

Professional Service Achievement

Marc W. Vital II

Aiding in student development and showcasing their scholarly excellence, I have served on committees at the national, regional, university, and department levels. Volunteering with the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF), I have served as a member of the RED (Representation, Equity, and Diversity) Caucus. I work with the Caucus to improve our conference practices, eliminating unfair barriers to participation at the national and regional levels. KCACTF features eight regional conferences each year allowing for the adjudication and showcasing of theatre work from students, faculty, and staff. My work towards equality continues at the university and department levels with drafting curriculum outcomes with our Inclusion and Diversity initiative and acting on the Diversity and Inclusion Committee for my department. My work with the Visual Arts and Design Showcase and The Chancellor's Arts Showcase, and the KCACTF Showcases, provides an opportunity for the applied research of myself and my students to be shared with the public and adjudicated by fellow artists. The below sections detail each service project and explain how I was involved at the national, regional, university, and department levels.

National

Since 2018, I have been involved with the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival also known as KCACTF. It is a national organization that holds events year-round including eight regional conferences in which collegiate theatre makers and scholars, including faculty, staff, graduate, and undergraduate students, celebrate their accomplishments and compete in various events.

KCACTF leadership determined that we needed to create leadership positions that foster inclusive non-discriminatory practices within our national organization, and so, the RED Initiative was born. Each of the eight regions established an RED Chair and Vice Chair to ensure the integration and promotion of RED standards. RED stands for Representation, Equity and Diversity. With Representation, we want to uplift those who are underrepresented in our communities- from race and ethnicity to body type and ability to gender and sexuality. It's about making opportunities for theatre professionals and students from marginalized groups to be seen and heard. We hope to inspire students in similar situations to strive for their place in our theatre community. It's not about replacing. It's about sharing and fellowship. Equity speaks to removing barriers to participation that make our systems unfair in ways that can be helped. One inequity is that many of the region's students are not being cast in shows because they are people of color, and their institutions don't produce shows in which people of color are portrayed. KCACTF respondents view and adjudicate these shows nominating one of the actors for the Irene Ryans Scholarship competition. This means that if you are not cast in a

show, you are not eligible to be nominated. Many talented acting students never participate in the KCACTF Irene Ryans Acting Scholarship Auditions which can afford the student national training and recognition which helps further their higher education and job prospects. To combat this, we have allowed anyone to self-nominate for participation in the Irene Ryans Acting Auditions regardless of being cast in a show. This is not a free pass. Applicants still prove their skills by auditioning for the event but the barrier that kept them from participating has been removed. With Diversity, we strive to celebrate differences. Regardless of religion, color, gender, etc. We want to learn from one another- coexisting in a vibrant, collaborative community with trust, understanding, and safety.

In 2020, I applied to be the first RED Vice Chair for our region, Region 5, and was elected! It is a volunteer position in which I attend leadership meetings looking for ways we can be more equitable in our practices. I am proud to say that Region 5 leadership is on board with improving our practices, and we work together toward this goal.

The National RED Caucus is an assembly of all eight regions' chairs and vice chairs. Together, we discuss the National RED initiative and our next steps. Our latest big move has been to create a national standard for Respondent Training. One of the organization's biggest events is Guest Respondents. These are volunteer theatre artists who travel to participating colleges and universities to provide outside feedback on a performance. We have had unacceptable responses in the past in which respondents have been inappropriate and/or disrespectful to students and faculty. The goal of the national standard is to ensure that our respondents are charitable educators, who build up students and teach them to be creative theatre makers and critical thinkers. An outside perspective allows artists to understand how their work is being received. Art is often about the arranging of symbols to communicate meaning. Respondents help students be more effective in the messaging of their creative choices.

Outside of my work with KCACTF, I was able to serve the educational costume community in 2021. I was selected to review a proposal for a new textbook. The author is Mary McClung, the Professor of Costume Design at West Virginia University. The book would be about costume and character design with an emphasis on the importance of the artist's concept, artistic approach, conceptual style development, and how to achieve unity between idea and reality. I was very impressed with the proposal and felt it would help students better understand how to blaze their own path in costume design.

Inspired, I may endeavor to write my own book about ethical methodologies for creating fantasy costumes without promoting harmful stereotypes or negative cultural appropriation. Currently, directors and designers pull inspiration from real-world cultures, but their remixing is more like adding random things to a soup rather than generating a plausible fictional scenario. Fashion doesn't emerge from nothing. It is a response to environmental factors. Understanding how and why real-world cultures respond to their environments can help creatives generate verisimilitude with logical and interwoven cultural traits that emerge from solving the fictional culture's problems. This means that sacred cultural dress, ethnic representation, demonization,

and exoticization are reduced if not eliminated because creatives are not copying but innovating.

Regional

As the Region 5 RED Vice Chair, I and the RED Chair have found our position is about the “how things are done” rather than “what is done.” We are more than hall monitors. We are guides and advocates for the Region 5 community. That said, we have also acted as event and project coordinators.

I have helped to establish the Drag & Neo Burlesque Ball- a performance event about bodily autonomy, self-expression, and empowerment. We provide a safe and supportive environment for students to discover character creation, develop dance numbers, and practice constructive critique.

Providing professional mentorship, I have arranged for professional Drag and Neo Burlesque performers to attend our festivals to coach student performers, teaching workshops, and speaking on panels about working as a freelance performer.

Ever expanding our understanding of neurodivergence, we created quiet places in 2022 for conference goers to get away from the hectic hustle and bustle. When you don't have time to go back to your hotel room this can be a calming place to recenter. We continue to look for ways to serve the mental wellbeing of our community.

Region 5 is in the Midwest and has a high population of conservative people of European descent. We wanted to provide an opportunity for students of color and LGBT+ students to meet and network. It can be helpful when you are the only one like you at your school to see and meet other people like yourself. So, we created affinity spaces.

The goal was for these students to network, share their experiences and develop friendships. We heard many stories in these meetings concerning identity and its impact on theatre practices. We found that there were shared problems that had no clear answers, but students are the future, and they will live out the answers as they receive the reins of power.

In 2022 we tried a new approach creating Affinity Game Nights, one for LGBT+ folx and one for People of Color. These were very successful and promoted an atmosphere of fun and fellowship. In 2024 we added tabletop role playing games to the mix which is a combination of improvised live theatre and board games. It was a big hit and many students participated. My goal in the future is to expand this with workshops and panels discussing the crossover between theatre and gaming.

Moving forward we hope to tackle accessibility accommodation in the Region 5 festival. Knowing and loving people with disabilities in my personal life, I have learned about the daily struggles to move through a society that doesn't acknowledge your existence. Though it is better for some today, many disabilities go overlooked and are exacerbated by intersectionality

with other traits such as race and sexuality. There are things we can do to make our festivals more accessible to our community.

Continuing to work in leadership with KCACTF, as of January 2024, I have been promoted to RED Chair of Region 5 and will work with my new RED Vice Chair to continue the work of RED.

University

The Visual Art and Design Showcase (VADS) is an adjudicated event with 3-4 guest jurors who mentor the participants and award scholarships to one project in each category. Each project is done under the supervision of a faculty mentor, who ensures the quality of the work. Students must apply and if selected will showcase their work in a local gallery. Most recently, it has been held in the Columbia Art League in our downtown district. I have a number of costume design and technology students participate including Rose Shirkey who won a scholarship for her makeup design/ photography piece titled Birthday Toast(ed).

In 2018 I joined the committee, taking over for one of our theatre faculty. I have aided in the selection process of our jury members, helped streamline our workshops and application processes, promoted the event to perspective participants and guided students in preparing their displays.

Each year, we curate a jury of 3-4 guest artists to mentor and provide feedback to our students. I have recommended people to be on the jury such as costume designer, Linda Cho and sculptor, painter, writer, Vanessa German. Once contracted, jurors are brought in to give small lectures to classes, meet and greet students, provide critique for student work, and select scholarship recipients in each category of the showcase.

VADS has a detailed process for student application. Often, this event is a student's first experience showcasing their work. In the past, we provided a plethora of workshops to help students prepare including instruction in photographing their work and learning to write an artist's abstract. Streamlining the student experience, we have since reduced the number of workshops and implemented online submission portals to great effect.

Working to promote the event to students, I have mentored several theatre participants. If selected, I help theatre students prepare a display for the showcase. For theatre design, they make a poster board that shows their process. We use the principles of design to arrange the content in a manner that is both aesthetically pleasing and guides the eye of the viewer in chronological order. We show process photos, research images, and educational resources, using captions as needed. In cases where the costume design was realized, we bring a mannequin to display the costume. In cases where the design is not realized we highlight the design and artistry of their costume sketches.

The Chancellor's Arts showcase is an opportunity for the College of Arts and Sciences departments at the University of Missouri to show off our work to the chancellor. Wanting to

provide an avenue for non-performative work, we began decorating the lobby of the venue with student projects. I had a few students who were participating in VADS and would already have projects prepped for display, so I offered to decorate the lobby with their VADS work. These students were from Theatre and Fine Arts. Since then, we have expanded the lobby displays to include Fashion, Theatre, Fine Arts, Floral Arrangement, and Architecture showing just how vast and diverse the arts are at MU.

In spring of 2021, I was invited to serve on the Diversity Committee for Committee on Undergraduate Education with Dr. Bill Horner. The Committee of Undergraduate Education (CUE) was charged with drafting universal learning outcomes that each school within the University of Missouri would apply to their Inclusion, Diversity, and Equality courses or plans of study. These outcomes were meant to be specific, consistent, and measurable. After drafting these outcomes, CUE submitted the draft to the Faculty Council for further review. I was honored to help in this way to further our students' education and help find more effective education methods.

Departmental

Endeavoring to do my part, I have served my department in the following ways; as the KCACTF Liaison between us and the conference, as a member of the department's Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity Committee, participated in recruitment tours for perspective students, and participated in the restructuring of our theatre curriculum. The four sections below go into more detail about these activities.

KCACTF Liaison

Initially, I served as a chaperone for my department, helping to transport students from the University to the festival location. The goal was for me to take over this responsibility and lead a travel committee. However, I got involved with KCACTF in a greater capacity. That said, because I am in KCACTF leadership, I still act as a liaison for my department.

As the KCACTF Liaison, I keep everyone informed about changes to policy and rules for events. I also find answers to specific questions as they arise to ensure our preparations for the conference run as smoothly as possible.

I am on our departments KCACTF Planning Committee who provide transparency for students to understand the conference, pairing students with coaches whether for acting, design tech, stage management or dramaturgy. We have created an equitable selection process for students who go to the festival supported by the department. We arrange the travel vans, hotel lodging, and food for the week at the conference. This past spring 2024, I specifically arranged travel and accessibility accommodations for our acting student who uses a motorized wheelchair and had been invited to compete at nationals.

As the costume design and technology coach for students who want to participate in the KCACTF Expo, I select student work from our classes and realized productions to be showcased and mentor them through the creation of their display and the writing of their artist's abstracts. This is a lengthy endeavor requiring multiple drafts of their writing and their display board that can take 4-6 weeks. These projects then live on to be part of our Showcase Circuit.

I created the Showcase Circuit to allow students to create one display to be presented up to five times at different events. The first, ideally, is in January at the KCACTF Expo, in which the student generates a display detailing the process of how they created their project. If selected at our regional festival, the student will present at the National festival. At Nationals, students present their work, network with students from other regions, receive mentoring from professionals from across the country, and may be awarded scholarships.

The second event is the Chancellor's Arts Showcase in February, a campus event in which the Chancellor and their office view and celebrate the work of the College of Arts and Sciences. Their work is displayed in the lobby along with students from other MU departments.

The Third event is in April called the Visual Arts and Design Showcase or VADS for short. It is an adjudicated campus event, with guest jurors who mentor the students and award scholarship funding to one participant in each category. The display is mounted in the Columbia Art League in our downtown district for about two weeks.

If there is time, we strive to participate in Show Me Research Week or the Poster Project days at MU. This an opportunity to show our work to more science minded departments and spread the word about the arts at MU.

Diversity/ Inclusion

This committee is focused on the practice of inclusion. Like the KCACTF RED initiative, we evaluate our practices and policies for inequity. We want to champion innovative season selection, allowing for organic opportunities for inclusive and diverse casting practices that help to correct the ostracizing practices of traditional theatre educators. We have a significant number of students who are Black, Latinx, Hispanic, and LGBT+. We choose shows that allow for the casting of any of our students including these demographics. For example, we chose to do *The Prom*, a light and upbeat musical about LGBT+ acceptance. Based on acting skill, we were able to cast some of the traditionally white leads as people of color in a way that still supports the narrative. The play also allowed our LGBT+ students to portray themselves on stage in a story many of them identified with.

As the costume designer on many of our shows, I work to showcase the diverse body types and ethnicities in our department. Rather than using colorblind casting in which a person of color is cast in a white role and is effectively playing a "white" person, we are changing the ethnicity of the character to that of the actor. When appropriate, I like to incorporate nods and details to the actor's heritage. Regarding body shape, I believe that all types should look beautiful on

stage. If theatre spectacle is about immersion, then all actors, not just the small or able bodied, must look like they belong in the world of the show. Recently, we produced *Something Rotten* where our lead was played by a talented performer who uses a motorized wheelchair and has larger proportions. He deserves to be included in the show, so we custom-built his costume, taking his needs into account and making him part of the production.

Recruitment

Our director of undergraduate studies provides tours to perspective students bringing them by our costume wing where I am happy to talk to them about our student opportunities. I share with them how we utilize the theatre arts as a vehicle to teach life skills, such as collaboration, communication, time management, responsibility, conflict de-escalation, and more all of which are necessary for any career so that even if the student decides not to pursue a career in theatre they still have valuable skills to pursue the career that best suits them.

Curriculum

As our department grows, we are working to find a course rotation that allows a student to enter our program at any point and graduate in 4 years. I oversee the costume related courses and work to offer our advanced courses every 3 semesters. This allows our student population interested in the higher-level courses to accrue so that the courses fill. I am also working to connect our costume courses with the needs of our season. The shows we produce are part of the curriculum. Though our shows are very real and highly produced, they could be thought of as “practice” plays and musicals providing hands on experience to students.

Updating many of our courses to make them fresh and responsive to a modern world, we utilize classic and contemporary play scripts, explore new technologies, and facilitate guided student achievement in the applied research of Theatre.

In conclusion, I look forward to serving my communities as I continue my time in these various organizations. It has been rewarding to be a Region 5 RED Chair for KCACTF, a mentor to so many students, and to bring about the positive changes I long to see in these organizations.