

# Amanda Dawson, Ph.D.

## Diversity Statement

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I have been fortunate in my life that I have experienced the privilege that unfortunately many, many others have not. But now, in my fourteenth year of teaching (combined university and high school experience), I have heard the stories and worked with hundreds of students who face challenges because of their gender, race, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and level of education.

Like many courses, the interest, engagement, and motivation of students varies. Early in the semester, I focus on student engagement and motivation. On the first day of class I ask the students: "What is your name? Where are you from? What is your major? Why did you take this class? And what is something interesting we should know about you?" Each student must stand in front of their classmates and answer those questions. This is not a revolutionary idea for a first day of class, but it is a vital first step in my teaching philosophy and approach to diversity. I teach storytelling and on day one I want my students to know that their stories matter and that we, as a class, are going to listen to them. We will respect our differences and seek out our similarities.

Activism has become an important part of my pedagogy and practice as I teach theatre as a tool for social change. In Theatre Appreciation, we read, analyze, and discuss Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* as an entrance to discuss race on stage and Lauren Gunderson's *The Taming* as the starting point for feminism and politics. I consciously choose plays and musicals that will allow for diversity stories and people to be spotlighted (i.e. Carolyn Kras' *The Subject*, Kitty Chen's *Rowing to America*, Qui Nguyen's *She Kills Monsters*). I set aside time in class, whenever necessary, to discuss current events. In past semesters, my students and I have discussed the 2016 election, Charlottesville, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, Hurricanes, police shootings, among others. With Charlottesville, for example, I asked the students, in small groups, to discuss why they think racism is still an issue in the United States. Then I ask them, what they can do, as individuals, to combat racism. As a class, we came up with a list of large and small actions we can do daily to respond to racism that we might hear, see, or experience.

Daily, I attempt to broaden the world my students can see or experience. Theatre Appreciation students create presentations on a particular playwright, and one of their plays, that does not identify with the students' gender and race. For example, a white male student gets to select a playwright that is not white and not male. Public Speaking students research and present a speech on a cultural element or event from a culture other than their own. These assignments allow students the opportunities to reach outside of what they know and then share what they learn with the class.

Brescia University is a small, private, Catholic university in Kentucky. Therefore, I believe it is important to highlight what I do outside of the classroom in an attempt to support what I do in the classroom. During my time in Owensboro, I participated in a cleanup of a vandalized Muslim center in town, walked in the annual AIDS walk, joined the Solidarity Gathering (after the travel ban was announced a few years ago), and continually donate to organizations I support. When I get involved in these projects I share them with my students to show how simply, but vital it is to stand up for what you believe in. As someone who is privileged, it is my job to stand up for those who are not.