidentiary standard in evaluating whether there is sufficient evidence to support the allegations raised in this investigation.

V. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Interviews with witnesses and the review of evidence establish that there is an air of distrust and racial tension between faculty and students of color within the Theatre Department that has existed for at least 13 years. The current student body, consisting of both Black and White students, was overwhelmingly consistent in their view that students of color are subject to biases and unequal treatment in the form of disparate opportunities and racially or culturally insensitive comments. Most of the examples provided were often described by the students as micro-aggressions—referring to frequent verbal or behavioral indignities, intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative attitudes toward stigmatized or culturally marginalized groups—as opposed to blatantly racist comments, although there was evidence of comments that also rose to that level. Thus, while the Investigator found many of the students' claims to be credible, there was insufficient evidence to substantiate each of the claims outlined above.

The evidence in this case establishes the following:

- Professors within the Theatre Department have: (1) made discriminatory and/or racially insensitive comments about students of color or (2) engaged in conduct that appears to be discriminatory and/or racially insensitive toward students of color.
- In the past five years, only 2 of the Theatre Department’s 43 main stage productions have been written by African American playwrights. There is a belief

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that the Theatre Department selects main stage productions with the greater community of Columbus, Georgia and a “White audience” in mind. Current professors counter this position by stating that the plays are selected to showcase certain genres, such as classical and western civilization. Nevertheless, the numbers speak volumes and evidence the lack of diverse selections of the Theatre Department’s main stage productions, which has negatively impacted casting opportunities for students of color, resulting in limited opportunities to be selected for lead or “feature” roles.

- While there are opportunities for students of color to be cast in main stage productions, those same students are more often than not cast in secondary and minor roles and have a disproportionate opportunity to be cast in “leading roles” in main stage productions.
- Although the Theatre Department has employed African Americans temporarily, none have been hired as a full-time professor. While this evidences some effort to address issues of diversity among the Department’s faculty, this lack of diversity on the faculty has deprived the Theatre Department of a much-needed perspective in addressing the cultural sensitivities that have been occasioned by the increasingly diverse student population.
- Students of all ethnicities contend that Black students were selected for the Theatre Department’s main stage productions as “tokens” solely for the sake of diversity. The overwhelming consensus was that students of color are “sprinkled” and “recycled” into the cast of the Theatre Department’s main stage productions. Given the subjectivity involved in the casting process and the lack of direct evidence, there is insufficient proof that students of color were selected for roles as “tokens.”
- Although there is evidence that current faculty members made racially and culturally insensitive comments regarding students of color which contributed to their belief that they were disproportionately cast in “caricature roles”; the evidence does not support this finding.

VI. FACTUAL OVERVIEW AND DISCUSSION

A. Alleged Discriminatory or Racially Insensitive Comments and Conduct Engaged in By the Theatre Department’s Faculty and Staff.

During individual interviews, both current and former students told the Investigator that some of the Theatre Department’s faculty and staff have: (1) made discriminatory and/or racially insensitive comments about students of color or (2) have engaged in conduct that appears to be discriminatory and/or racially insensitive toward students of color.

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While some students witnessed the alleged discriminatory and/or racially insensitive comments during classroom instructional time or rehearsals for the Theatre Department's productions, others learned about the comments from fellow students. Notwithstanding the origin of how the comments were relayed, several current and former students raised concerns that this conduct was disproportionately directed toward Black students.

1. *Allegations Regarding Professor Steve Graver.*

During individual interviews, several current and former students expressed concerns with statements and conduct by Professor Steve Graver, who teaches courses in costuming and stage makeup, that they believed to be discriminatory and/or racially insensitive.

a. *Comments likening stage makeup for darker skin tones to food.*

Nearly every current and former student interviewed reported that during a stage makeup course taught by Professor Graver, Professor Graver made comments about how the names of makeup for darker skin tones (e.g. "chocolate," "caramel," etc.) made him think of food and made him hungry. Students acknowledged that Professor Graver likely made this comment in jest but told the Investigator that it made students feel uncomfortable. Students who attended CSU in 2002 through the present reported that Professor Graver made this comment.

b. *Comments regarding the hair texture or appearance of students of color.*

A total of 7 students told the Investigator that Professor Graver described their hair or the hair of other students as "nappy" during a costume fitting or other interactions. These observations were made by students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

- Student B reported that during a stage makeup and hair class while talking with students about best practices in preparing their hair for shows, Professor Graver referred to Black hair as "nappy."
- Student C reported that both Professor Graver and Professor Garcia made comments about her hair being "nappy" or "wild," but she did not describe a specific incident during which these comments were made.
- Student E reported that she overheard Professor Graver refer to Black students' hair as "nappy" while she worked independently in the costume shop. She could not recall precisely when this statement was made. According to Student E, on another occasion, Professor Graver commented that he didn't want students' wigs for an upcoming production to "look like a bad weave."

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- Student N reported that when she worked as the stage manager for “Spring Awakening (2017-2018), she saw Professor Graver write the descriptor “nappy hair” on the fitting sheet for a student of color.
- Student P reported that during a fitting for the Department’s production of “James and the Giant Peach” (Summer 2018), Professor Graver felt his hair and said he would have a barber cut it. Student P responded that he would ask a barber that he frequented to cut his hair instead. According to Student P, Professor Graver referred to his hair as “nappy” during this exchange. Student P corrected him and said, “it’s just curly.”
- Student R reported that when she was a student she was selected for the cast of “She Kills Monsters” (2018-2019). According to Student R, at the end of each production, students are given a grade sheet, outlining points earned for certain graded skills like performance. Student R told the Investigator that the students cast in “She Kills Monsters” shared their grade sheets, and on one of the students’ grade sheets Professor Graver wrote that the student’s hair was “too nappy.”
- One former student, who attended CSU between 2008 and 2013 and spoke on the condition of anonymity, told the Investigator that during the Department’s production “The Great Trailer Park Musical,” she was given a blonde wig to wear with her costume. She asked Professor Graver if she could have a wig that looked like her hair. Professor Graver responded, “I think I have a ‘nappy’ wig around here somewhere.”

At least 1 student told the Investigator that they heard from other students that Professor Graver used the term “nappy” to describe the texture of Black students’ hair.

- Student N reported that she heard from a former student that Professor Graver wrote the word “nappy” next to a student’s name on a casting sheet.

To further investigate the students’ allegations, the Investigator requested a copy of all fitting sheets created for the Theatre Department’s main stage productions in the last five (5) years. Though many of the fitting sheets were illegible, those fitting sheets that could be reviewed did not display the word “nappy” next to any student’s name. *See Measurement Sheets for Black Students (2015-2018), attached in Appendix A; see also Measurement Sheets for Black Students (Additional), attached in Appendix A.*

The Investigator asked Professor Graver about his alleged use of the word “nappy” and/or similar descriptors regarding the texture of Black students’ hair. Professor Graver admitted to using the words “kinky” or “natural” to describe students’ hair but denied having ever written or spoken the word “nappy.” Professor Graver told the Investigator that he was not aware that the word “kinky” has negative connotations.

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As previously noted, the Investigator requested casting sheets for current students, and those casting sheets that were produced did not include the word “nappy.” Notwithstanding this, the Investigator finds convincing the sheer volume of students who witnessed Professor Graver use this term, combined with the consistent statement of an alumna who is 13 years removed from the Department. Notably, the alumna who shared her experience has been separated from the school for many years, is an established professional with no apparent hostility towards the Department, and has referred current students to the Theatre Department. The outcome of this investigation will have no direct impact on this alumna, supporting the Investigator’s belief that she has no motive to be untruthful. Based on these facts, the Investigator finds by a preponderance of the evidence that Professor Graver has used the term “nappy” to describe the hair texture of Black students.

c. *Inappropriate or otherwise disparate makeup for students of color and assignments featuring people of color.*

Several students expressed concern with the use and availability of makeup for students of color and Professor Graver’s assignments featuring people of color.

Many students expressed a concern that the makeup made available in the Theatre Department’s stage makeup courses did not include adequate shades for people of color. By comparison, White students had ample makeup shades to choose from.

Some students also expressed concerns with the makeup demonstrations performed by Professor Graver in his stage makeup courses. Former Student M told the Investigator that Professor Graver did not use students of color for makeup demonstrations unless the demonstration was of a fictional character (i.e. a clown, a monster, etc.). Former Student G told the Investigator that she believes students of color were purposefully not chosen or “shied away from” during makeup demonstrations. Former Student G reported that on one occasion, Professor Graver commented that “it was so much harder” to work on students of color.

Student M described an incident in her stage makeup class during which she volunteered to model “old age” makeup for a classroom demonstration. According to Student M, Professor Graver told the class that he would do half of the demonstration on her and half of the demonstration on another White student. Student M told the Investigator that Professor Graver did not do this for previous stage makeup demonstrations and that Professor Graver explained that doing the makeup on two different students was necessary because “the shadows are different.” Professor Graver went on to explain that there were distinctions in how the makeup would be applied to make an individual appear old depending upon the model’s skin tone. Student M told the Investigator that she felt Professor Graver was taking special care to teach the White students that he didn’t normally take for students of color and alleged that students of color are often left to figure out how to recreate the makeup demonstrations on themselves.

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One former student told the Investigator that she felt some of the assignments in Professor Graver's stage makeup course required her to perform "Blackface." Former Student I described an incident in her stage makeup class, taught by Professor Graver, during which students were assigned to recreate the looks of famous individuals. The individuals who were the subject of the assignment were chosen at random, and Former Student I chose Josephine Baker. She asked Professor Graver if she could change the subject of the assignment to a White woman. Professor Graver declined and told Former Student I that she would have to complete the assignment as Josephine Baker or risk a negative impact on her grade. Former Student I told the Investigator that she felt pressured to do "Blackface," and heard that other White students were assigned the recreate the looks of Louis Armstrong, Nefertiti, etc.

The Investigator asked Professor Graver about student concerns regarding the range of makeup available to people of color. Professor Graver told the Investigator that the makeup kits ordered for his costume makeup classes do include a range of shades and that he does not intentionally try to exclude any student and/or a person of color. Professor Graver explained that he orders the makeup kits as they appear on the website for the company from which they are ordered. He also orders additional shades to match students with different skin tones. Professor Graver denied that he does not assist students of color with makeup demonstrations or finding makeup to fit their skin tone.

When asked about student concerns that at least one of his assignments required students to perform "Blackface," Professor Graver told the Investigator that students choose the subject of their assignments at random and that he typically does not allow them to switch to avoid unnecessary complications/delay in completing the assignment. Professor Graver denied that any student was forced to perform "Blackface" as a result of the assignment.

d. *Inappropriate or otherwise disparate costuming for students of color.*

At least 3 students expressed concerns that the costuming, wigs and other materials provided to students of color for the Department's main stage productions by Professor Graver were inappropriate, worn out, and differed from the care and attention given to the costuming for White students. Student D told the Investigator that her costume for "The Children's Hour" (2018-2019) was an "old costume" and she was given white stockings, as opposed to flesh-toned stockings to make their appearance less noticeable on stage. Student D shared that the two other female African American students cast in "The Children's Hour" were also given an "old and dirty costume" and white stockings. According to Student D, her White castmates were given new costumes and nude tone stockings. Student Q relayed similar concerns about the costume she was provided for "The Children's Hour." According to Student Q, when one of the other Black students asked for skin-toned tights, Professor Graver responded, "this is all we have." Student Q told the Investigator that the Black students cast in "The Children's Hour" were forced to purchase skin-toned tights themselves.

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Several students believe the Department's production of "Milk Like Sugar" (2019-2020) was neglected and poorly budgeted because it was the "Black show." Students believe this neglect extended into the costumes prepared for students participating in the show.

- Student D told the Investigator that she felt the costuming was "lazy" and was not as well done as the costuming for other productions featuring majority White students that were also scheduled for the 2019-2020 school year, like "The Importance of Being Earnest" and "Cabaret."
- Student L told the Investigator that, in her opinion, the costume Professor Graver initially provided for her character in "Milk Like Sugar" did not fit the description of a teenage girl and made her look foolish. Student L explained that her costume included a large, curly wig, a red suit, and red high heels. She felt that her character, written in the script as a 15-16-year-old young woman, was "hypersexualized" and Professor Graver created a costume that left Student L "looking like Mary J. Blige." According to Student L, it wasn't until she showed her costume to Part-time Professor Elizabeth Reeves, who directed the show, that Professor Graver changed the design.

Student L described another incident that occurred during the Department's production of "Milk Like Sugar." During this incident, Professor Graver gave Student L a gold purse to wear with her costume. Student L noticed that the paint on the purse started to chip when she worked with it during rehearsals and asked Professor Graver for a new one. She went on to explain that Professor Graver ignored her request. After mentioning the defect in the purse on three separate occasions that evening and raising her voice to get Professor Graver's attention, Professor Graver left rehearsal and returned with a Black purse exclaiming, "will this do?" Later that night, Professor Graver privately apologized to Student L.

- Student Q told the Investigator that, in her opinion, in "The Importance of Being Earnest" (2019-2020), the costumes were handsewn and "beautifully done." Comparatively, the set design and costuming for "Milk Like Sugar" felt like an afterthought.

The Investigator asked Professor Elizabeth Reeves about the costumes chosen for "Milk Like Sugar" and student concerns that they were hypersexualized and neglected. Professor Reeves told the Investigator that she told each of the faculty members working on the show in lighting, design, and costumes that she wanted it to be a positive representation of the Black experience. Despite this, Professor Reeves said that she had to have many conversations with Professor Graver about using stereotypical costuming. At times Professor Reeves felt that she was not being heard. To address this, Professor Reeves told the Investigator that she came into the costume shop, even on days off, to show Professor Graver her vision for the production.

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The Investigator asked Professor Graver about the costuming for “Milk Like Sugar” and other productions. Professor Graver admitted that he had an exchange with a student about the purse selected for her costume and told the Investigator that he later apologized for the incident. He told the Investigator that he does not recall receiving complaints from students about their costuming beyond that incident.

When asked about the allegation that some of the costumes chosen were “hypersexualized” or did not reflect the age of the characters in the production, Professor Graver told the Investigator that the description made by Student L of her costume is correct, as is the fact that Professor Reeves spoke with him about changing the costume. Professor Graver explained that during the costume design process he spoke with the student and asked what she felt comfortable in. The student did not raise any concerns during that discussion. Professor Graver admitted that the initial costume was “hypersexualized,” but explained that is how the script portrayed the character. According to Professor Graver, Professor Reeves’ concern was that the costume made the character appear older than a high school student with more money to spend, not that the costume was “hypersexualized.”

As to the claim that the makeup kits used by Professor Graver did not include adequate shades for people of color, Professor Graver produced documents showing that the makeup kits ordered for his stage makeup courses do include a range of shades for people of color. Professor Graver explained that he orders the makeup kits as they appear on the website for the company from which they are ordered. He also orders additional shades to match students with different skin tones.

As to the criticism that Professor Graver does not take equal care in performing makeup demonstrations for students of color, who contend that they are often left to figure out how to recreate the demonstrations, the Investigator finds there is insufficient evidence to corroborate this claim.

As to the criticism regarding inappropriate or otherwise disparate costuming for students of color, 3 students pointed out the disparity in the quality of the costumes selected for “Milk Like Sugar” and “The Importance of Being Earnest,” which they attributed to the fact that “Milk Like Sugar” was a production featuring a majority-minority cast. Professor Graver countered that the costume decisions made in these productions reflected the collective thoughts of the directors and other faculty members working on the productions and noted that he regularly consulted with the director of “Milk Like Sugar” for approval of the costumes. Professor Reeves, who directed “Milk Like Sugar,” agreed that she and Professor Graver consulted on the costumes for the show but noted that she often felt “unheard” and had to speak with Professor Graver multiple times to make the costumes appropriate.

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e. *Inappropriate or otherwise disparate comments about the casting of students of color.*

During individual interviews, 1 student told the Investigator that during a fitting for the Theatre Department's production of "The Importance of Being Earnest," she overheard Professor Graver comment that a student of color should not have been selected for the show's cast because the play was written by Shakespeare and there were no people of color in England during the period the play was set.

Another student, Student Q told the Investigator that during the production process for "The Importance of Being Earnest," she overheard Professor Graver say, "well since they cast an African American woman as the lead, they are going to get an African American look."

The Investigator asked Professor Graver about this alleged comment. Professor Graver responded that he "does not at all confirm" that he made this comment about the casting of a student of color in "The Importance of Being Earnest." Professor Graver told the Investigator that he was "excited" about creating costumes for Student Q because she is a "lovely" student." Professor Graver also told the Investigator that he "had no problem with the casting of that show at all."

2. *Allegations Regarding Professor Kimberly Garcia.*

During individual interviews, several current and former students also expressed concerns with statements and conduct by Professor Kimberly Garcia, who teaches courses in costuming and stage makeup and manages the Department's "costume shop," which they believed to be discriminatory and/or racially insensitive.

a. *Comments regarding the hair texture or appearance of students of color.*

At least 4 students told the Investigator that Professor Garcia described their hair or the hair of other students as "nappy" during a costume fitting or other interactions. These observations were made by students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

- Student C reported that both Professor Graver and Professor Garcia made comments about her hair being "nappy" or "wild," but she did not describe a specific incident during which these comments were made. Student C specifically recalled Professor Garcia commenting "there you go with the wild hair" when she entered the Theatre Department's "costume shop" for a fitting.
- Student I reported that she overheard Professor Garcia refer to Black students' hair as nappy. She noted, however, that Professor Garcia never made these

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comments to her or about her. According to Student I, Professor Garcia made these comments in a “joking” tone.

- Student K reported that during a fitting for “James and the Giant Peach,” Professor Garcia felt his hair and said, “this hair is so nappy, you can keep it.” Student K told the Investigator that he did not respond to Professor Garcia’s remarks because he did not want to be labeled as an “angry Black man” and/or risk his chances of being cast in another production.
- Former Student B reported that Professor Garcia wrote the word “nappy” and/or “kinky” (the interviewee could not recall precisely which word was written but recalls one of these words was used) on a student’s fitting sheet during fittings for the Department’s production of “Clybourne Park” (2016-2017).

At least 3 students told the Investigator that they heard from other students that Professor Garcia used the term “nappy” to describe the texture of Black students’ hair. These observations were made by students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

- Student O reported that Professor Garcia often described Black students’ hair as nappy.
- Student L reported that a former student, a Black male, told her that Professor Garcia referred to the former student’s hair as nappy. The former student relayed the comment to other students in the Department, including Student L. According to Student L, the student’s aunt called Professor Garcia about the incident and asked Professor Garcia to apologize.
- Student J reported on the same incident Student L reported above, noting that the former student who was the target of this comment was a close friend and that both Student J and the former student spoke with Dr. Dooley about the incident.³ The comment was made during a fitting for the Department’s production of “Spring Awakening” (2017-2018). According to Student J, after they met with Dr. Dooley and Professor Garcia’s conversation with the former student’s aunt, Professor Garcia sent the former student a written apology via e-mail. In the e-mail, Professor Garcia wrote that she did not know the term “nappy” was offensive.

Notably, during individual interviews, Professor Graver told the Investigator that he has been present when Professor Garcia used the word “nappy” to describe students’ hair. According to Professor Graver, this occurred “once or twice.” According to Professor Graver, during the first

³ The Investigator asked Dr. Dooley if he recalled this incident. He responded that he did not but did recall having later conversations with Professor Garcia about using the term “nappy.”

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incident, Professor Garcia was speaking with a student who described her hair as “nappy.” Professor Garcia responded using the word the student used to describe her hair. Professor Graver did not recall when this occurred. During the second incident, Professor Garcia used the word “nappy” to describe a male student’s hair. The student’s aunt called Professor Garcia and explained that the word has negative connotations. Professor Graver has not heard Professor Garcia use the word since that incident.

At least 5 students told the Investigator that they overheard Professor Garcia make comments on Black students’ hair and use of wigs and/or hair extensions.

- Student B reported that during fittings for the Department’s production of “Hairspray” (Summer 2017), Professor Garcia did not help her affix her wig and instead mused, “y’all know how to put on wigs.”
- Student I reported that Professor Garcia asked on more than one occasion if she wore wigs and “what does your real hair look like.” Student I told the Investigator that these comments did not feel simply inquisitive or positive. Instead, some of Professor Garcia’s remarks, like “oh, you changed your hair again,” had a negative tone. Student I estimated that Professor Garcia made comments about her hair “at least once a week.”
- Student L reported that Professor Garcia remarked that Student L should know how to apply a wig. Student L told the Investigator that she believes this comment was made because she is Black.
- Student M reported that during her first year in the Theatre Department she worked in the costume shop and on more than one occasion Professor Garcia asked if she was wearing a wig because “Black girls always wear wigs.”
- Student Q reported that during a wig demonstration in her stage makeup class, Professor Garcia instructed students not to pull their wigs too far down their forehead. Another Black student said, “who would pull their wig too far down their head?” According to Student Q, Professor Garcia then “code-switched” and said, “oh girl, I know.”

At least 1 student told the Investigator that they heard from other students that Professor Garcia regularly comments on Black students’ hair and use of wigs and/or hair extensions.

- Former Student H did not witness or hear discriminatory comments from faculty members while attending CSU, but she has heard from other students that Professor Garcia has commented on Black students’ hair.

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The Investigator asked Professor Garcia about her alleged use of the word “nappy” and/or similar descriptors regarding the texture of Black students’ hair. Professor Garcia told the Investigator that she has only used the word “nappy” on one occasion and explained that she did not understand “it was a racial thing.” She admitted that during the production of “Spring Awakening” she used the word “nappy” to describe a former student’s hair. Professor Garcia confirmed that the student’s aunt called her and explained that “nappy” was an incorrect way of describing African American hair. Professor Garcia felt the conversation was “open” and ended the discussion feeling “this was something we were going to go on from.” Professor Garcia explained that she did not use “nappy” in a derogatory way and does not believe she has used that word since.

When asked about allegations that she has used the word “nappy” or other racially insensitive comments when making notes on student fitting sheets, Professor Garcia stated that she has never written the word “nappy” down. Instead, she uses “very general” terms to describe student hair (i.e. straight, curly, long, short, braids, no braids, etc.).

When asked about student concerns related to her alleged comments about wigs, Professor Garcia told the Investigator that she does not recall commenting that “Black girls always wear wigs.” And though she does teach students to apply wigs as part of her role as manager of the costume shop, she denied commenting that Black students did not need this instruction because they should know how to apply wigs. She admitted that on one occasion she assumed an African American student would know how to apply a wig because she believed the student wore them to class but denied saying she would not help the student because she was Black and therefore knew how to wear a wig.

When asked about student concerns related to her alleged comments about their “real hair,” Professor Garcia stated that she “probably” has asked Black students about “how their real hair looks” to assist with costuming. Professor Garcia explained that she needs to know this information to know how best to prepare the students for wig application and other costuming needs.

b. *Comments regarding “flat feet” being “the great African American curse.”*

A total of 4 students told the Investigator that they heard Professor Garcia comment that having “flat feet” is a problem unique to African Americans and is “the great African American curse.”

- Student H, who assisted with the production of “Corduroy” (Summer 2019), described an incident during which Professor Garcia commented that having “flat feet” was “the great African American curse.” The student explained that an African American student was being fitted for shoes and told Professor Garcia that she would need a specific kind of shoes because she had flat feet. According to

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Student H, Professor Garcia responded that having flat feet was “the great African American curse.”

- Student N report that she overheard Professor Garcia make this comment as well. Student N reported that the student to whom this comment was directed appeared “shocked,” but did not respond to Professor Garcia’s remark.
- Student M, to whom this comment was directed, confirmed that Professor Garcia made this comment. Student M told the Investigator that there were other students present when Professor Garcia made this statement, but Student M was so shocked that she didn’t respond. She did not want to “be that person” and be labeled as a student “with an attitude.”
- Student P told the Investigator that Professor Garcia made a similar comment to him during fittings for the Department’s production of “James and the Giant Peach” (Summer 2018). According to Student P, during his fitting, he told Professor Garcia that he is flat-footed and would need different shoes than the shoes she offered him. Professor Garcia responded, “I see a lot of Black students with flat feet.”

During individual interviews, Professor Garcia denied making this comment. She admitted that she told the student who alleges this comment was made that many of the women in the Theatre Department had large feet and expressed frustration over the difficulty with finding shoes to fit them.

c. *Comments made during the production of “Junie B. Jones.”*

Former Student A described an incident during a meet and greet after a showing of “Junie B. Jones” during which Professor Garcia allegedly commented that a young, Latino attendee was “probably named José.” According to Former Student A, during a cast meet and greet after a showing of “Junie B. Jones,” Professor Garcia commented that one of the children who attended the show was wearing clothing that matched the clothing of a character named José. Professor Garcia continued and said of the child: “he’s wearing the same clothes as José; his name is probably José too.”

The Investigator asked Professor Garcia about this alleged comment. Professor Garcia told the Investigator that she may have made this comment because many children attended the children’s productions dressed as the characters in the show. She explained that she would not have made such a comment in a derogatory way because her “last name is Garcia” and her spouse is Latino.

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d. *Inappropriate or otherwise disparate comments about the casting of students of color.*

During individual interviews, 1 student told the Investigator that she overheard Professor Garcia comment that a student of color should not have been selected for the cast of “The Importance of Being Earnest” (2019-2020) because it was not historically accurate.

3. *Allegations Regarding Professor Brenda May Ito.*

Current and former students described several incidents in which they felt Professor Brenda May Ito, director of the Theatre Department’s B.S.Ed. program, made discriminatory and/or racially insensitive comments, or engaged in discriminatory and/or racially insensitive behavior. Student D told the Investigator that she feels Professor Ito has a “personal vendetta” against students, especially Black students. Student D explained that she has not auditioned for productions directed by Professor Ito because she believes Professor Ito “treats Black students worse than others” and discriminates against Black students in “how she runs her callbacks.” Student B told the Investigator that she believes Professor Ito, along with Professors Steve Graver and Kimberly Garcia, is “racist with [her] whole chest.” Former Student M described Professor Ito and Professor Graver as “openly racist.” Other current and former students raised similar concerns.

One former student, Former Student F, told the Investigator that he had a positive relationship with both Professor Ito and Professor Graver. Former Student F told the Investigator that he never saw “eye to eye” with Professor Graver, but believes he is a mentor and someone instrumental in helping him matriculate through graduate school. Former Student F described Professor Graver as “very opinionated” but generally “a giant teddy bear.”

Former Student F also told the Investigator that Professor Ito is a mentor and taught him everything he knows about teaching. He shared that Professor Ito “vouched” for him as he applied for jobs after graduating from his undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

a. *Spring 2020 auditions for “Cabaret” and comment that the Theatre Department would “riot.”*

Before the close of CSU’s campus for in-person instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Theatre Department hosted auditions for its planned production of “Cabaret,” (2019-2020) a musical featuring a large cast. The auditions for “Cabaret” were held at the height of tensions in the Department over the selection and production of “Milk Like Sugar” and other perceived discriminatory conduct by certain members of the Department’s faculty and staff.

One former student told the investigator that during the day-long callbacks for “Cabaret” she overheard Professor Ito make the following comment: “I have to cast a student of color because if not this department is going to riot.” Other students told the investigator that they

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heard some variation of this comment, like “they would revolt” or that students of color would need to be selected for the cast of “Cabaret” or “you know. . . ,” with Professor Ito gesturing toward the individuals she was speaking with.

- Student N, who served as the stage manager, told the Investigator that during the callbacks for “Cabaret” the student performers were sent out of the auditorium so that Professor Ito (director), Michelle “Shelly” DeBryun (music director from CSU’s School of Music), Professor Amy Taylor (choreographer and assistant professor in the Theatre Department)⁴, and Student N could discuss selections for the show. Once the students were out of the room, Professor Ito said she needed to cast students of color in the show and “trailed off” with “well, you know. . . .”
- Former Student A, who served as the assistant director, told the Investigator that he also overheard Professor Ito make this comment during the auditions for the Department’s Spring 2020 production of “Freckle Face Strawberry (2019-2020).” During the audition process for the show, Former Student A overheard Professor Ito muse that she had “to cast at least one Black person or people will get mad.”

A total of 2 students reported hearing this comment from classmates shortly after the auditions for “Cabaret.”

- Student P told the Investigator that Student N relayed this comment to him in October 2019, the first or second day after callbacks for “Cabaret.”
- Student R reported that after the auditions for “Cabaret,” Student B told her that Student B and Student D overheard Professor Ito say, “she was going to have to cast Black people in ‘Cabaret’ or there would be a riot.” This comment was relayed to Student R by Student B during their stage directing class.

During individual interviews, Professor McDonald described a brief discussion that he overheard between students about this incident. In the early part of the Spring 2020 semester, sometime after auditions in the Department, Professor McDonald noticed that his students’ mood “seemed low” and several students appeared upset. According to Professor McDonald, Student Q and Student D were discussing comments made by a faculty member during the audition. Specifically, the students shared that an unnamed professor commented “if we don’t cast students of color there is going to be a riot.” After reading an article about the incident in The Saber, Professor McDonald learned that the comment was attributed to Professor Ito. In response to this comment and the students’ reactions, Professor McDonald told the students

⁴ When asked about this comment, Professor Taylor told the Investigator that she did not recall such a comment being made. Professor Taylor told the Investigator that none of the Department’s faculty members or staff have made comments that she would characterize as discriminatory or racially insensitive in her presence.

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that such a comment is serious and encouraged them to report it to the Department's leadership if it had been made.

The Investigator asked Professor Ito about these allegations. Professor Ito responded that she does not recall making such a statement and noted that if she had made this comment, it was "misconstrued." After the Investigator asked her why she qualified her response, Professor Ito later explained that when casting the Department's children's theatre productions, she "tries to cast every color I have" because she believes it is important for children to see people who look like them on stage. Later, Professor Ito told the Investigator, "I'm going to deny that I said it."

b. *Auditions for "Corduroy" and comment that the director wanted to select a "stereotypical Black cast."*

One student, who served as the stage manager, described an incident during which Professor Ito asked about a Black student's performance during the auditions for the Theatre Department's production of "Corduroy." According to Student H, Professor Ito asked if she thought the student would be a good fit for the role of the mother in "Corduroy." Student H responded affirmatively, and Professor Ito stated: "that's good because I need to cast a stereotypical Black mother." Student H told the Investigator that because she worked as a stage manager and worked so closely with the Department's faculty and staff, she often heard similar comments that "they thought wouldn't get out."

During individual interviews, Professor Ito denied making this statement. Professor Ito noted that during the audition process she called back White and Black students for the mother's role to provide students with on-stage experience. She also stated that she intended to cast a Black actress in the role because she wanted to be true to the character's description in the children's book. Professor Ito told the Investigator that she did not recall commenting that she would need to call back a Black cast for the production of "Corduroy" to "fit the funky transition music."

c. *Comment regarding Professor Ito's family being a "collection of Asians."*

At least 3 students expressed concerns that Professor Ito comments she could not engage in any discriminatory conduct because her family is a "collection of Asians." Students acknowledged that this comment was likely made in jest but told the Investigator that they found it to be offensive and discomforting, especially in the context of other perceived microaggressions and tensions in the Theatre Department.

Professor Ito admitted that she has commented that her family is a "collection of Asians." Professor Ito explained that this comment was made in jest and was not serious. She did not recall telling students that she did not believe she could be biased or racist because of her family's

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ethnicity. Professor Ito told the Investigator that she would not repeat this comment given the concerns expressed by students.

d. *Comment regarding the “diversity” of students selected for the cast of “Jingle Arg the Way.”*

Student L, who served as a timekeeper for the Department’s production of “Jingle Arg the Way,” described an incident in which Professor Ito said, allegedly without provocation, that “they can never say I’m not diverse because I’ve had a White Santa, a Black Santa, and even a Hispanic Santa.” Student L felt this comment made light of the alleged casting discrepancies and tensions in the Theatre Department.

During individual interviews, Professor Ito told the Investigator that she did not recall making this comment, similar to her response to other insensitive comments attributed to her. Professor Ito also stated that if she did make this comment, it was in jest.

e. *Comment regarding a student of color being “cute for a Hispanic kid.”*

Student J described an incident that allegedly took place before auditions for the Department’s scheduled production of “Junie B. Jones.” According to Student J, he did not intend to audition for “Junie B. Jones” and instead decided to audition for “Cabaret.” Both productions were directed by Professor Ito. Student J was selected for “Cabaret.”

According to Student J, during a rehearsal for “Cabaret,” he asked Professor Ito for feedback on a scene. Professor Ito responded, “I’ll keep telling you that you are doing well if you audition for Junie B. Jones.” Professor Ito went on to say that she needed him to audition for “Junie B. Jones” because he was “cute for a Hispanic kid.”

During individual interviews, Professor Ito told the Investigator that she did not recall making that comment. She noted that she asked a male Latino student to audition for the show because the character was Latino, and she wanted to remain true to the script.

f. *Mispronunciation and misspelling of ethnic-sounding names.*

At least 3 current and former students reported that Professor Ito often mispronounces and/or misspells the names of students of color and alleged that she refuses to correct these mispronunciations. Students also allege that Professor Ito appears to have little to no appreciation for the significance of these mispronunciations. Former Student M described an incident in which Professor Ito told Student A that his name was “too hard and she wasn’t going to bother learning it.” According to Former Student M, this comment was made in front of other students. Student B also described the incident, which took place during the Department’s production of “Hairspray” (Summer 2017), to the Investigator, stating that Professor Ito

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misspelled and mispronounced Student A’s name. When Student A corrected her, Professor Ito responded, “oh that doesn’t matter.”

The Investigator asked Student A, the student who was the subject of this incident, about Professor Ito’s alleged mispronunciation of his name. Student A told the Investigator that in 2017 he auditioned for the Theatre Department’s production of “Hairspray,” directed by Professor Ito. During the callbacks for “Hairspray,” Student A noticed his name misspelled on the callback board. When asked about the misprint, Professor Ito said in front of other students “your name is too complicated, I’m not going to bother learning it.” Student A told the Investigator that he did not respond to this comment.

One former student, Former Student F, told the Investigator that many of the Department’s faculty and staff have a “problem” learning various students’ names. Notwithstanding this, Former Student F believes professors and faculty members would address and correct the problem “if spoken to directly.”

The Investigator asked Professor Ito about this allegation. Professor Ito responded that she does not recall making this comment. She further stated that if the student’s name was misspelled on the audition sheet for “Hairspray,” “it was an honest typo.”

g. The comment that a student of color “snuck in the back door” of an audition.

One student described an incident during which Professor Ito accused her of circumventing the Theatre Department’s policies about auditioning for main stage productions. According to Student B, during the callbacks for “Milk Like Sugar” Part-time Professor Elizabeth Reeves asked Student B to reconsider her decision not to audition and invited Student B to attend the callbacks. Student B agreed, but the deadline to apply for the show had expired. When Student B arrived for the callback, Professor Ito allegedly told Professor Reeves to remove her from the callback sheet because she did not audition. Professor Ito then asked if Student B had gotten into the auditorium “through the back door.” Student B felt it was a microaggression to suggest that a student of color had snuck into the audition. Another student described this same exchange to the Investigator and also described it as a “microaggression.”

The Investigator asked Professor Ito about this allegation. Professor Ito explained that auditions for “Milk Like Sugar” and “Cabaret” were held on the same day and Student B missed the deadline to apply to audition for either show. Professor Ito further explained that Student B “took it upon herself” to email a video audition to Beth Reeves, the director of “Milk Like Sugar,” after the audition process to secure a callback audition. Professor Ito did not confirm or deny that she made the statement described above.

4. *Allegations Regarding Professor Tim McGraw.*

Some students described Professor Tim McGraw as a faculty member who does not regularly use discriminatory or racially insensitive language, but who engages in conduct that can be perceived as discriminatory. At least 4 students explained that Professor McGraw's behavior during the production of "Milk Like Sugar" was the greatest example of Professor McGraw's discriminatory and/or racially insensitive conduct.

For example, students described an incident during the Theatre Department's barbecue, or "Q to cue," for the cast and crew of "Milk Like Sugar" during which there allegedly was not enough food for attendees, including those students who were cast members. During the incident, two African American students approached Professor McGraw—who, according to students, managed the pre-performance barbecues—and asked if more food would be purchased. Student D and Student B told the Investigator that Professor McGraw declined this request and responded that the barbecue "wasn't for them" and that he didn't "owe you guys anything." According to Student D, to resolve the incident a "random student" offered to purchase more food for the barbecue. According to Student B, Professor McGraw responded, "I wouldn't wish her attitude."

Former Student K provided a different account of this incident to the Investigator. According to Former Student K, she was part of the student group that assists with hosting the Department's pre-performance barbecues and was charged with purchasing the food for "Milk Like Sugar's" barbecue. Former Student K explained that when purchasing food for these barbecues, she used a formula to determine how much food was needed. More people attended the barbecue than was expected, so the student group ran out of food and supplies. Former Student K confirmed that students became very angry with Professor McGraw over the lack of food, accusing him of not purchasing enough for the one production involving Black students and "calling him racist." She offered to tell the students that it was her mistake, but Professor McGraw stopped her because, in her opinion, "he would rather have students mad at him than my peers mad at me."

The Investigator asked Professor McGraw about these allegations. Professor McGraw explained that the day of the barbecue for "Milk Like Sugar," rehearsal ended at approximately 2:00 P.M. (earlier than they usually would). Some students left the rehearsal location because the barbecue had not started. Professor McGraw told the Investigator that the barbecue started at 3:00 P.M., as it had for other productions in the past. The students who left the rehearsal location did not return until 4:45 P.M. when the group was preparing to end the barbecue and resume rehearsal.

When the students returned, hamburgers and sides were remaining, but not hamburger buns. Professor McGraw asked the student group to turn the grill on to serve those students but noted that he was not expecting them to return. He denied telling students that he would not serve them because of their attitude or that there were no refreshments for them.

5. *Responses from the Theatre Department's Faculty and Staff*

The Investigator asked the Theatre Department's faculty and staff about student concerns that some faculty members have: (1) made discriminatory and/or racially insensitive comments about students of color or (2) have engaged in conduct that appears to be discriminatory and/or racially insensitive toward students of color. Professors Elizabeth Reeves, Sam Renner, Amy Taylor, and Molly Claassen told the investigator that no student has raised concerns about the comments and conduct attributed to Professors Graver, Garcia, and Ito above. Other professors told the investigator that students had come to them to discuss these comments but that they were not made aware of them until the months leading up to the Investigation.

All the professors told the Investigator that they have not witnessed discriminatory conduct or comments made by the Department's faculty and staff. Though he has not witnessed such conduct, Professor Cameron Bean told the Investigator that, based on the allegations made, "the current faculty is not equipped to deal with the cultural sensitivities of the increasingly diverse student body." Even so, Professor Bean believes the faculty, specifically Professors Ito, Graver, and Garcia, are "teachable" and "able to be equipped."⁵ Professor Blackburn and Mr. Head also acknowledged efforts by Professor Graver and Professor Garcia to address the students' concerns, "own their behavior," and "start a growth process." Neither professor told the Investigator that they saw evidence of such acknowledgment from Professor Ito.

Throughout the investigation, some of the Department's faculty expressed a concern that some White students were using this investigation to air grievances about faculty members having nothing to do with issues of race and diversity. These faculty members told the Investigator that they worried White students, in particular, have used the opportunity "to either create false allegations" or "exaggerate the context of circumstances around instances to make a professor look bad." For example, they noted that Student H was removed from the role of stage manager for "Cabaret" and therefore had a motive to fabricate the "riot" comment attributed to Professor Ito. They also noted that Student E was verbally reminded of classroom attendance issues and therefore had a motive to exaggerate the allegations regarding Professor Blackburn, noted in *Section VI.G.5* below. The Investigator made no conclusions about these concerns.

⁵ Professor Graver also expressed a desire to attend cultural diversity and sensitivity training to address the issues raised in this investigation.

B. Selection of “Straight Plays” and Musicals for the Theatre Departments Main Stage Productions.

1. *Student Concerns Regarding Lack of Diversity in the Type of Plays Selected.*

Both current and former students expressed concerns about the types of productions selected for the Theatre Department’s main stage programming. Several students expressed a belief that the Theatre Department selects main stage productions with the greater community of Columbus, Georgia and a “White audience” in mind. One former student described the Department’s selection of main stage productions as productions written by “old, dead, White guys.” Former professors Chris Head and Jamila Turner agreed with this sentiment. Mr. Head told the Investigator that he believes the lack of opportunities for students of color in the Theatre Department’s main stage productions is spurred on in part by the season selection process. He likened the Department’s perceived selection of plays that do not reflect people of color and its effect on the opportunities available to Black students while at CSU and after graduating to “systemic racism.”

Students explained that while the Department hosts open auditions for each of the main stage productions and at surface level there does not appear to be a lack of opportunity, the themes or characters of shows selected often lead students of color to opt-out of the audition process. One student told the Investigator that when the season is announced each school year “you can feel the air go out of the room” because students of color assume the shows selected are not meant for them. Many students told the Investigator that students of color rely on student productions, like a recent student production of “For Colored Girls,” to provide meaningful opportunities to students of color.⁶

Both current and former Black students confirmed that they avoid auditioning for the Department’s main stage productions because they do not believe they will ultimately be selected for the cast.

- According to Student C, many of the Theatre Department’s Black students, herself included, feel that the themes or characters of the Department’s main stage productions do not reflect Black students or portray an experience that Black students can relate to and convey, so students choose not to audition.

⁶ Part-time Professor Elizabeth Reeves, who attended CSU for her undergraduate and graduate studies, told the Investigator that when she was a student, students of color sought out student productions or productions at the now closed Liberty Theatre (a community theatre operated by Black actors and playwrights in Columbus, Georgia) for opportunities to perform. According to Professor Reeves, students of color had few opportunities to perform when she was a student.

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- Student M, a BA student, told the Investigator that in the later years of her time at CSU, she decided not to audition for the Department's main stage productions because she believed she would not be cast. When she did an audition, she felt she was "proven right" because the faculty chose White students and/or BFA theatre performance majors over her.
- Student O, a second-year student, told the Investigator that when she auditions for productions, she does not feel she has a chance of being called back or selected for the cast. She stated: "[t]here are times when I've argued with myself should I even try this?" Student O told the Investigator that she does not feel optimistic that she will ever be selected for a main stage production because the faculty and staff cannot imagine filling the roles with students of color. Student O shared that she feels she is wasting her undergraduate career at CSU because she does not have a real opportunity to participate in main stage productions.

In response to concerns raised about the shortage of productions featuring Black playwrights or Black actors, the Investigator asked interview participants about the Theatre Department's recent productions of "Intimate Apparel" (2017-2018) and "Milk Like Sugar" (2019-2020). Many current and former students told the Investigator that "Intimate Apparel" and "Milk Like Sugar" were aberrations from the Department's practice and noted that every few years the Department selects a "Black show" to appease students of color.⁷

The Investigator asked four former members of the Theatre Department's faculty about their impressions of how the Department selects its main stage productions. Former part-time professor Jamila Turner told the Investigator that because she was a part-time faculty member, she had no input into the Department's season selection process. Nonetheless, she agreed that in her time as a part-time professor, the Department did not select shows that were written by diverse playwrights or that gave students of color opportunities to perform.

Former Professors Chris Head, Natalia Temegsen, and Becky Becker and Professor Rachel Blackburn also described their efforts to suggest plays for the Department's main stage productions that were written by Black playwrights and/or featured Black actors.

- Both Mr. Head and Ms. Turner told the Investigator that in 2016 Mr. Head asked Ms. Turner to assist him with finding plays written by Black playwrights that the Department could produce in the upcoming school year. Among Ms. Turner's suggestions were "Intimate Apparel" and "The Piano Lesson."

⁷ Former Student M recalled Professor Steve Graver telling students, in reference to "Intimate Apparel," "don't complain, we gave you a black show." The Investigator did not come across other students or evidence to corroborate this alleged comment.

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- Mr. Head told the Investigator that for the last 4 years, starting in 2016, he suggested that the Theatre Department put on a production written by an African American playwright. Mr. Head told the Investigator that he intended to make certain Black voices were included on the main stage. Because part-time faculty members are not included in the show selection process, Mr. Head asked Jamila Turner to compile a list of plays she suggested the Department produce. “The Piano Lesson” by August Wilson was included on Ms. Turner’s list, so Mr. Head suggested the play during the next show selection meeting. According to Mr. Head, the other faculty members did not support his suggestion.⁸

Mr. Head told the Investigator that in a later season selection meeting, he also suggested productions written by African American playwrights. He noted that some of the Department’s faculty members expressed concern with selecting such a show but acknowledged that the faculty agreed to put on “Intimate Apparel” in the 2017-2018 school year.⁹

Mr. Head also told the Investigator that in 2018, when Dr. Dooley became the acting Dean for CSU’s College of Arts and Professor McGraw became the acting Chair of the Theatre Department, he again raised the issue of increasing diversity in the main stage productions and suggested that a play by an African American playwright be included in the season. Mr. Head again suggested that the Department include “The Piano Lesson” by August Wilson. Professor Blackburn, who was new to the Department, suggested “Milk Like Sugar” and other productions written by people of color. According to Mr. Head, Professor McGraw became “red-faced” and Mr. Head recalled him saying “color-blind casting” is enough. The conversation during this faculty meeting became “heated” and Professor McGraw’s tone became angry.

- Professor Temegsen told the Investigator that she has extensive screen and playwriting experience. When she noticed the lack of diversity in the plays selected for the Department’s main stage productions, Professor Temegsen offered two of her plays that had been produced by other theatre companies for inclusion in the season. According to Professor Temegsen, Dr. Dooley told her that

⁸ During individual interviews, Dr. Dooley admitted that Mr. Head’s suggestion of “The Piano Lesson” had been met with resistance. However, Dr. Dooley recalls this conversation occurring more recently than 2016. According to Dr. Dooley, the faculty “all kind of rolled our eyes” because students told the faculty that they wanted to see plays beyond those written by August Wilson. Dr. Dooley also noted that this production would not have been feasible because the Springer Opera House has just produced “Fences,” also written by August Wilson.

⁹ Dr. Dooley told the Investigator that he does not recall Mr. Head having to “convince” the faculty to include “Intimate Apparel” in the season and does not recall much pushback.

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there would not be enough students of color (specifically Black students) to fill the roles required by her plays.

- Former Professor Becky Becker told the Investigator that she also experienced pushback when she suggested productions written by people of color. Professor Becker also witnessed this pushback when Mr. Head suggested such plays. For example, Professor Becker recalled that some of the faculty worried that “Intimate Apparel” would leave out White students in the Department. Professor Becker told the Investigator that she also believes some of the faculty were “overly concerned” with not offending the audience. She did not recall which professors pushed back on her and Mr. Head’s suggestions.

Overall, Professor Becker would describe the Theatre Department’s selection of productions (and casting decisions) as “stuck.” She believes some of the faculty have been members of the Department for many years and are unable to reimagine their ideals or casting philosophies. Professor Becker told the Investigator that she eventually became frustrated with this environment.

In response to student concerns, some of the Theatre Department’s faculty and staff undertook efforts to highlight diversity in the theatre industry and expose students to materials written by Black playwrights and/or featuring Black actors. For example, former Part-time Professor Turner and Professor Rachel Blackburn created the “Busted Open” reading series in 2018. Professor Blackburn and Ms. Turner envisioned the reading series as an opportunity for students to perform readings of productions written by Black playwrights. According to Professor Blackburn and Ms. Turner, the series was well-received by students but did not receive much support from the Department’s faculty.

2. Responses from the Theatre Department’s Faculty and Staff.

The Investigator asked each of the Department’s current faculty and staff members about student concerns that the shows selected for the Department’s main stage productions are not diverse and do not reflect the student population.

Dr. Larry Dooley, the chair of the Theatre Department, described his leadership style as collaborative and trying to “bring things to consensus.” Thus, when there are disagreements about season selection, Dr. Dooley has historically tried not to insert himself in the discussion and instead allow the faculty to reach a consensus to resolve them.

When asked about student concerns regarding season selection, Dr. Dooley explained that this has been an “ongoing conundrum” Dr. Dooley told the Investigator that the Department has to balance “a whole bunch of interests,” including literary and commercial (i.e. whether the general public will purchase tickets). Dr. Dooley explained that the Department tries to consider several needs when selecting a season: (1) classical v. contemporary; (2) roles for men and

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women; (3) inclusivity and racial diversity; (4) whether the productions complement each other; and (5) theme. Dr. Dooley told the Investigator that issues regarding season selection and representation are not unique to CSU's Theatre Department and affect theatre departments and professional theatre companies across the country.¹⁰ Dr. Dooley envisions a department that blends "color-blind" and "color-conscious" casting.

Many faculty members disagreed with and denied the students' observation that the Department selects productions with the local community in Columbus, Georgia, or a "White audience" in mind. Part-time Professor Cameron Bean, who is the University's Assistant Vice President for Development & Stewardship, told the Investigator that he does not believe the Department has ever selected productions this way. He acknowledged that season selection for any theatre company can be driven by the local market and "who's going to buy tickets," but does not believe the Theatre Department operates in this manner. Other members of the Department's faculty and staff agreed.

Nearly all the faculty members interviewed agreed that the Department can and should do a better job of selecting productions that are diverse and more closely reflect the student body. Professor Bean observed that the Department "has not kept pace with the growing diversity of the student body." In recent years, the faculty have had more conversations about addressing diversity in the Department. Minutes from faculty meetings held in February 2018 through 2020 show that issues of diversity and inclusion were on the agenda for the Department. *See generally*, Department Meeting Minutes (Feb. 2018 through Feb. 5, 2020), attached in Appendix A. According to some of the Department's former professors, these issues remained agenda items and no action was taken. A recent email exchange between the Department's faculty and staff to discuss the 2020-2021 season demonstrated more robust efforts to discuss and suggest productions written by Black playwrights and featuring Black actors. *See Email from Lawrence Dooley to Amy Taylor, et al. re Just Thinkin'* (Mar. 25, 2020), attached in Appendix A.

However, some faculty members did not agree that there should be a production selected each year that is written by a Black playwright or features a majority-minority cast. Professor Claassen told the Investigator that whether such a play is selected every season depends on the student population because the Department needs a sufficient number of students to fill those roles. Professor Ito acknowledged that the Theatre Department has not produced many plays written by Black playwrights but noted that the faculty and staff serve "a whole department of students" of all backgrounds. For that reason, the Department "wouldn't want to do just shows by Black playwrights."

When asked about other concrete ways the Department could improve the season selection process, many professors suggested that students should have a greater role in season selection. Dr. Dooley told the Investigator that he is creating a student advisory panel for this purpose.

¹⁰ Former professors Natalia Temegsen and Becky Becker agreed with this point.

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C. Opportunities for People of Color to Be Selected for the Cast of the Theatre Department's Main Stage Productions and "Tokenism."

Data produced by the University's Department for Institutional Research and Effectiveness and the Theatre Department show that between the Fall of 2015 and the Fall of 2020, the demographic make-up of CSU's Theatre Department was as follows:

Table 1: Demographics of the Columbus State University Theatre Department, Fall 2015-Fall 2020

Race/Ethnicity	Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018	Fall 2019	Fall 2020
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	1	0	0	0	1
Asian	0	1	0	1	0	0
Black or African American	32	40	45	48	55	48
Hispanic or Latino	13	10	8	8	7	10
International Student	1	1	0	0	0	0
Two or More Races	3	3	3	2	2	4
White	123	145	145	152	146	147
<hr/>						
Total	173	186	201	211	210	210
<hr/>						
White	71%	70%	72%	72%	70%	70%
Black or African American	18%	22%	22%	23%	26%	23%
Hispanic or Latino	8%	5%	4%	4%	3%	5%

See Sridhar, Sitharaman, *Theatre Race Ethnicity Expanded* (Aug. 28, 2020), attached in Appendix A. Over the last five years, the percentage of Black or African American students in the Department has averaged around 22%.

1. *Casting of the Theatre Department's main stage productions.*

Throughout the investigation, current and former students expressed frustration and concern with the opportunities for students of color to be selected for the cast of the Theatre Department's "main stage" productions.¹¹

One interviewee, Former Student H, told the Investigator that she could not recall a show in her four years in the Department in which a student of color was the lead *and* the lead's racial description wasn't written into the script. Other students expressed similar concerns that students of color, especially Black students, are not selected for the lead roles in the Theatre Department's main stage productions unless the script describes the lead roles as being filled by a Black person or person of color. One student told the Investigator that she believes White students in the Theatre Department did not experience a lack of casting opportunities because the Department's show selection process is "tailored for their success." Notwithstanding these observations, students acknowledged—and statements and documents from the Department's faculty and staff confirm—that two women of color were cast in the lead roles in the Department's recent production of "The Importance of Being Earnest."

Multiple students noted that the only exception to this rule appeared to be the Theatre Department's Spring 2020 production of "Milk Like Sugar," and attributed that exception to the fact that all the play's characters were African American. "Milk Like Sugar," written by African American playwright Kirsten Greenidge, is a coming of age story of three African American teenaged women who enter a pregnancy pact. See Script, MILK LIKE SUGAR, attached in Appendix A. According to the Department's faculty and staff, "Milk Like Sugar" was proposed by Professor Rachel Blackburn and selected because it is a straight play written by a diverse playwright that portrays the African American experience and provided meaningful opportunities for Black students to act in the main stage production. As noted in *Section VI.E.3* of this Report, students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds felt "Milk Like Sugar" relied too heavily on stereotypes and portrayed a caricature of the Black experience. And as noted in *Section VI.A.1.d* of this Report,

¹¹ At least 3 students expressed that the lack of opportunities for students of color extend beyond casting and affect those students interested in lighting, tech, and design. Student G told the Investigator that he believes students of color interested in these fields have not been given opportunities to work on the Department's productions and shared that "students of color have to work way harder." Student N observed that students of color who were interested in stage management or lighting are not selected to assist with the Department's main stage productions. Former Student J told the Investigator that in her time at CSU she learned that at least one classmate, a student of color, was interested in lighting but was selected to do lighting for just one production.

Former professor Chris Head provided the Investigator with a chart listing the student set designers and stage managers for the last five years that corroborates the students' allegations.

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several students believe the Department’s production of “Milk Like Sugar” was neglected and poorly budgeted because it was the “Black show.”

a. The Theatre Department’s “color-blind casting” policy and inconsistent use of the same.

Both current and former students generally attribute the perceived lack of opportunities for Black students to participate in the Department’s main stage productions and the use of “tokenism” to the Department’s “color-blind casting” policy. “Color-blind casting” refers to a casting philosophy in which actors are selected for roles without consideration of their racial or ethnic identity. Instead, casting is based on the actor’s ability to relate to and portray the theme of the production, setting, and other characteristics of the role. Thus, in a production of “Romeo and Juliet,” an actor of any race and ethnicity could be cast as the lead characters Romeo or Juliet, so long as they could adequately portray other characteristics of the roles.

Current and former students agree that color-blind casting can be effective but note that few of the Theatre Department’s faculty and staff adhere to this policy. Student L told the Investigator that “[d]irectors talk about color-blind casting, but all they see is their color.” Student J told the Investigator that, in his opinion, the Department’s faculty and staff find it difficult to consistently apply color-blind casting because they “preconceive” the roles as being filled with White actors. Student J went on to explain that the Theatre Department’s faculty and staff members are older and have seen many of the shows selected for the Department’s main stage productions “thousands of times.” Because the faculty and staff have seen these shows performed “thousands of times,” Student J believes it is difficult for them to envision the roles being filled by anyone who is not White.

Former Part-time Professor Jamila Turner disagreed that “color-blind” casting is effective and instead told the Investigator that she prefers “color-conscious” casting.¹² Ms. Turner explained that “color-conscious” casting would allow the Department to reimagine roles so that all students, including students of color, could fit them regardless of the script. For example, plays written by Tennessee Williams have southern themes, and Ms. Turner feels that is a “culture and a feeling” that can be recreated by anyone regardless of race. Ms. Turner feels the Department should and could produce plays that “transcend race.” Former Professors Natalia Temegsen, Becky Becker, and Chris Head agreed that “color-blind” casting can be ineffective. Professor Temegsen noted that this concept is “subject to racial bias” and observed that the theatre industry as a whole does not do a good job of implementing it.

During individual interviews, several students identified Professor Krystal Kennel, Professor Larry McDonald, and Professor David Turner as faculty members who practiced color-

¹² Former professors Becky Becker and Chris Head, and current Professor Rachel Blackburn, also suggested that the Theatre Department use “color conscious” casting instead of color-blind casting.

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blind casting and selected students of color for meaningful roles in the Department’s main stage productions.

When asked about faculty members that they believed struggled to consistently implement color-blind casting, students identified Professor Brenda May Ito and Professor Molly Claassen. Former Student M described the productions directed by Professor Ito as “White-washed” and stated that her casting decisions “ignore the talent of all students of color.” Student J and Student L identified the Department’s production of “Peter and the Starcatcher” as another example of this problem. The students explained that “Peter and the Starcatcher” is a fairy-tale and presented opportunities for color-blind casting and having a diverse cast. Notwithstanding this, Professor Molly Claassen, who directed the show, selected just two Black students for the cast.

During the investigation, 2 former students expressed a different opinion about the use of color-blind casting and the opportunities available for students of color in the Theatre Department’s main stage productions. Former Student I, who graduated from CSU in 2010, told the Investigator that she felt the Theatre Department’s main stage productions, like “Midsummer’s Night Dream,” were “fairly inclusive” when she was a student. She recalled that three Black students were selected as the leads in “Midsummer’s Night Dream.” Former Student I noted, however, that “Midsummer’s Night Dream” was directed by a faculty member who is no longer employed by CSU.

Former Student F, who graduated from CSU in 2009, disagreed that the Department’s faculty and staff purposefully withhold opportunities from students of color. Instead, he believes students should feel empowered to ask their professors for these opportunities. Former Student F also told the Investigator that feels students should reach out to the Theatre Department’s faculty directly to discuss the subject(s) of this investigation.

The Investigator asked several of the Department’s faculty and staff their perceptions of “color-blind” casting. Many of the professors agreed that the philosophy of “color-blind” casting needs to be redefined. Professors Turner, Kennel, and Blackburn all expressed concerns with “color-blind” casting and noted that it can often mean faculty and staff are deliberately choosing not to see color. Instead, they prefer to use “color-conscious” casting. Professor Larry McDonald told the Investigator that he has seen examples of “color-blind” casting done well in the Department but noted that the faculty’s adherence to color-blind casting is not consistent. When asked about the students’ concern that more people of color were not selected for “Peter and the Starcatcher,” Professor Claassen explained that “is the very definition of color-blind casting.”

b. ***Perceived bias in favor of students in the Theatre Department's Bachelor of Fine Arts degree program, and impact on the casting of students of color.***

Several students interviewed also attribute the Theatre Department's perceived casting discrepancies to the faculty and staff's "bias" in favor of students in the Bachelor of Fine Arts ("BFA") program. Student C believes she received more opportunities to participate in the Department's main stage productions because she is in the BFA program. She explained that, in her opinion, the faculty and staff "favor" the selection of BFA students over BA students for main stage productions and that there are fewer students of color who are BFA students.

Many students expressed a belief that this "favoritism" for BFA students, and the faculty and staff's use of "favoritism" in general, disproportionately affects Black students.¹³

- Student B told the Investigator that she feels "[i]t is unfair that me and my White peers pay the same amount of tuition without the same opportunity to be cast."
- Student C told the Investigator that she believes this favoritism harms Black students more than other members of the student population because most of the Theatre Department's BA students are Black.
- Student F told the Investigator that he believes this "favoritism" of BFA students limits the opportunities for BA students, both White and Black, to "work on their craft."
- Student L told the Investigation that she feels she had some "privilege" and "got to see more shows than others" because she is a BFA – theatre performance student.
- Student O told the Investigator that, in her opinion, the Department's faculty and staff have a group of "favorite" students who are selected for main stage productions each semester, and those students are White. This leads Student O to believe the faculty and staff intentionally choose not to select Black students for main stage productions.
- Student Q told the Investigator that BA students do not have the same opportunities as BFA students. This disproportionately affects Black students because the majority of the BFA class each year is made up of White students.

¹³ Many students told the Investigator that even with the perceived advantage of being enrolled in the Department's BFA program, students of color are still disadvantaged and are not regularly selected for the Department's main stage productions.

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- Student M told the Investigator that she feels the Department has created an environment in which BFA - theatre performance students are viewed as “better” or more talented than BA students and are cast in shows more often.

During individual interviews, Professor McDonald admitted that he does have some “bias” in favor of the Department’s BFA students when selecting students for the productions he directs but explained that he does not have any malintent in doing so. Instead, Professor McDonald believes this “bias” is necessary and justified because BFA students have committed their education to theatre performance. BA students have not committed to this more rigorous training. Because BFA students have committed their education (and presumed careers) to theatre performance, Professor McDonald believes it is the Department’s responsibility to provide them with as much training as possible.

c. *Labeling of students as “difficult” and impact on the casting of students of color.*

Throughout the investigation, current and former students described a practice by some of the Theatre Department’s faculty and staff members of describing students as “difficult to work with,” students “with an attitude,” or “problematic.” Students observed that these labels were disproportionately attributed to Black students and negatively impacted those students’ ability to be selected for main stage productions. Specifically, students identified Students A, B, and D as individuals they believe faculty members have described as “difficult.” One student, Student P, told the Investigator that he felt the Department’s faculty members were especially cold to Students A, B, and D after they publicly raised concerns about issues of race and diversity in the Theatre Department. Student P explained that, in his opinion, professors “shunned” these students and used minor mistakes to “belittle” them. Students identified Professor Brenda May Ito, Professor Steve Graver, and Lecturer Kimberly Garcia as faculty members who have used this phrase to describe Students A, B, and D. Student P identified Professor Ito and Professor McGraw are faculty members who were “cold” or “shunned” Students A, B, and D after they became more outspoken about the subject(s) of this Investigation.

Student C told the Investigator that, in her opinion, because some students of color are labeled as “difficult to work with,” they are disproportionately deprived of opportunities to exercise the skills and techniques learned in the classrooms in main stage productions.

The Investigator asked the Department’s faculty and staff about the students’ concerns that some students, especially those who are outspoken, are labeled as “difficult” or “problematic.” Professor Graver admitted that professors have described Students A and B as problematic because of their behavior (e.g. late to rehearsals, inability to complete tasks as requested in a timely fashion, etc.). Professor Graver denied that these descriptors were reserved for students of color.

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Professor Ito responded that this may have come up in conversation with other faculty and staff. Professor Ito explained that some students were routinely late for a performance, unable to meet the expectations for performing in a production, or otherwise “uncooperative.” Professor Ito noted that while she spoke with other faculty about these students, she did not discuss them with students. Professor Ito did not recall using the word “problematic” to describe a student but stated that if she used that word, she was referring to the issues noted above.

2. *Use of Black students as “tokens.”*

Throughout the investigation, current and former students also expressed concern that students of color, particularly Black students, were selected for the Department’s main stage productions as a “token” for the sake of diversity. Students expressed frustration with the fact that a select group of students of color are “sprinkled” and “recycled” into the cast of the Theatre Department’s main stage productions in the name of diversity but are not given meaningful roles and/or opportunities to perform.

- Student O described the Theatre Department’s main stage productions as a “rinse and repeat” of the same students (both White students and students of color), meaning the same students are regularly selected for shows and “recycled.” Student O told the Investigator that, in her opinion, when Black students are selected for the Department’s main stage productions it feels as though they were chosen to “showcase diversity,” as opposed to being selected because the faculty and staff want the student to be in the role.
- Student H reported that the Department’s faculty after selected one to two students of color for the Department’s main stage productions to “make [shows] seem diverse, but really it was tokenism.”

When students of color are cast in the Department’s main stage productions, both students of color and non-students of color observe that they are disproportionately selected for the ensemble or minor roles. Professor Blackburn also made this observation, citing the Department’s production of “Guys and Dolls” as an example and alleging that the only students of color selected for the cast were in ensemble roles with no character names.

A total of 7 of the current and former students of color interviewed—who identified as Black or as a member of another race and/or ethnic group—described themselves as “tokens” or among the students of color who are regularly selected by the Theatre Department’s faculty and staff for main stage productions.

- Student C, a BFA – theatre performance student, told the Investigator that her experience in the Department did not align with the experience of other students because she was provided opportunities to participate in main stage productions.

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- Student J, a BFA – theatre performance student who identifies as Latino, told the Investigator that he believes he has been selected for many of the Theatre Department’s productions because he is “White passing.”
- Student L, also a BFA – theatre performance student, told the Investigator that though she was cast for three main stage productions in her time at CSU, she felt like a token.
- Student K, a BFA – theatre performance student, told the Investigator that he has been selected for several main stage productions but noted this is not “a good reflection” of his experience in the Theatre Department. Though he was a “token” and selected for multiple plays, he was relegated to roles in the ensemble with either a few lines or no lines at all. Student K told the Investigator that he often felt he was selected for musicals simply because he could dance. Student K would like to be cast in a lead role but does not feel optimistic that he will be because most of the lead roles in the productions selected by the Department are written for White males.
- Student P, a BFA – theatre performance student, told the Investigator that he feels like a “token” but noted that he has only been selected for the ensemble of the Department’s main stage productions. Student P told the Investigator that he felt he could not offer a statement in this investigation because he has been selected for many on-stage productions and, therefore, he “had nothing to complain about.” Notwithstanding this, Student P expressed a desire for roles with speaking lines and opportunities outside of the ensemble. He believes the faculty and staff regularly cast him in shows, specifically musicals, for his dancing ability.
- Student Q, a BFA – theatre performance student, told the Investigator that when she was selected as the lead in “The Children’s Hour,” she felt like a “trophy” for the Department. She did not have the same experience as she was selected for the lead role in “The Importance of Being Earnest.” Student Q commented that, overall, she feels she is “the golden egg” for the Theatre Department but noted the following: “I’m graduating in a year. There has to be other people you are going to take that chance on.”
- Former Student C, a BFA – theatre performance student, told the Investigator that he was cast in the Department’s main stage productions each semester he attended CSU between 2006 and 2011. Because he had an opportunity to perform in so many main stage productions, Former Student C felt he had nothing to complain about. He told the Investigator that he later concluded that the faculty and staff’s decision to cast him in main stage productions was based on race and an example of tokenism.

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Former Part-time Professor Jamila Turner, Former Professor Chris Head, and Professor Blackburn agreed that the Department’s faculty engage in “tokenism,” casting the same Black students repeatedly in main stage productions. Student D believes this tokenism forces the Theatre Department’s African American students to compete against each other for one or two opportunities in the Department’s main stage productions each semester.

3. *Impact on the academic experience and career outcomes for the Theatre Department’s students of color.*

Both current and former students expressed concerns that the Theatre Department’s casting practices hurt their academic experience and career outcomes. According to Former Student H, the BFA degree program requires students to have two performance credits before graduation, and every student in the BFA – theatre performance class is required to audition for every role. Some students are never cast in a role, and thus have difficulty meeting this degree requirement.

Student D, a BFA – theatre performance student, raised a similar concern and told the Investigator that she believes the Department’s two-performance credit requirement can only be completed by performing in: (1) main stage productions; (2) student-directed shows chosen for the Department’s One Act Festival; or (3) the Department’s summer productions. Despite not having the credits needed to complete the Department’s performance credit requirement, Student D told the Investigator that she is not worried about graduating because she feels she “can’t be held accountable if I’m not cast.”

Former Student A told the Investigator that he does not feel the Theatre Department’s students of color are prepared to compete in the market upon graduation because of the lack of casting opportunities during their undergraduate studies. He noted that students of color are not given the same opportunities to “practice” and “explore” in an educational setting. Thus, while Former Student A felt confident to “go out into the world” after his time at CSU, he is not sure his classmates felt the same way.

Former Student J told the Investigator that she also believes the lack of casting opportunities negatively impacts students of color. She explained that students who are cast in lead roles have more “performance credits” and ultimately more job opportunities upon graduation. Former Student J went on to explain that shows on the main stage are attended by people in the community, and employment offers may come from a performance in one of those shows. According to Former Student J, though student-produced shows presented more opportunities for students of color, they did not create the same job prospects.

Student K told the Investigator that he does not feel prepared to audition for acting roles upon graduation from CSU because he does not know what his “type”—or what kinds of roles are best suited for him—is. He explained that though he has participated in the Department’s

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main stage productions, he has not been selected for a meaningful or challenging role that allowed him to develop his skills and identify what kinds of roles are best for him.

Former Part-time Professor Jamila Turner told the Investigator that in her opinion, many students will be “very green” upon graduation from the Theatre Department with limited experience because of the lack of opportunities for students of color to perform in the Department’s main stage productions.

During individual interviews, Former Professor Becky Becker told the Investigator that there is some merit to the argument that students are not always right for a role. Notwithstanding this, Professor Becker believes it is the Department’s obligation to provide all students, particularly those students enrolled in the BFA program, with an opportunity to perfect their craft.

4. *Responses from the Theatre Department’s Faculty and Staff.*

The Investigator asked each of the Department’s current faculty and staff members about student concerns that there are insufficient opportunities for students of color to participate in the Department’s main stage productions. Generally, the faculty deny that they select students for main stage productions simply for diversity’s sake. The faculty also deny that the Department neglects to cast students of color in main stage productions. Professor McDonald admitted that the Department has not statistically done well at giving students of color a “fair shot” at being selected for main stage productions. However, the professor believes the Department is doing well now and cited the casting of two students of color in the lead roles for “The Importance of Being Earnest” as an example.

Several of the faculty members interviewed described efforts the Department has recently undertaken to track and outline each of the productions for the last five years and the race and/or ethnic identity of each of the students selected for the cast. According to the faculty, Professor Krystal Kennel created the “CSU Dept. of Theatre Cast Breakdown” chart in the Fall of 2019, after student concerns regarding casting first came to light.

Most of the professors interviewed expressed that the size of the Theatre Department necessarily means that there are not enough roles for students of all genders and races. In Professor Kennel’s opinion, the ratio of students of color who are selected for main stage productions has improved in recent years and roughly matches the percentage of students of color in the Department.

Professor Turner agreed, noting that while there are problems with casting and the availability of opportunities for students of color, but thinks the issue is more nuanced than the students suggest. He told the Investigator that the universe of roles specifically for people of color is small and this is an “underserved” space in the theatre industry generally. In Professor Turner’s opinion, the fact that students believe the Department includes a production written by

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a Black playwright every few years shows “some conscious effort to put it on stage” and an improvement from previous years. Overall, Professor Turner feels the Department is “nudging in the right direction” but acknowledges there is still work to be done. Many of the professors interviewed expressed a similar opinion.

Some of the Department’s faculty members expressed a concern that students believe that participation in main stage productions provides the only meaningful opportunity to develop concrete skills. The faculty emphasized that the Department provides several opportunities for students to exercise the skills learned in the classroom beyond the main stage productions, including performances during the Department’s One Act Festival, in student productions, and various lab and reading series. Students may also participate in shows produced by The Springer Opera House. Some faculty members also told the Investigator that they believe the greater benefit to students comes from the skills they learn in the classroom because students gain more skills that will be useful after graduation in the classroom.

D. Diversity of the Theatre Department’s Faculty and Staff.

1. *Student Concerns Regarding Lack of Diversity.*

The petitions circulated by current and former students of the Theatre Department expressed concern with the lack of diversity among the Theatre Department’s faculty and staff. Specifically, the petition circulated by current students took issue with the fact that there are no people of color among the Theatre Department’s full-time faculty members and stated “[o]ne Part-time employee is not proper representation. We deserve a staff that reflects the world we live in.” See *Proper Representation Is A Must*, IPETITIONS.ORG (2019), <https://www.ipetitions.com/petition/proper-representation-is-a-must> (“CSU Student Petition”). Students also expressed concern that the Theatre Department’s existing diverse faculty and staff members do not have a role in the selection of the Department’s main stage productions or other Department-wide decision-making. *Id.*

During individual interviews, current and former students of all races shared their belief that the Theatre Department suffers from a lack of diversity. Former Student H remarked that in her four years at CSU, she has had one Black professor. Other current and former students made similar comments. Students expressed a concern that faculty members who are people of color are “being driven away as a result of what they’ve experienced” in the Theatre Department.

The Theatre Department’s current and former students also share a belief that part-time faculty members who are people of color, like Jamila Turner, should have been promoted to full-time professorships. Both current and former students told the Investigator that people of color, including Ms. Turner, expressed an interest in full-time positions but were simply not hired. Generally, students were upset over Ms. Turner’s resignation from the Department and believe the Department’s failure to promote her to a full-time position was to blame. One student told the Investigator that, in his opinion, Ms. Turner was mistreated in more ways than a lack of

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promotion to a full-time position. Student P explained that in his first year he took an “Introduction to Acting” course taught by Ms. Turner and witnessed other faculty members “talking down to her” when they observed her class.

The Investigator asked Ms. Turner about her experience as a part-time professor in the Department. Turner shared that in her time in the Theatre Department she “was not taken care of or valued.” She feels the Department retained her for six years with the promise of being promoted to full-time but wanted her to be part of the Department for her “Blackness.”

The Investigator also asked Professor Natalia Temegsen, a former part-time professor in the Theatre Department and current professor in CSU’s English Department, about her experience in the Department. Professor Temegsen told the Investigator that she spoke with Dr. Dooley about her interest in a full-time position in the Department and was told that the Department did not have the budget to create such a position. Professor Temegsen observed that the Theatre Department’s Black faculty members “tend to be on the periphery” and noted that she was not invited to faculty meetings because of her status as a part-time faculty member. Professor Temegsen expressed a concern that recruiting and retaining diverse faculty members is not a priority for the Department.

Finally, the Investigator asked Professor Elizabeth Reeves about her experience as a part-time professor in the Department. Professor Reeves told the Investigator that because she is a part-time professor, she historically was not invited to participate in faculty members or the season selection process. She has recently been invited to attend faculty meetings. Professor Reeves has expressed an interest in both directing more of the Theatre Department’s productions and teaching additional courses. According to Professor Reeves, Dr. Dooley was receptive to her interest in both but told her that there are not additional courses available for Professor Reeves to teach. Professor Reeves told the Investigator that if she was offered a full-time position in the Theatre Department, she would accept.

2. *Responses from the Theatre Department’s Faculty and Staff.*

Every faculty and staff member the Investigator interviewed acknowledged that the Theatre Department lacks diversity in their ranks. Several of the professors interviewed told the Investigator that the Department has discussed ways to improve the diversity of its faculty and staff but note that the decision to hire (and create the budget for) a diverse faculty member must be made by the University. Professor McGraw told the Investigator that if there is an opportunity to hire additional faculty members increasing diversity would be a “priority.” Before the investigation, increasing the diversity of the Department’s faculty was “an important consideration.”

The Investigator asked Dr. Dooley about efforts to increase the diversity of the Department’s faculty and staff. Dr. Dooley told the Investigator that he attempted to create a position in the Department that Jamila Turner would have qualified for and brought this request

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to the attention of the Dean of the College of Arts, Ron Wirt, for 4-5 of the years Ms. Turner was a part-time faculty member. Despite these efforts, the budget for a full-time position was not granted.

Dr. Dooley agrees that there is a “great need” for more diversity among the Department’s faculty and staff. During his interview, Dr. Dooley told the Investigator that the Department was actively recruiting a visiting professor for theatre history with the goal of that position becoming a full-time, tenure-track position. Dr. Dooley noted that the Department’s advertisement for the position and recruiting tactics have not had a particular emphasis on diversity and stated that Professor McGraw is overseeing this search.

E. The Selection of People of Color for “Caricature” Roles that Misrepresent the Experience or Character of People of Color.

In a petition authored by students currently enrolled in the Theatre Department, students expressed concern about and demanded “[p]roductions that show POC as individuals and not caricatures.” See CSU Student Petition. A petition authored by alumni of the Theatre Department similarly demanded that the Theatre Department’s faculty and staff “[e]liminate casting Black and People of Color in stereotypical roles within productions.” See DeMarco-Jacobson, Jessica, *Black CSU Theatre Alumni issue public statement calling for action against systemic racism within department*, THE SABER (July 2, 2020), <https://csusaber.com/culture/Black-csu-theatre-alumni-issue-public-statement-calling-for-action-against-systemic-racism-within-department/> (“CSU Alumni Petition”).

During individual interviews, the Investigator asked current and former students to identify and describe productions in which students of color were cast in roles that were a “caricature” or stereotypical of the experience or character of people of color.

1. Casting of an African American student as the “maid” in “The Children’s Hour.”

Several students identified the Theatre Department’s production of “The Children’s Hour” (2018-2019) as an example of stereotypical casting or casting of students of color in roles that amounted to “caricature.” Students explained that in that production a student of color was cast as a maid. Students acknowledged, however, that a person of color was also selected for the lead role in “The Children’s Hour.”

Former Part-time Professor Jamila Turner also identified “The Children’s Hour” as an example of stereotypical casting. In her opinion, students of color are “typecast by their physical appearance” and placed in stereotypical roles based on the same.

2. *Casting of African American students in roles featuring other stereotypical professions or characteristics.*

Many students noted that the main stage productions that included students of color required the students to play the role of a basketball player, maid, or another stereotypical profession. For example, 3 students told the Investigator that in the Theatre Department's production of "Freckleface Strawberry" (2019-2020) a Black student was cast as a basketball player. Students reported that during rehearsals for the show, Professor Brenda May Ito commented that the student wouldn't require much instruction for the role and "should already know how to play basketball."

Student B told the Investigator that during the Department's production of "Vanya, Sonia, Masha, and Spike," (2016-2017) directed by Professor Molly Claassen, she was called back to read for the role of the maid. Student B believes she was asked to read for the maid's role "for my skin color." She told the Investigator that Professor Claassen directed students reading for the maid's role to portray the character as "crazy" and "voodoo-like" with a Caribbean dialect. Student B was not selected for that role.¹⁴ According to Student A, another student of color was ultimately cast as the maid in this production.

Several students also expressed concerns with the casting of students of color in "Peter and the Starcatcher," (2019-2020) also directed by Professor Claassen. Students told the Investigator that the two students of color selected for the show played the role of a prisoner with bags of their head and no speaking roles.

One former student, who attended CSU between 2008 and 2013 and spoke on the condition of anonymity, told the Investigator that during the Department's production "The Great Trailer Park Musical," she was cast as a "stripper."

One student told the Investigator that when she is selected for the lead role in the Department's main stage productions, she faces a different circumstance in which she is asked to "ignore her Blackness" to fill the role. Student Q explained that, for example, she was cast as the lead in "The Children's Hour" (2018-2019) but felt as though the play's content "ignored the Black experience." The costuming required her to wear her hair "sleek" and in a bun. Student Q told the Investigator that felt she was forced to straighten her hair to achieve this look and was discouraged from wearing natural curls. Student Q did not specify who discouraged her from wearing her hair in its natural state. Student Q also noted that during the rehearsal process for "The Children's Hour" she tried to bring her ideas for the role to Professor Claassen's attention,

¹⁴ Student B also told the Investigator that she believes Professor Claassen's and the other faculty's casting decisions stem from a lack of accountability in the Department. Student B notes that Professor Claassen, as a white woman, may not be aware of the stereotypical nature of the roles she selects Black students for, but believes it is the job of the Theatre Department's leadership to advise her and hold her accountable.

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and wanted the character to be portrayed as a “strong Black woman.” According to Student Q, Professor Claassen encouraged her to portray the role as written in the script.

Student K expressed a similar concern when asked by the Investigator about his experience in the Theatre Department and expressed that he feels students must “mute your Blackness to work with professors.”

3. *The Theatre Department’s Spring 2020 “main stage” production of “Milk Like Sugar.”*

Several students interviewed also identified “Milk Like Sugar” (2019-2020) as an example of a production with roles that were stereotypical of the perceived experience and behavior of African Americans. Student B told the Investigator that “Milk Like Sugar” was “the epitome of a caricature of a Black woman.” She explained that Professor Graver created the costumes for the show, and “what he thought Black women were . . . that’s what we saw on the stage.” Student L told the Investigator that she initially believed “Milk Like Sugar” was a great selection because it would feature a cast of Black students. After participating in the show’s production, Student L feels the Black students “looked like a fool” because it portrayed them, and the characters they embodied, as inner-city youth. Part-time professor Elizabeth Reeves also felt that “Milk Like Sugar” was stereotypical but decided to direct the play because she did not trust another director to adequately address and overcome the show’s stereotypes.

When discussing these examples of stereotypical or “caricature” roles, many students expressed frustration and concern that the Theatre Department’s faculty and staff did not perceive Black students as fit for any other roles. Student B explained that “[a] lot of our professors are unable to see us in any other role.” She further explained that the Theatre Department’s faculty do not see students of color as fit for roles outside of “mammy” or “caricature” roles.

Throughout the Investigation, students acknowledged that the Department’s production of “Milk Like Sugar” was successful and well-done. Students also acknowledged that the Department hosted a “talk back” after the program so that audience members could discuss the show’s racial and potentially stereotypical themes with a guest speaker. However, students attribute the success of “Milk Like Sugar” and the Department’s agreement to host a “talk back” to the efforts of Part-time Professor Elizabeth Reeves.

One former student, Former Student F, expressed a different opinion and told the Investigator that he does not believe faculty members engage in intentional type-casting or stereotypical casting.

4. *Responses from the Theatre Department's Faculty and Staff.*

All of the Theatre Department's faculty and staff deny that they cast students of color in caricature roles or direct students to portray diverse characters in stereotypical ways. Instead, the faculty told the Investigator that—in their opinion—the roles described above are not caricatures or stereotypical at all. For example, according to one professor, though one student of color was selected for the role of a maid in "The Children's Hour," the maid was "one of the smartest characters" in the show and was not directed stereotypically. The faculty also emphasized that two students of color were selected for lead roles in the show.

When asked about "Freckle Face Strawberry," some of the faculty emphasized that the basketball-playing character was played by a White student, not a student of color, and the character was not portrayed as a thug.

During individual interviews, Professor Claassen told the Investigator that though a student of color was cast as the maid who practices voodoo in "Vanya, Sonia, Masha, and Spike," the role "was written to be that way." She believes the role was written as a Caribbean woman and, therefore, a person of color should fill the role. Professor Claassen reiterated that her casting decision in this play "was not a matter of creative license," and instead followed the script. Professor Claassen also noted that there were only six roles in the show so each of the students had a lead role with a significant amount of lines.

When asked about "Peter and the Starcatcher," Professor Claassen told the Investigator that the students played a "multitude of different roles" throughout the show. Though two of the students of color were at one point captured and imprisoned, they were not the only characters to be bound and they were not bound for the majority of the show. Professor Claassen denied that the students of color were singled out and explained that the script was written to have the characters bound for one scene.

When asked about "Milk Like Sugar," the faculty acknowledged that the play has stereotypical themes but believe it was written to rise above that. The faculty do not agree with and deny the students' contention that "this is how the faculty see us."

F. Diversity of the Theatre Department's Curriculum.

Throughout the investigation, current and former students expressed a concern that the Theatre Department's curriculum does not include the study of plays and other materials authored by Black playwrights, featuring Black characters, or otherwise relevant to the training and experience of Black actors. Some students identified Professor Rachel Blackburn, former professor Becky Becker, Professor Larry McDonald, and former professor Kate Musgrove as the only faculty members who endeavored to teach about diversity and inclusion. Other courses allegedly lacked this material. For example, students expressed a concern that the Department's voice and movement course, included in the Department's two-year Meisner training program

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for BFA – theatre performance students, taught European dialects but not Caribbean or African dialects. Students also expressed a concern that the Department’s script analysis courses did not include scripts written by Black playwrights.

One former student expressed a different opinion, telling the Investigator that the students’ request for classes focusing on diverse playwrights was already met by the material covered in his theatre history course. Former Student F believes that more specific material if the students request it, should be taught in an elective course.

The Investigator requested copies of the syllabi for various courses taught in the Theatre Department, including script analysis. Upon review of these materials, the Investigator determined that materials written by Black playwrights or featuring Black actors were included in the syllabi for the Department’s courses. *See Syllabus, THEA 1175I: Script Analysis, Fall 2019* (July 31, 2019), attached in Appendix A (indicating that among the scripts to be studied for the semester are *Sweat* by Lynn Nottage); *see also Syllabus, THEA 1175I: Script Analysis, Fall 2020* (Aug. 8, 2020), attached in Appendix A. Thus, the Investigator could not conclude by a preponderance of the evidence that the Theatre Department does not have a diverse curriculum.

G. Other Alleged Unprofessional or Insensitive Comments and Conduct Engaged in by the Theatre Department’s Faculty and Staff.

Several current and former students described the culture in the Theatre Department as “toxic” and told the Investigator that they believe this culture is perpetuated by some of the Department’s faculty and staff. Former Student C told the Investigator that she believes the Department does not prioritize students’ mental health and expressed that she transferred to another university for that reason and other stressors caused by the Department. Former Student H told the Investigator that professors in the Theatre Department often made “unkind” comments about various students’ performance and appearance. She also shared that the Department’s professors often “gossip” about students and that she was told some even gossiped about her. Former Student G identified Professor Kimberly Garcia as a faculty member who “gossiped” about students’ behavior or attitudes with other students.

1. Allegations Regarding Professor Steven Graver.

a. Comments about student weight and appearance.

At least 2 students told the Investigator that Professor Graver made comments about the weight and appearance of students while they were students in the Theatre Department.

- Former Student G reported that Professor Graver was her academic advisor during the four years of her undergraduate career at CSU. During one academic advising session, Professor Graver commented that Former Student G, self-described as “a

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larger person,” “didn’t have to look good” because she wouldn’t be on stage.¹⁵ Former Student G acknowledged that this was said in a joking tone, but told the Investigator that it made her feel uncomfortable.

Former Student G described another incident during which Professor Graver allegedly commented that a student was too large and mused that finding a shirt for that student “would be like finding a tent.” Former Student G explained that Professors Graver and Garcia were standing behind a table of students when Professor Graver made this comment. According to Former Student G, she confronted both professors about this comment and asked, “how could you say that?” They responded, “it just makes our jobs harder.”

Former Student G also told the Investigator that both Professor Graver and Garcia have been overheard commenting that thinner students looked “ugly” in certain costumes and complaining about students’ “lack of curves.”

The Investigator asked Professor Graver about these alleged comments. Professor Graver denied telling a student that she did not need to look good because she performed technical roles in the Department’s productions.

Professor Graver admitted that in private conversations he and Professor Garcia have discussed student sizing and finding costumes for larger students. Professor Graver told the Investigator that he may have asked a student where they shop to find clothing the student would feel comfortable in. Professor Graver denied having such conversations in front of other students.

b. *Comments about student capabilities and intelligence.*

At least 3 students told the Investigator that Professor Graver made comments about and made fun of the intelligence of students in the Department.

- Former Student M reported that Professor Graver made fun of students who asked questions about assignments.
- Former Student G reported that both Professor Graver and Garcia regularly “talked down” to students about their intelligence. She also reported that during her studies in the Theatre Department she overheard Professor Graver and Garcia: (1) insult students’ intelligence and call students “retarded”; (2) speak in a mocking tone when students asked questions; (3) call students “stupid”; (4) and tell students they needed to “speak correctly or not at all.” Former Student G

¹⁵ Former Student G explained that she did not participate in any of the Department’s main stage productions because she focused her studies on technical theatre and set design.

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emphasized that these comments were made to students generally and were not limited to students of a specific race.

Former Student G also reported that both Professor Graver and Garcia often said students were being “overdramatic” when they expressed frustration about the coursework.

- Former Student J, who attended CSU between 2002 and 2006, reported that she once overheard Professor Graver call a student a “bitch” after the student asked for an extension on a project.

The Investigator asked Professor Graver about these allegations. When asked if he has used the word “bitch” to describe a student, Professor Graver responded, “I don’t think so.” He admitted that he has thought this to himself but stated that he could not think of an instance when he would have said this aloud. When asked if he has used the word “retarded” to describe a student, Professor Graver responded that he does not use that word. He admitted that he has told students, “there is no such thing as a stupid question unless you ask it five times because you weren’t listening the first four times.”

When asked if he has ever told a student that he or she needs to “speak correctly or not at all,” Professor Graver admitted that he does correct students’ word choice but did not admit to using this phrase. For example, Professor Graver told the Investigator that he corrects students’ use of the word “conversate.”

Professor Graver told the Investigator that he, at times, can “take a tone” with students when he is frustrated and has realized throughout this Investigation that this is something he needs to address and correct. Professor Graver told the Investigator that he can behave this way with both White and Black students. Professor Graver admitted that this is something “I need to police myself on.”

c. *Allegations regarding the use of transgender students' preferred pronouns.*

Student G told the Investigator that Professor Graver engaged in “misgendering” and refused to use the preferred pronouns of transgender students. Student G explained that he began identifying as transgender after he enrolled at CSU but noted that he “has always gone by [Student G].” According to Student G, on several occasions, Professor Graver refused to call him by his preferred name or use his preferred pronouns. Student G explained that he has not legally changed his name so his “dead name” still appears in his student record. Student G reported that Professor Graver referred to him by his “dead name” after being asked not to do so.

Student G also described an incident involving a “gender-swapping” assignment in Professor Graver’s stage makeup class. The assignment required students to bring reference

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photographs of individuals of the opposite gender so that they could recreate their looks. Student G compiled photographs of male individuals but added photographs of female individuals at the end of the packet. According to Student G, when Professor Graver noticed the photographs of the female subjects, he asked Student G to remove them. Student G asked if he could use a female subject for the assignment, and Professor Graver reportedly responded that he would have to complete the assignment based on “what he had”—meaning Student G would have to complete the assignment for the gender opposite to the gender he was assigned at birth.

Former Student G also described this incident to the Investigator and told the Investigator that she overheard Professor Graver say, “you need to do makeup for what you have.”

The Investigator asked Professor Graver about these allegations. Professor Graver told the Investigator that he does not recall using a student’s “dead name” or failing to use a student’s preferred pronouns but stated that this may have inadvertently occurred. Professor Graver noted that Student G is enrolled in a class taught by him this semester and that he had a private email exchanged with Student G before the semester began to be sure he used Student G’s preferred name and pronoun. Professor Graver told the Investigator that he only learned Student G identifies as transgender this semester.

Professor Graver told the Investigator that the “gender-swapping” assignment incident described above “is ringing a bell,” but he does not recall the details of the conversation. He does recall feeling “confused” as to why the student included photographs of males and females in his packet. Professor Graver explained that he prefers not to “assume” a student’s gender so if the student raised a concern about this assignment, he may not have realized this is what he was referring to. Professor Graver did not recall telling students that they had to complete the assignment based on the gender they were assigned at birth but told the Investigator that “it’s possible” this comment was made.

d. Allegations of aggressive physical conduct.

Student E told the Investigator that she has witnessed Professor Graver throw objects at students when he was upset. Student E also told the Investigator that two unnamed students told her that in recent years they were treated at the Bradley Center (a mental health treatment facility in Columbus, Georgia) for issues and/or stressors they attributed to interactions with Professor Graver.

Former Student J, who attended CSU between 2002 and 2006, described another incident during the Department’s production of “Twelfth Night.” According to Former Student J, she worked in the costume shop with other students and Professor Graver to create costumes for the show. One night at approximately 9:00 pm students were sewing a jacket and noticed a piece of the jacket was missing. Former Student J explained that Professor Graver became “very angry” over the missing piece, called students “fucking stupid,” and threw a book at them.

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The Investigator asked Professor Graver about these allegations. Professor Graver admitted to throwing an object at a student when he was “joking around” but told the Investigator that he has never done so out of anger. When asked if he has ever used the words “fucking stupid” to describe a student, Professor Graver responded, “I can’t imagine a situation in which I would use that term.”

2. *Allegations Regarding Professor Kimberly Garcia.*

a. *Comments about student capabilities and intelligence.*

One student told the Investigator that Professor Garcia made comments about and made fun of the intelligence of students in the Department.

- Former Student G reported that both Professor Graver and Garcia regularly “talked down” to students about their intelligence. She also reported that during her studies in the Theatre Department she overheard Professor Graver and Garcia: (1) insult students’ intelligence and call students “retarded”; (2) speak in a mocking tone when students asked questions; (3) call students “stupid”; (4) and tell students they needed to “speak correctly or not at all.” Former Student G emphasized that these comments were made to students generally and were not limited to students of a specific race.

Former Student G also reported that both Professor Graver and Garcia often said students were being “overdramatic” when they expressed frustration about the coursework.

During individual interviews, Professor Garcia denied allegations that she has described or called students “retarded” or “stupid.” And though Professor Garcia admits that she has called students “dramatic,” she explained that “[i]t’s a theatre department, they are all dramatic.”

Professor Garcia also denied allegations that she has told students that they “need to speak correctly or not at all” when asking questions or engaging in conversation in the costume shop. Professor Garcia stated that she has heard Professor Graver make this comment.

b. *Comments about student weight and appearance.*

Former Student G reported that both Professor Garcia and Graver have been overheard commenting that thinner students looked “ugly” in certain costumes and complaining about students’ “lack of curves.”

Professor Garcia denied making comments about students’ weight. She stated that she only refers to a student’s weight when necessary for costume fittings.

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c. *Allegations regarding use of transgender students' preferred pronouns.*

Student G reported that Professor Garcia also engaged in “misgendering” and refused to use the preferred pronouns of transgender students. He noted that on one occasion Professor Garcia told Student G that it was hard to keep track of his and a trans-female student’s preferred pronouns.

3. *Allegations Regarding Professor Brenda May Ito.*

a. *Comments about student attitudes and students being “divas.”*

Two former students reported that Professor Ito described students as “divas.” Former Student M told the Investigator that Professor Ito also commented that such students “needed to be put in their place.” Former Student C reported that though this comment was never made directly to him, he learned from other students that Professor Ito referred to him as a “diva” and made other negative comments about his “attitude.”

The Investigator asked Professor Ito about allegations that she comments about student attitudes and/or behavior. Professor Ito denied engaging in this behavior outside of commenting on student conduct to other faculty members, as described in section A.1.c above.

4. *Allegations Regarding Professor Tim McGraw.*

During her interview, Student B described an incident during which Professor McGraw was overheard not using a transgender student’s preferred pronoun. Student B explained that before a Department-wide convocation (Student B couldn’t remember the date), Professor McGraw was standing in the lobby and a student knocked at the door. Professor McGraw said, “can someone let him in?” Student B corrected Professor McGraw and said the subject student’s preferred pronouns were “she/her.” According to Student B, Professor McGraw did not acknowledge this and walked away.

The investigator asked Professor McGraw about this alleged incident. According to Professor McGraw, he has only inadvertently used the wrong pronouns when referring to a transgender student on one occasion and “immediately corrected himself.” He recalls the incident described above and explained that during the incident the student yelled “[the subject student] wants to be called she,” and informed him that she was a member of the student diversity board and it was her duty to stand up for other students. Professor McGraw responded, “I did not call [the subject student] ‘he.’” The subject student then responded, “leave Tim alone.”

Given Professor McGraw’s response and the lack of corroborating statements by other current or former students, the Investigator could not conclusively determine by a preponderance of the evidence that the students preferred pronouns were not used.

5. *Allegations Regarding Professor Rachel Blackburn.*

Two students expressed concerns about Professor Rachel Blackburn's conduct and the content used in courses Professor Blackburn teaches.

Former Student A told the Investigator that in a theatre history course taught by Professor Blackburn, students and Professor Blackburn were having a classroom discussion about the course material and a Black student was more vocal than others. According to Former Student A, the conversation became heated and Professor Blackburn commented that the Black student was "attacking her" with her commentary. Former Student A told the Investigator that similar incidents happened on more than one occasion, and during one incident Professor Blackburn stormed out of class.

Former Student A described another incident that allegedly took place during the production of the "Rocky Horror Picture Show" at The Springer Opera House. Professor Blackburn and students from the Theatre Department were working on the show, and during one rehearsal Professor Blackburn allegedly commented to a student (who was mostly undressed), "I didn't know you were packing down there." At the time of our interview, Former Student A told the Investigator that he had a meeting scheduled with CSU's Title IX Coordinator(s) to discuss this incident.

Student E expressed concerns about the material used in Professor Blackburn's courses. She alleged that in the Spring of 2020 she took a Devising Performance class with Professor Blackburn and some of the material and videos used were outdated and racially insensitive. For example, In February 2020, during a lecture on satire and political humor, Professor Blackburn used the "White Klansman video" by Dave Chappelle in which the "n-word" is said by White individuals over and over. In another classroom session, Professor Blackburn shared a video of comedian Lisa Lampanelli to show how people take on personas on stage. Approximately two minutes into the video, someone in the video commented "I live in a White neighborhood and most crime is committed by Black people."

The Investigator asked Professor Blackburn about these allegations. Professor Blackburn admitted the media as described above but denied that she intentionally included the material for its racial or discriminatory themes.

Professor Blackburn recalled showing students a sketch by Dave Chappelle during the Spring 2020 semester of her "Devising Performance" course to illustrate satire. In the sketch, Chappelle plays a blind African American male who joins the Ku Klux Klan because he does not know he is Black. Professor Blackburn told students that the sketch contained some "derogatory language" and allowed students to leave the classroom if they felt uncomfortable. Professor Blackburn explained that part of her teaching philosophy involves using comedy, one unit during her "Devising Performance" course as an example of satire and political humor. She teaches her students, however, that comedy should be used to "punch up" not "punch down" or further

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denigrate marginalized groups. Professor Blackburn believes the sketch was an example of “punching up.”

Professor Blackburn also recalled showing students a video featuring Lisa Lampanelli but explained that the video was used as an example of “punching down” and unacceptable satire. She admits that the video commented that most of the crime took place in neighborhoods populated by people of color and turned off the video as soon as she heard the comment. Though Professor Blackburn watched the video before showing it to students, she admitted that its content was “worse than I remembered” and apologized to the students.

During individual interviews, Professor Blackburn denied engaging in any behavior students have alleged and/or described as inappropriate or unprofessional. She did not recall telling students in her theatre history class that she felt “attacked.” Professor Blackburn also denied ending classroom discussions because she felt uncomfortable with the subject or “attacked.”

Regarding the alleged comment about a student packing, Professor Black stated that: “[T]his was not something I have ever said at all. I know better than to say something so inappropriate to a student, would never say that to begin with anyhow, and moreover, I was not involved with that production in any capacity, not even as an audience member. In fact, I believe the last time they produced that show was in 2017, before I’d ever moved to Columbus, GA upon being hired. I wasn’t even physically here or employed here until 2018. This allegation is completely false, and all I can think is maybe they have me confused with someone else. To my knowledge, I have never discussed that show with any student here. (And I likely wouldn’t, given the mature/adult themes in that show.)”

6. Allegations Regarding Professor Amy Taylor.

During individual interviews, one student told the Investigator that Professor Amy Taylor, who teaches courses in dance, has on more than one occasion told him to “don’t be sassy to me” or don’t “have an attitude” during dance rehearsals. The student believes this is racially motivated and told the Investigator that he has not observed Professor Taylor making similar comments to White students. The student explained that these comments at the very least make him uncomfortable in the current political and/or social climate.

The Investigator did not hear similar concerns regarding Professor Taylor’s conduct from current or former students, and therefore the student’s comments were not corroborated. Moreover, the student’s concerns are outside of the initial scope of this investigation.

7. Allegations Regarding Professor Sam Renner.

One former student described an incident in which Professor Sam Renner, who teaches courses on set design, made what the student perceived to an unprofessional comment on the

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last day of the Spring 2019 semester. According to Former Student M, on the last day of the semester, he went into the classroom to find a check-in sheet for a course that was taught by Professor Renner. When he went into the classroom, Former Student M and Professor Renner discussed an assignment and Professor Renner said, “I’m going to give you a C so you can pass.” Professor Renner then allegedly told the student that he was “the biggest disappointment” and wished him luck in his career.

The Investigator did not hear similar concerns regarding Professor Renner’s conduct from current or former students, and therefore the student’s comments were not corroborated. Moreover, the student’s concerns are outside of the initial scope of this investigation.

8. *Responses from the Theatre Department’s Faculty and Staff.*

Please see sections G.1-7 above.

H. Discussion of Student Concerns with the Theatre Department’s Faculty and Staff

1. *Allegations Regarding the Theatre Department’s Failure to Respond to Student Concerns.*

Throughout the investigation, many current and former students expressed frustration with the perceived lack of acknowledgment of their concerns by certain members of the Theatre Department’s faculty and staff. Students identified Professor Krystal Kennel, Professor David Turner, Professor Rachel Blackburn, and Professor Larry McDonald as an “ally” in their efforts to bring their concerns about race and diversity in the Department to Dr. Larry Dooley’s (Chair of the Theatre Department) attention. One student told the Investigator that he believes Professor Turner is one of the few professors in the Theatre Department “who actually care about us.” Students believe other faculty, including Dr. Dooley, have not adequately acknowledged and addressed their concerns.

In November 2019, students met with Dr. Dooley to discuss conditions in the Theatre Department and the production of “Milk Like Sugar.” According to Student B, the students told Dr. Dooley that it was unfair that the only production involving students of color portrayed them in this light, and shared that “Milk Like Sugar” was upsetting because “a lot of the times this is how people see us.” Student B told the Investigator that during this meeting students raised their concerns over perceived racially insensitive comments made by Professors Ito, Graver, and Garcia. According to Student B, Dr. Dooley wrote these comments down and said it was the first time he heard about them. At the end of the meeting, Dr. Dooley assured the students that an apology would be made to the student body for selecting “Milk Like Sugar” and that a town hall meeting would be held to discuss tensions in the Theatre Department. Student B told the Investigator that she left this meeting feeling encouraged but ultimately felt nothing came of it. Student A relayed a similar account of this meeting with Dr. Dooley to the Investigator.

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In March 2020, another group of students met with Dr. Dooley to discuss the perceived lack of casting opportunities for students of color. Student J and Student Q told the Investigator that they asked Dr. Dooley if they could attend a faculty meeting to share their ideas to improve casting with the Department's faculty and staff. According to Student J and Student Q, Dr. Dooley responded that the Department was working to diversify the shows selected and explained this was an ongoing process and would take time to change. In the interim, Dr. Dooley suggested that the Department host a town hall meeting for students to share their concerns.

In June 2020, Dr. Dooley sent a Department-wide email to provide a platform for students to discuss societal issues regarding race and diversity. In this email, Professor Dooley encouraged open conversation with "an eye towards making things better." Several students in the Department responded with their concerns about race and diversity in the Theatre Department. A few students also responded with calls for the termination of some faculty members, including Professors Ito, Graver, and Garcia. Dr. Dooley responded as follows:

Good morning, all,

I have spent the morning pulling together some thoughts (and actions) for the department, based on a meeting of the faculty. I hope to send that out before too long.

Let me ask one thing of you, however. As great and beneficial as I find this email thread, some comments are becoming personal and hurtful. Let me appeal to you better angels on that one.

Obviously, I can no more control what you say here than elsewhere, but I am still asking. There is nothing I can actually do about it, but if the intent is to have people read your comments, please know that I will stop reading if this only becomes like so much other social media.

Let's keep our aims high.

Best,
Larry

Email from Dr. Larry Dooley to Nia Robinson, *et al.* (June 1, 2020, 9:58 AM) ("Theatre Department Emails"), attached in Appendix A.

Dr. Dooley later followed up and wrote:

Respectfully, I disagree.

If the purpose in engaging in personal attack is to make the reader better understand the pain you have felt, it only causes me to question my empathy for both. I think there is still

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a place in this for respectful disagreement. Many have already made convincing and constructive observations about the paid that exists, and they have done it without vitriol and personal attack.

Email from Dr. Larry Dooley to Nia Robinson, *et al.* (June 1, 2020, 10:31 AM) (“Theatre Department Emails”), attached in Appendix A.

According to Student A, he responded that the students’ voices should not be silenced. Dr. Dooley and Student A exchanged private emails in which they agreed that change in the Department was needed and Student A offered to be a “bridge” between the faculty and students. A short while later, Dr. Dooley asked Student A to organize a student advisory board to advise on productions students would be interested in including in the upcoming season.

2. *Responses from the Theatre Department’s Faculty and Staff*

During individual interviews, Dr. Dooley told the Investigator that he first learned about many of the issues that are the subject of this investigation during his October 4, 2019 meeting with Student A and Student B, described above. Dr. Dooley denied that it allowed the students’ concerns to languish, and told the Investigator that in the next faculty meeting (scheduled for October 9, 2019) he spoke with the faculty about many of the issues, including concerns about casting, the inclusion of diverse materials in script analysis and voice classes, the provision of appropriate costuming and makeup for students of color, etc. Dr. Dooley told the Investigator that there was a consensus among the faculty that these issues needed to be addressed. Dr. Dooley denied that he promised students a town hall meeting during October 2019. According to Dr. Dooley, the decision to host a town hall meeting was not made until January or February of 2020. Dr. Dooley told the Investigator that he did not mention the idea to a student until February.

Dr. Dooley told the Investigator that diversity, both in season selection and in faculty, has long been a priority for the Theatre Department.

When asked how he intended to hold the faculty accountable for addressing these issues, Dr. Dooley told the Investigator that he did not feel he had many resources to do so. Though he is the Department Chair, Dr. Dooley considers himself a “first among equals” when interacting with the Department’s faculty and staff. For this reason, he does not feel that he can require the faculty to include more diverse materials in their coursework or increase the variety of makeup provided to students. Dr. Dooley told the Investigator that he feels he has “very little authority” over the faculty’s course materials and topics discussed in classroom discussions. Dr. Dooley described these as matters subject to “academic freedom,” though he acknowledged that he has some “power of persuasion” as the Chair of the Department. Dr. Dooley told the Investigator that he did not follow up with the faculty to ensure they undertook efforts to address these concerns in the Spring 2020 semester. Instead, Dr. Dooley trusted that these issues “would be on their

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radar for the next opportunity.”¹⁶ Dr. Dooley also told the Investigator that he will raise these issues with the faculty again if he hears from students that these issues have not been addressed.

When the Investigator asked Dr. Dooley about his response to student emails exchanged in the Department-wide June 2020 email, the following exchange took place:

The Investigator: Let me ask, I want to pivot for a moment, and then we’re gonna. . .we’ll revisit this when we talk about the specific concerns a bit more. Um, because we got far afield. I was asking. . .I started asking you why you began the chain and then I think we went in a different area, so I want to come back to that, that email chain that was started in June. Why did you begin that?

Dr. Dooley: Uh, it . . . it was in response to, uh, a handful of emails that all came in at the same time from students who were saying um . . . and I’ve already gone through that. It was White students who were saying that they benefited from White privilege and that their classmates hadn’t had the same opportunities, and why didn’t they ever get the townhall.

And so I felt at that moment that I really had to reach out. . .uh, you know, please remember that uh, we were all very very concerned about all of our students being sent home during the pandemic. And the fact that a lot of them were having great mental anxiety. They were under distress, and I honestly sent it out, uh, as an attempt to express my concern and what I felt was the concern of all the faculty.

The Investigator: Okay. And at, um, some point you reversed course in the email. I think the first email was one of. . .well let’s just pull it up.

[Ms. Singleton pulls up the “Theatre Department Emails” email, dated June 1, 2020, and attached in Appendix A.]

. . .

The Investigator: Let’s see. Shaniqua, what you are showing me now? Is this the second email? Oh, is this the end of the first one? So you’re saying “Respond or read as you will, but I hope we can do this openly and with an eye towards making things better.” Why did you include that sentence, “I hope we can do this openly and with an eye towards making things better”? What was your. . .because I. . .I . . .it seems like you put a lot of thought

¹⁶ In response to Dr. Dooley’s remarks, the Investigator requested recent evaluations completed by Dr. Dooley for each of the faculty members in the Theatre Department. A review of those documents, completed for the 2019 calendar year, did not show that the issues of race and diversity that are the subject of this investigation were included in Dr. Dooley’s evaluations.

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into the email, so I was just wondering what you had in mind when you added that last sentence.

Dr. Dooley: Oh . . . uh . . . uh . . . I was hoping that what happened would not happen. Which in my mind was, uh, personal attack.

The Investigator: Okay. Alright. Um. . . so you wanted honest communication, but you didn't want the personal attacks?

Dr. Dooley: I, yeah. I . . . I believe that, uh, it's fair to have the rules of engagement.

The Investigator: Okay.

[Ms. Singleton pulls up the second in time email sent by Dr. Dooley, Email from Dr. Larry Dooley to Nia Robinson, et al. (June 1, 2020, 10:31 AM) ("Theatre Department Emails"), attached in Appendix A.]

. . .

The Investigator: Okay. "Good morning all." Does this look like the second email you sent after receiving all of the feedback where folks were sharing their specific experiences?

Dr. Dooley: Uh . . . uh, I believe that's correct.

The Investigator: Okay. Alright. So "I have spent the morning putting together some thoughts (and actions) for the department, based on a meeting of the faculty."

What date is this? June 3rd. Okay. Alright, June 3rd. Let's go back down.

"Based on a meeting with the faculty. I hope to send that out before too long. Let me ask one thing of you, however. As great and beneficial as I find this email thread, some comments are becoming personal and hurtful. Let me appeal to you better angels on that one."

"Obviously, I can no more control what you say here than elsewhere, but I am still asking. There is nothing I can actually do about it, but if the intent is to have people read your comments, please know that I will stop reading if this only becomes like so much other social media. Let's keep our aims high."

So, tell us. . . um. . . tell us why you sent that email, and um . . . just explain to us what your intention was there?

Dr. Dooley: I was being protective of some faculty members. Um, I'd been contacted by one, in particular, I can't remember if it was a phone call or email, Kim Garcia, who. . . uh,

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was crying. If it was an email, I still knew she was crying. She was greatly upset. Greatly distressed that she was being targeted and was going to be fired.

And, I'd heard from a couple others that . . .that they also thought "What do the students want? Let's just get fired." And so, I was feeling protective. I also felt that it wasn't a fair fight at this point because none of those people could respond, I don't think, with specific examples of students' misbehavior or misunderstanding without, you know, violating some sort of confidentiality and professionalism.¹⁷

VII. IMPACT ON STUDENT AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Generally, current and former students believe the Theatre Department is well-known in the state and country for its theatre programming and training, and attribute the Theatre Department's reputation, as well as the faculty and staff, with providing career prospects and opportunities for admission to graduate programs after graduation. Many students told the Investigator that they decided to complete their undergraduate studies at CSU because of this reputation.

A few students were first exposed to the Theatre Department as high school students attending the Georgia Thespian Conference, held on CSU's campus each year. The conference provides high school students with an opportunity to take theatre-specific courses and learn skills that may not be available at their high schools. Student O described the conference as being "like Disney World," and noted that it was "one of the best parts of being a theatre kid." Student O told the Investigator that she "fell in love" with the Theatre Department after attending the conference. According to Student O, that was not the environment she encountered when she enrolled in the Theatre Department. In sum, Student O told the Investigator that she thought CSU's Theatre Department "would be like Narnia" but feels "this is not Narnia at all. Or maybe it is like Narnia when the Ice Queen ruled."

Other students told the Investigator that they began their studies in CSU's Theatre Department with "high hopes" but left with their dreams "crushed" because of the lack of casting opportunities for students of color and ongoing issues related to race and diversity in the Department. Student L told the Investigator that she believes the Departments faculty and staff simply do not "see" the students, especially the students of color.

One former student told the Investigator that he fears a breakdown in communication has occurred between the Theatre Department's faculty and students. Former Student F believes any discomfort students feel in speaking with the faculty about the subject(s) of this investigation suggests a "more intrinsic problem than race." He feels that if students cannot speak up, it affects

¹⁷ Quoted from an audiovisual recording of the Investigator's August 27, 2020 interview of Dr. Dooley, recorded at Dr. Dooley's request via the GoToMeeting platform maintained by Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough LLP.

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the creative process. And if faculty cannot discuss “the message of a play” for fear of offending a student, that impacts faculty-student relationships. Former Student F fears this investigation will hurt faculty-student relationships, and that CSU’s Theatre Department will “go the way of the dodo.”

The Investigator asked many students what they hoped would result from this investigation. Many current and former students expressed that they are not optimistic there will be much change from the Theatre Department’s faculty and staff as a result of this investigation. Some students told the Investigator that they believe the Department’s faculty and staff are expressing some remorse or addressing issues of race and diversity now “to cover themselves.” Other students suggested that the Department’s faculty and staff need training on issues of diversity and inclusion. Other students still told the Investigator that they believe some of the Department’s faculty and staff should no longer be a part of the Department, namely Professors Ito, Graver, and Garcia.

VIII. FINDINGS

Witness interviews make clear that there is an air of distrust and racial tension between faculty and students of color within the Theatre Department that has existed for at least 13 years. The current student body, consisting of both Black and White students, was overwhelmingly consistent in their view that students of color are subject to biases and unequal treatment in the form of disparate opportunities and racially or culturally insensitive comments. Most of the examples provided were often described by the students as micro-aggressions—referring to frequent verbal or behavioral indignities, intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative attitudes toward stigmatized or culturally marginalized groups—as opposed to blatantly racist comments, although there was evidence of comments that also rose to that level.

Based on the review of evidence and interviews conducted in this case we find the following:

A. Alleged Racially Insensitive Comments

During individual interviews, both current and former students of all races told the investigator that some of the Theatre Department’s faculty have: (1) made discriminatory and/or racially insensitive comments about students of color or (2) have engaged in conduct that appears to be discriminatory and/or racially insensitive toward students of color.

As to the claim that the makeup kits used by Professor Graver did not include adequate shades for people of color, Professor Graver produced documents showing that the makeup kits ordered for his stage makeup courses do include a range of shades for people of color. Professor Graver explained that he orders the makeup kits as they appear on the website for the company from which they are ordered. He also orders additional shades to match students with different

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skin tones. Investigator finds that there is insufficient evidence to substantiate these claims by a preponderance of the evidence.

As to the criticism that Professor Graver does not take equal care in performing makeup demonstrations for students of color, who contend that they are often left to figure out how to recreate the demonstrations, the Investigator finds there is insufficient evidence to substantiate this claim by a preponderance of the evidence.

Regarding the allegations surrounding the unequal treatment of African American students during classroom make-up demonstrations, as well as the complaint that a class makeup exercise essentially required students to perform in “Blackface”, the Investigator finds the student claims to be credible; however, there is insufficient evidence to substantiate these claims.

As to the allegations surrounding costuming for students of color in various mainstage productions, including Milk Like Sugar and The Children’s Hour, the Investigator finds that there is some evidence to corroborate these claims. Concerning the costumes in Milk Like Sugar, Professor Graver acknowledges that Visiting Professor Reeves raised concerns with him that the costumes for that production were “hypersexualized”. Professor Graver explained his costume choices were informed by the script. Nevertheless, after speaking with Professor Reeves, Professor Graver ultimately changed the costumes so that they were more appropriate for teenagers. Professor Graver’s initial costume decision, however, speaks to the cultural insensitivities which is among the claims raised in this case. The Investigator finds that there is insufficient evidence to substantiate these claims by a preponderance of the evidence.

On the issue of unprofessional conduct by Professor Graver in general, such as calling students by profane language and throwing items at students, these issues do not go directly to the claims of race and color that are the subject of this Investigation. However, Professor Graver admits that he has used a “tone” with Black and White students in the past and acknowledged this behavior that he is actively working to correct. The Investigator finds that there is insufficient evidence to substantiate these claims by a preponderance of the evidence.

Finally, the Investigator was unable to confirm that Professor Graver purposefully refused to refer to transgender students by their preferred pronoun. Professor Graver noted a transgender student is enrolled in a class taught by him this semester. Professor Graver presented an email to the Investigator which showed an email exchange between himself and a transgender student in which he sought clarification of the student’s preferred pronoun. The Investigator finds that there is insufficient evidence to substantiate these claims by a preponderance of the evidence.

A total of 7 students told the Investigator that Professor Graver described their hair or the hair of other students as “nappy” during a costume fitting or other interactions. Students of all races and ethnic backgrounds heard Graver make these comments. While Professor Graver

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vehemently denies making these claims, the Investigator finds convincing that an alumna, with no bias or vested interest in the outcome of the investigation, stated that Graver used the word “nappy” about her hair under similar circumstances, some 13 years ago. Thus, the Investigator finds that it is more likely than not that Graver has used the word “nappy” to refer to the hair texture of students of color. Moreover, the fact that this type of conduct reportedly occurred 13 years ago underscores the longstanding nature of the cultural and racial insensitivities that have occurred within the Department.

At least 4 students told the Investigator that Professor Garcia used the word “nappy” to refer to the hair texture of African American students. Professor Garcia admits that she used the phrase on one occasion and was not aware that it was a derogatory term until she was confronted by the aunt of the student to whom she made the comment. First, the Investigator finds it troubling that a college Professor would be unaware of the negative and racial connotations associated with the use of the phrase “nappy” in describing the hair texture of African Americans. Second, the student’s claims are corroborated by Professor Graver who stated that he has heard Professor Garcia use this phrase on at least two occasions. Also, these claims were made by both White and Black students. Thus, the Investigator finds it more likely than not that Professor Garcia has used the phrase “nappy” about the hair texture of African American students.

Finally, at least 4 students stated that they have heard Professor Garcia refer to “flat feet” as “the great African American curse.” The Investigator notes that these statements were reportedly made in the presence of other students who came forward to report this comment. It is also convincing that Professor Garcia made a similar, but not verbatim, statement to another African American student during a separate production. These alleged statements are consistent with the nature of the casual, yet insensitive claims which are emblematic of the type of conduct experienced by students of color. Thus, the Investigator finds that it is more likely than not that Professor Garcia made these claims.

One former student related that she overheard Professor Ito state, “I have to cast a student of color because if not the department is going to riot.” A second student reported hearing a variation of this comment, that students of color would “revolt” if not selected for the cast of “Cabaret.” A third student overheard Professor Ito make a similar statement during the audition process for “Freckle Face Strawberry.” Each of the students who overheard these statements said that the comments were not made directly to them, but that Professor Ito made the statements in their presence, with apparently no regard for the fact that a student was in the room.

An incident relayed by Professor McDonald lends credence to the students’ version of events. During his interview, Professor McDonald recounted a discussion that he overheard between students in the Spring of 2020. Professor McDonald told the Investigator that sometime after the Spring auditions, he noticed that his students’ mood seemed low and several students appeared upset. According to Professor McDonald, two students shared with him that an unnamed professor commented “if we don’t cast students of color there is going to be a riot.” It

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was only after an article about the incident appeared in The Saber, that Professor McDonald learned that the comment reported by these students was attributed to Professor Ito.

When asked about these statements, Professor Ito did not flatly deny making the comments. Instead, she stated that if she made the comment it was “misconstrued.” Even after the Investigator questioned Professor Ito about her equivocal response, she still declined to give a firm denial and instead states, “I’m going to deny that I said it.”

Based on the numerous accounts of Professor Ito making similar comments, as well as the statements overheard by Professor MacDonald closely following the event, the Investigator concludes by a preponderance of the evidence that Professor Ito made the statements alleged herein.

a. *Mispronunciation and misspelling of ethnic-sounding names.*

At least 3 current and former students reported that Professor Ito often mispronounces and/or misspells the names of students of color and alleged that she refuses to correct these mispronunciations. One student relayed that Professor Ito stated that his name was “too hard and she wasn’t going to bother learning it.” Professor Ito did not deny this student’s account and could only state that she did not recall making the statement. Professor Ito further stated that if the student’s name was misspelled on the audition sheet, “it was an honest typo.”

b. *Comment that a faculty member’s family is a “collection of Asians.”*

Several students expressed concern that Professor Ito commented that she could not engage in any discriminatory conduct because her family is a “collection of Asians.” Professor Ito admits that she does refer to her family as a “collection of Asians” but stated that the comment was made in jest. As to tying this statement to whether she could engage in discriminatory conduct, Professor Ito did not deny making the statement. Instead, Professor Ito stated that she could not recall making the statement.

c. *Diversity of students selected for the Theatre Department’s production of “Jingle Arg the Way.”*

One student expressed concern about an incident in which Professor Ito stated, “they can never say I’m not diverse because I’ve had a White Santa, a Black Santa, and even a Hispanic Santa.” Like her responses to other allegations of racially insensitive comments, Professor Ito stated that she did not recall making the comment. Professor Ito told the Investigator that if she did make the comment, it was in jest.

d. *Comment that a student was “cute for a Hispanic kid.”*

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One student stated that Professor Ito asked him to audition for the Department's production of "Junie B. Jones" because he was "cute for a Hispanic kid." When asked about this statement, Professor Ito stated that she did not recall making the comment.

e. *Comment that a student "snuck in the back door" of auditions for the Department's production of "Milk Like Sugar."*

One student described an incident during which Professor Ito accused her of circumventing the Theatre Department's policies for auditioning for main stage productions and likened her conduct to "sneaking through the back door." At least two students overheard this comment and described it as a "microaggression." Professor Ito declined to confirm or deny that she made the statement.

The Investigator notes that Professor Ito failed to deny many of the claims outlined above. Instead, she either responded that she does not recall making the alleged statements or that the statements were made in jest or somehow misconstrued. The Investigator does not find it credible that a witness would be unable to firmly admit or deny making the very specific and objectively racially insensitive comments that have been attributed to Professor Ito. It is also noteworthy that in several instances, Professor Ito conceded that if she made the alleged statement, she did so in jest. These comments came during the height of racial tensions within the Theatre Department, reflecting poorly on Professor Ito's professionalism, judgment, and sensitivity to the issues of race and diversity that are the subject of this investigation. Finally, the evidence shows that comments such as those attributed to Professor Graver, Garcia, and Ito have contributed to the air of distrust and racial tension between certain professors and the students in the Theatre Department.

B. *Inadequate opportunities to be cast in main stage productions.*

With very few exceptions, current and former students of all races were adamant that there are insufficient opportunities for students of color to be cast in main stage productions. This issue appears to result from two principal causes: (1) the traditional nature of plays included within the season selection; and (2) the Department's failure to consistently apply a "color blind" approach to casting. Notably, some professors have been more inclusive in casting than others like David Turner, Larry McDonald, and Krystal Kennel. As part of the evidence, the Investigator reviewed a casting chart that captured the Theatre Department's main stage productions and students cast in roles according to race and gender. During individual interviews, the Investigator asked the faculty members who directed the productions to identify the significance of the role (*i.e.* lead, featured, secondary, supporting, or ensemble). According to the information gathered, within the past five years, there have been 43 productions and 456 roles cast, including: 170 White males, 178 White females, 53 Black males, 39 Black females, 9 Latino males, and 7 Latina females.

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There have been only 2 productions written by African American playwrights within this 5-year period, “Milk Like Sugar” (2019-2020) and “Intimate Apparel” (2017-2018). These productions, featuring a majority African American cast, are included in the cast analysis chart below but were not representative of many of the Department’s main stage productions.

The types (and percentages) of roles in which members of the various racial and/or ethnic groups were cast is as follows:¹⁸

Table 2: Types and Percentages of Roles in the Theatre Department’s Main Stage Productions from 2015 to 2020

Race/Ethnicity	Lead	“Feature”	Secondary	Supporting	Ensemble ¹⁹
White Male	43.6% (43 roles)	29.4% (25 roles)	22.2% (2 roles)	47.7% (20 roles)	36% (90 roles)
White Female	32.7% (33 roles)	37.6% (32 roles)	44.4% (4 roles)	38.1% (16 roles)	39.6% (99 roles)
Black Male	7.9% (8 roles)	16.5% (14 roles)	11.2% (1 role)	7.1% (3 roles)	13.2% (33 roles)
Black Female	10.0% (11 roles)	12.9% (11 roles)	22.2% (2 roles)	7.1% (3 roles)	8.0% (20 roles)
Latino Male	2.0% (2 roles)	2.4% (2 roles)	0% (0 roles)	0% (0 roles)	2.0% (5 roles)
Latina Female	4.0% (4 roles)	1.2% (1 role)	0% (0 roles)	0% (0 roles)	1.2% (3 roles)
Total	100% (101 roles)	100% (85 roles)	100% (9 roles)	100% (42 roles)	100% (250 roles)
Casting in “Milk Like Sugar” (2019-2020) and “Intimate Apparel” (2017-2018)					
White Male	0% (0 roles)	20% (1 role)	0% (0 roles)	0% (0 roles)	0% (0 roles)
White Female	0% (0 roles)	20% (1 role)	0% (0 roles)	0% (0 roles)	0% (0 roles)
Black Male	30% (3 roles)	20% (1 role)	0% (0 roles)	0% (0 roles)	0% (0 roles)
Black Female	70% (7 roles)	40% (2 roles)	0% (0 roles)	0% (0 roles)	0% (0 roles)

¹⁸ At least two of the Department’s main stage productions that took place in the last 5 years were directed by former students. We have not been able to contact the two former students to determine the racial and/or ethnic makeup of the students cast in lead, feature, secondary, supporting, and/or ensemble roles.

¹⁹ According to Professor Claassen, “Peter and the Starcatcher” was entirely made up of an ensemble cast but not all the ensemble roles were equal.

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Latino Male	0% (0 roles)	0% (0 roles)	0% (0 roles)	0% (0 roles)	0% (0 roles)
Latino Female	0% (0 roles)	0% (0 roles)	0% (0 roles)	0% (0 roles)	0% (0 roles)
Total	100% (10 roles)	100% (5 roles)	0% (0 roles)	0% (0 roles)	0% (0 roles)

Overall, 76.3% of White students were cast in the lead roles of productions that were not written by African American playwrights compared to 17.9% of Black students, and 67% of White students were cast in feature roles of productions that were not written by African American playwrights as compared to 29.4% of Black students. In productions written by African American playwrights, the lead roles were all filled by Black students. In productions written by African American playwrights, 20% of the feature roles were filled by a White student and 80% of the feature roles were filled by Black students.

These numbers alone do not paint the complete picture. Instead, it is important to also consider the nature of the role. Both students and several of the professors agree that there is a significant difference between a lead role, feature role, secondary role, supporting role, and an ensemble role. Students and several professors acknowledge that students of color are often selected for more minor or secondary roles, as opposed to lead or even “feature” roles.

An analysis of this Chart does not conclusively demonstrate that students of color are provided inadequate opportunities to be cast in main stage productions. The evidence does show, however, that students of color are overwhelmingly selected for more minor or secondary roles, as opposed to leading roles. It is important to note that the chart reflects the information provided to the Investigator solely by the professors who directed the productions, as opposed to other professors in the Theatre Department. The evidence shows that while it is easy to identify “leading” roles, in some instances, there appears to be a level of subjectivity in how minor roles were classified. For example, some of the roles that Professor Kennel considered “ensemble” roles were designated as “feature” roles by the professor who directed the show. To the extent that discrepancies such as these occurred, we deferred to the representations made by the professor who directed the show, rather than the opinions of others on the faculty.

Even with deferring to the professors who directed the main stage productions, the data substantiates the students’ position that African American students do not receive a proportionate share of leading roles. Instead, they are more likely than not relegated to secondary or minor roles. Within the past five years, African American students were selected for lead roles 17.9% of the time, compared to White students who were selected for 76.3 % of the lead roles. The statistics received by the University’s Department for Institutional Research and Effectiveness shows that over the last five years, the percentage of African American students in the Department has averaged around 22%. Accordingly, African American students are not receiving a proportional percentage of lead roles based on the percentage of the African American student population within the Theatre Department. While the evidence does not show

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by a preponderance of the evidence that students of color have inadequate opportunities to be cast in main stage productions, it does show that it is more likely than not that students of color have fewer opportunities to be cast in leading roles.

C. Caricature Roles and Tokenism.

1. *Caricature Roles*

After a review of the evidence, in addition to the cast of “Milk Like Sugar,” the Investigator was able to identify 3 additional examples (i.e. maid, basketball player, and prisoner) where students have argued that people of color have been cast in caricature roles. However, the Investigator found that students of color were likewise cast in roles that were not stereotypical, for example in the productions of “The Importance of Being Earnest,” “The Children’s Hour,” and “She Kills Monsters.” Though students of color have often been selected for roles that are not caricatures or stereotypical, these roles have been overshadowed by the themes and characters presented in “Milk Like Sugar,” which perpetuated several negative stereotypes—including teenage pregnancy, domestic abuse, and materialism—within the African American community. In considering the witness interviews, it appears that the recent production of “Milk Like Sugar,” the historically small number of African American playwrights selected for mainstage productions, and racially insensitive comments attributed to certain faculty members contributed to the impression that students of color are disproportionately cast in caricature roles.

Critically, “Milk Like Sugar” was suggested by Professor Rachel Blackburn, who has been a champion for diversity and inclusion within the Theatre Department. Professor Blackburn partnered with former Professor Turner to establish a reading series focused specifically on diverse playwrights and has been an advocate for the inclusion of Black playwrights in the Department’s main stage productions. Professor Blackburn explained that she suggested “Milk Like Sugar” because of the opportunity it presented to cast African American female students in what she perceived to be strong roles. She admits that she did not consider the potentially negative implications at the time that she suggested “Milk Like Sugar” and was instead focused on the show’s more positive messages. From the students’ perspective, this was only the second of two main stage productions featuring the Black experience, therefore making the selection of this play even more significant. Accordingly, many students, Black and White, considered the selection of this “Milk Like Sugar” a commentary on how students of color, who already felt marginalized, were perceived by their professors.

Despite Professor Blackburn’s good intentions, the selection of this production points out blind spots in the Department on the issue of diversity and inclusion and underscores the need to have professors with diverse experiences and perspectives involved in the decision-making within the Department. Notwithstanding the above, the Investigator was unable to conclude by

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a preponderance of the evidence that Black students are intentionally selected for caricature roles.

2. *Tokenism*

On the issue of tokenism, students contend that Black students were selected for the Department's main stage productions as "tokens" for the sake of diversity. The overwhelming consensus from the current student body was that a group of students of color are "sprinkled" and "recycled" into the cast of the Theatre Department's main stage productions in the name of diversity but are not given meaningful roles and/or opportunities to perform.

This issue presents a dilemma in that it requires a finding based on the beliefs of the students—which are shaped by their experiences within the Department—taking into consideration the subjective selection criteria articulated by the faculty. The Investigator's analysis of the Theatre Department's casting chart shows that 25 students of color (including Black and Latino(a) students) were selected for lead roles as compared to 76 White students. 28 students of color (including Black and Latinx students) were selected for feature roles, as compared to 57 White students. Given the racially and culturally insensitive remarks that have been outlined in this report, the students have a valid concern that African American students were selected for mainstage productions as "tokens" for the sake of diversity. While this concern may be the product of broader issues of diversity and inclusion in the Department, the Investigator finds that this claim is not provable. Given the subjectivity involved in the casting process, the Investigator finds that there is insufficient evidence to establish more likely than not, that students of color were selected for the Department's main stage role as "tokens."

D. Selection of the Theatre Department's Main Stage Productions.

In the past five years, only 2 of the Department's 43 main stage productions have been written by African American playwrights. Several students shared a belief that the Department selects main stage productions with the greater community of Columbus, Georgia and a "White audience" in mind. Current professors counter this position by stating that the plays are selected to showcase certain genres, such as classical and western civilization.

Notwithstanding this, it appears that the process for selecting the Department's main stage productions does not sufficiently take into consideration the increasingly diverse student population. This issue is compounded by the faculty's apparent inconsistency in employing "color-blind" casting. At least three current professors, Professors Krystal Kennel, Larry McDonald, and David Turner, and several former professors who have been directly involved in the season selection process have corroborated this claim. Former professor Becky Becker explained that she believes some members of the faculty have been members of the Department for many years and are "stuck" and "unable to reimagine their ideals of casting philosophy." Former professor Chris Head confirmed the lack of diversity in the type of plays selected and the inconsistent use of "color-blind" casting by the Department's faculty.

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In recent years, Professors Head, Blackburn, Becker, and Temegsen have suggested plays written by Black playwrights for inclusion in the Department's main stage production season. Each of these interviewees told the Investigator that their suggestions were met with resistance from other faculty members. The evidence shows that in response to these suggestions, certain professors mused that such plays "would leave out White students in the Department" or that they were unnecessary because of "color-blind casting."

Many of the Department's current faculty members now concede that the play selection process should be more transparent and be reimagined to include more productions written by African American playwrights and/or reflecting other touchpoints of diversity (race, gender, and sexuality) regularly. The Investigator concludes that there is sufficient evidence of a lack of diversity in the selection of the Department's main stage productions.

E. Final Observations

In addition to the findings outlined above, the evidence establishes that there is a lack of leadership within the Department concerning issues of diversity and inclusion, as well as responsiveness to the concerns expressed by students of color. Specifically, Professor Dooley was unable to articulate a plan for addressing the issues and concerns raised regarding diversity in the curriculum; could not identify an individual whose job was to evaluate the legitimacy of issues surrounding the issues raised surrounding the diversity in the course material; and admits that there are no checks or balances to determine whether professors were following through on addressing any of the claims made by students. In addition, in the June 2020 email in which he addressed the issue of race and color within the Theatre Department with his students, he initially encouraged open communication, and then threatened to stop reading the emails after the email exchange seemingly became too open and uncomfortable for either him or professors whose conduct was specifically addressed in the student's emails.

Professor Dooley admits that the issues of diversity and inclusion within the department have existed "forever" – recognizing that this is a longstanding issue within the Theatre Department. He adds that these issues have become more apparent over the last couple of years. In an interview with the Saber newspaper, Professor Dooley further acknowledged that there has "always been an issue of racism in the Theatre Department." When the Investigator asked Professor Dooley about this statement, he initially responded that "racism has been a problem in America," so certainly it has been an issue in the Theatre Department. However, when pressed by the Investigator to explain this position, Professor Dooley then distinguished between "intent" as opposed to "culturally insensitive" or "unconscious bias." Professor Dooley ultimately conceded that in his opinion the Theatre "Department's cultural insensitivities or unconscious biases has had the effect of excluding opportunities for Black students or marginalized people of color in the Department."

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Professor Dooley pointed to a faculty meeting on October 9 where the issues raised by students were formally discussed with the faculty. As to the students' complaints regarding the lack of diverse playwrights included in the "Script Analysis" class, Professor Dooley states that he has very little authority to dictate the curriculum of his professors and indicated that instruction "was a matter of educational freedom." Further, he was unable to identify any individual who would be responsible for making certain that professors were following through on any of the claims made by students regarding the lack of diversity in the course material. He admits that there are no "checks or balances to determine whether professors were following through." Instead, he stated that he would trust that it would be on their [professors] radar for the next opportunity. Also, Professor Dooley states that he considers his role akin to "middle management," stating that he has little control over how the professors instruct their students.

When Professor Dooley was asked how he would determine whether these issues had been adequately addressed, he stated that he would look to the student feedback forms and faculty evaluations at the end of the year to see if the students raised additional issues; thereby placing the burden on students to come forward with concerns as opposed to implementing a strategic plan to address these very critical issues

After issues of race were reported to Professor Dooley in October of 2019, in June of 2020 he sent an email to the students and faculty, which he stated was to encourage students to express their feelings on these issues. Two days later, Professor Dooley reversed course after students raised very specific instances of discrimination that they had either witnessed or experienced personally. Professor Dooley explained that he responded in this way because he felt "protective of the faculty."

Professor Dooley nevertheless made several fairly critical acknowledgments as follows:

- He believes that Professor Garcia probably used the word "nappy" to describe the hair texture of African American students and believes the use of the word is "culturally insensitive."
- He states that the use of the word "nappy" by a professor in an educational environment is wholly unacceptable, but likewise believes that is a fixable problem.
- He believes that Professor Garcia referred to flat feet as being the "great African American curse," and believes that the use of this phrase is culturally insensitive and wholly unacceptable in an educational environment.
- He states that he could not imagine Professor Ito stating that she had to cast students of color otherwise the Department would "riot" or using words to that effect. However, he considers such a statement, if made, to go past cultural insensitivity and more toward "racism."

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- He believes that the casting in the production “Peter & the Starcatcher” was a mistake and not culturally diverse enough. He further stated that he believes “when a show has 30 people and only as 2 people of color, that’s a mistake.”

Finally, Professor Dooley recognizes the benefit of having increased diversity among the faculty and staff of the Theatre Department but states that he is bound by the budget dictated by the University. During Dr. Dooley’s tenure as the Chair of the Theatre Department, three African American women have been hired as part-time faculty members, evidencing some effort to increase the diversity among the faculty and staff and address student concerns regarding the same. It is important to note that part-time professors were not invited to attend faculty meetings or provide input into the season selection, which has been largely criticized by students. Dr. Dooley undertook efforts to create a full-time faculty position that one of those part-time faculty members, Jamila Turner, would have qualified for. Due to budget constraints, the University could not create such a position.

When the Investigator followed up on a question posed to Professor Dooley by the Saber regarding how the Theatre Department will tackle diversity when it has no black faculty or staff, Professor Dooley responded that the department is “diverse in other ways” (referring to gender) and he would place “everything in place to be more inclusive, open up processes, begin a student advisory committee.”

END OF REPORT.