

JAYE AUSTIN WILLIAMS, M.F.A., Ph.D.
Teaching Philosophy

I have been teaching at the collegiate level for over a decade and had the pleasure of serving at several diverse and distinguished institutions before arriving at Cal State Long Beach this year. In 2002, I offered a one-semester playwriting workshop while in residence as a guest director in Cornell University's Department of Theater, Film & Dance. I did this amid my direction of three professional regional productions at the nearby Hangar Theatre, Ithaca, NY: Emily Mann's *Having Our Say* (2001), David Auburn's *Proof* (2002) and Suzan-Lori Parks' *Topdog/Underdog* (2003). Shortly thereafter, in 2005, I directed an American Sign Language version of Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* as both an acting workshop and a main stage production at Gallaudet University, a federally chartered university for the education of the deaf and hard of hearing located in Washington, D.C. Finally, in the spring of 2006, I taught two sections of acting methods and directed Suzan-Lori Parks' *In the Blood* at Middlebury College. As a graduate student and doctoral candidate at UCI, I taught more than a dozen iterations of both upper and lower division courses, from broad surveys of Western drama to special topics like African American Theater (see attached CV). I also directed three productions at UC Irvine: George C. Wolfe's *The Colored Museum* (2011), Ngugi wa Thiong'o's and Micere Githae Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (2013), and Naomi Wallace's *The Liquid Plain* (2014), all incorporating supplemental theoretical texts drawn from my dissertation research in order to dramaturgically enrich rehearsal and performance for the graduate and undergraduate actors in the cast and crew. I am currently developing a monograph about the dynamics of this directorial-pedagogical process, examining theory-in-practice. In the spring of 2013, I taught a well-received graduate seminar on African American playwrights as a Visiting Teaching Fellow for the Faculty of Languages and Literatures at the Universität Bremen, Germany, where I returned in early 2014 to take part in the Futures of Black Studies Conference.

My commitment to facilitating not only critical thinking in my students, but also their dynamic engagement with "a history of present," including and beyond the limits of genealogy, has grown stronger with time. This is necessitated by the innovations in telecommunications and digital technology that challenge students' reflective capabilities as much as they also increase access to information, innovative impulses and knowledge. As such, I believe in creating an atmosphere that empowers students' imaginations and that enables their ability to think politically and historically as well as technically, in order to engage the ways that historical processes thought to be temporally or spatially distant continue to shape the understanding of artists and audiences alike. In this way, students are primed to contemplate interactions between race, class, gender, sexuality, ability and age in ways that integrate their liberal arts education with the practice of their craft. A direct extension of this synthesis is their ability to take seriously what the arts offer for thinking about the question of global modernity as such and how they might engage this question as practitioners over the long term. These experiences have helped me realize that my particular concerns about blackness as a political predicament and existential condition – concerns that open onto the most general questions of modern life – fuel my love of teaching the gamut of theatrical production and dramatic literature to students and fellow artists alike. In fact, my more recent perspective as a formally trained scholar has enhanced my pedagogy with regard to theatre history, criticism and theory; and my training in textual analysis has strengthened my approach to both the crafts of playwriting and the directorial

analysis of the work. I look forward to continuing this exploration with this year's spring production of Corthron's *A Cool Dip in the Barren Saharan Crick* at Cal State Long Beach, which I will direct in conjunction with a mini-symposium involving students, Long Beach faculty and invited scholars. In addition, I am engaged in a continued expansion of my syllabi into ancient and early modern work that remains in excess of the dramatic works regarded within the "classical" parameters of dramatic literature.

At UCI, student evaluations of my teaching during the regular academic year ranged from 6.25 to 7 on a 7-point scale (7 being the highest) and my summer session evaluations ranged from 8 to 9 on a 9-point scale (9 being the highest). In sum, students have rated my teaching minimally in the 90th percentile. More to the point, students have found me to "provide a safe environment in which difficult issues could be discussed in a give and take manner" and they have praised my "ability to address questions and comments in an open, informative, and very gracious way." Additionally, they have described my classes as "very helpful and accessible, filling in a large gap in [their] knowledge of [the field]." More recently, graduate students at the Universität Bremen composed an unsolicited letter of recommendation for the seminar on African American Drama that I taught there. Among other comments, they expressed "great respect and gratefulness for the intellectual ardor and fervent sense of social responsibility [I] brought to class." In that vein, they observed: "it was extremely helpful that [the instructor] was always able to connect fictional dramatic texts, theory, and real-world issues, both historical and contemporary." These reviews hopefully give some sense of how I have negotiated not only students' diverse backgrounds and varied learning styles, but also the shifting institutional emphasis from broad liberal arts education to pre-professional training in the STEM fields. I have allowed this general trend to redouble my commitment to a pedagogy that exposes students to archives of creative work and modes of critical analysis they might not otherwise encounter in their major fields of study.