

# VASTA Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Statement

VASTA serves a diverse constituency of theater professionals, academics, and voice professionals. As national demographics reflect the rich cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity of our planet, VASTA recognizes that it begins its 21st year as an organization predominantly comprised of Caucasian members with educational and artistic methods derived primarily from Eurocentric, specifically Anglo-American, forms, traditions, and texts.

These realities compromise our ability to fulfill our stated mission, which is to:

- Practice and encourage the highest standards of voice and speech use and artistry in [all] professional arenas;
- Serve the needs of all voice and speech teachers and all students in training and practice;
- Encourage and facilitate opportunities for ongoing education and the creation of scholarship and information among [all professionals in the field.

The governing Board of VASTA agreed to focus on growth in three areas: Teaching and Learning, Diversity, and Internationalization. The commitment to diversity was expressed initially as a desire to increase the diversity of the membership, but discussion at the 2006 VASTA conference identified an additional need to diversify our training sources, texts, and our concepts of contemporary teaching, rehearsal, and performance practice. We all have much to learn from diverse cultures and artists, and are able to offer our existing expertise and collegiality to voice and speech professionals from under-represented artistic and cultural communities, and to the theater companies, departments and organizations within which they work.

As an organization of coaches, trainers, and teachers, we additionally recognize a special commitment to the fullest education of students and clients from a diversity of backgrounds, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, religion, social class, sexual orientation, and gender identification. Students and clients face complex personal, artistic, and economic choices as they interface with directors, playwrights, producers, and audiences in situations that may perpetuate racial, cultural, linguistic, gender-based and homophobic stereotypes. Optimal preparation for these choices appears to include training in a variety of voice and speech styles, as well as supporting clients/students in determining their own personal values and artistic goals.

VASTA acknowledges that our evolution towards diversification will be complex and on-going. Nevertheless we wish to begin the journey. Members have identified the following initial steps, among others:

- Compiling and distributing artistic texts (or bibliographic references) from as wide a cultural spectrum as possible, for our members' use with all students and clients;
- Developing relationships with the diverse focus groups within ATHE, educating ourselves about their agendas and inquiring how we might work together;
- Proactively identifying and inviting voice and speech experts of diverse backgrounds to become major conference presenters and to submit work to VASTA publications;

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- Proactively inviting diverse organizations from underserved communities (artistic, educational, and cultural) to participate in the VASTA Fellows program;
- Encouraging interactions between academically-based members and their colleagues in non-English language departments, regarding bilingual theater productions and other projects;
- Developing budget items to support VASTA representatives to attend conferences and other events of organizations that represent diverse constituencies.
- Creating scholarships for students and teachers from under-represented communities to attend VASTA events.

Through these actions, and others yet to be determined, we aim to widen and enrich the organization, moving toward a more complete fulfillment and embodiment of our stated principles.