

Dear Students, Audiences and to Whom it May Concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to engage in this most important conversation. As I reflect on the open letter, it is important we unlearn and relearn about the systemic and institutionalized racism in our community. I appreciate you for helping us stay abreast of these concerns as we create and present our future productions.

In the fall of 2018, I proposed that we present the musical, *West Side Story*, written by Leonard Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim, and Arthur Laurents, with researched original direction by Hal Prince and choreography by Jerry Robbins. Because we were celebrating the 100th birthday of Leonard Bernstein, I thought it would be a hopeful piece about the perils of intolerance that could make a difference to students and audiences. I was sorely mistaken. A musical originally conceived by five white men of privilege is indeed a piece that, in the correct words of those of my students so negatively impacted, should no longer be produced under its original conception.

Last summer, it was brought to my attention that some audience members and students were profoundly hurt by the production. After our listening session, I understood that, as director of the work, I allowed the original stage directions in the score, racial slurs, and barbaric sounds, negatively depicting those of Puerto Rican descent to remain in the production--this was deeply offensive. I incorrectly cast members of the ensemble to play the Sharks that were not all of Latinx or Puerto Rican descent. The two Puerto Rican members on the production team were viewed by some as token members of the team. In these professionals' defense, they were of great support to the production. I could have done much more to utilize their expertise in more public forums and discussions, and to utilize their value and expertise. I do realize that students were offended by my choices and, no matter my intent, I caused a negative and hurtful impact on others.

I take full responsibility for my mistakes. I admit that at the time I did not understand the harm I was doing, but this is no excuse. It is my deepest desire to rectify the harm I have done, to offer my deepest apology, and to ask forgiveness for my ignorance and insensitivity.

This past summer and thus, moving forward, the College of Music has established the following initiatives: The Ally Advocacy Committee and the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Tasks Forces. Under the leadership of former Dean Shay, current Dean Davis, and the College of Music Diversity and Outreach Coordinator Alma Ramos, my colleagues and I began, in June, to participate in guided meetings and discussions that address matters of systemic racism in the arts, our unknowing contributions to it, and solutions for positive change and anti-racism within higher education. Our task forces are dedicated to promoting diversity in co-curricular programming, student recruitment, faculty hiring, concert repertoire and curriculum. I volunteered to serve on the student recruitment task force, and I continue to be a member of the College of Music Diversity Committee as I have for the past three years. I realize that change will not happen overnight and we as a college have agreed to make our work and

education a priority. I am encouraged by the positive leadership within the College of Music and a team of colleagues that feel inspired about the changes that I too seek.

I am sure there is much more I could say and as I continue to take accountability and further my learning, I promise to be an outspoken advocate for diversity and inclusion at this university. I am open to any suggestions you might offer as our community continues to grow, learn and develop.

With sincerity,
Leigh Holman