

Dear faculty and staff,

For nearly four years now, I have been a proud member of the Pepperdine theatre program. This program has challenged my perspective not only as an actor but as a human being. I've also gained countless friends and mentors through my time in college. Without a doubt, my experiences in Seaver college have shaped me into the man I am today, which is why I feel so strongly compelled to reach out to you all in light of the stark injustice our nation is facing.

Pepperdine's theatre program consists of many black actors and actresses who have eagerly served the program and have grown exponentially as a result of engaging in such a rich artistic environment. We love what we do, we are passionate about representing our school through our talents, and we consider our fellow students, faculty, and staff to be members of our extended family. This is why we feel we would be doing Pepperdine a disservice by remaining silent regarding the position of black people not only on stage but in America as a whole.

It is not enough to perform black pieces on stage. It is not enough to study black playwrights, black actors, and black theatre history. We demand action, and we urge the Pepperdine theatre program to rise to the occasion because we know it is capable of doing so. Pepperdine's website states that "our [theatre] students help enrich the cultural environment at Seaver College by participating in University productions in our state-of-the-art facilities." We want this environment to not only include the voices, leadership, and talent of black theatre scholars, but we want it to elevate them as well. For this reason, I, along with the black students in Pepperdine's theatre program have comprised a list of suggestions for the University to implement in the 2020-2021 school year and beyond.

1. Hiring more full-time black faculty members across design and acting.
2. A promise to cast by the talent and not by the color
3. Casting black actors and actresses in traditionally white roles; casting black actors and actresses in roles beyond those in traditional black theatre pieces
4. More theatre scholarships set aside towards diversity recruitment
5. A statement issued by the theatre program on behalf of the black students; an open address of the current issues as well as a clear condemnation of racism within the theatre program.
6. Inviting black playwrights, directors, and other black industry professionals to conduct seminars on campus to inform the entirety of the program of the disparities between black and white actors in the industry
7. Focusing on the recruitment of black technical students to have some diversity in that major who know about black hair and skin.

8. Subsequently, Introducing a course on black hair required of all theatre design students. As far as we know there is not currently a hair class in general, but it feels that we are told to do things with our hair by people who do not understand it and the ways it can be damaged.
9. An open discussion amongst all members of the theatre program regarding white privilege and how it affects black people in the arts
10. Instating a new theatre scholarship designed to empower black seniors from the inner city- this specialized scholarship will increase the original theatre scholarship and will be awarded to inner-city high school seniors seeking to pursue an education in theatre arts at Pepperdine

These suggestions are merely the tip of the iceberg for what we believe is necessary to encourage and promote inclusivity at our University. We hope that our action is only the beginning of a continued discourse regarding black students attending Pepperdine. We understand that the path to change is not a sprint, but a marathon. While we cannot transform policies, mindsets, and traditional institutions overnight, we can continue to engage in conversation about the black experience. We urge Pepperdine to take a stand and to act as an example not only to other universities in California but to all schools across the nation. This list is the result of a collaborative effort amongst the black students in Pepperdine's theatre program. Together we aim to transform through informing our fellow student body and staff of the black student experience.

Thank you,

George Edward Preston IV, Chase Perry, Skylar Brown, Yayabell Debay, Peace Ikediuba, Brykell Killingsworth, Karese Frizell, Leyla Dillig, Khalil J. Powell, Jada Henry, Kaya Richardson, Joshua Fredenburg