Is Theatre at Parkland College Diverse?

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INTRODUCTION
The Parkland College Theatre Program is a two-year, multi-option degree program that gives a variety of experiences both on and off the stage. Students get the opportunity to work hands on and side-by-side with veteran faculty, staff, and visiting artists who are industry professionals and experts in the field of performing arts. The associates-degree program allows you to choose from two focuses of study, performance and design. They have two performance spaces and put on approximately 4 productions each year, with at least one being a musical. They currently have 23 students in the program and all are required to be involved with at least one production per semester.

AIM
The purpose of the study was to learn more about the relationship between race and Theatre at Parkland College as well as history of diversity within the program. Is the theatre program diverse? Are there more diverse community members vs. Parkland Theatre Majors? Are the plays and musicals selected a reflection of the diversity?

METHOD
The data for research was gathered through a series of interviews with Parkland College Theatre Majors that are currently involved with the theatre productions and the program.

Sample Interview Questions:
• Do you feel there are many opportunities for you as a Parkland Theatre Student?
• Do you feel there is equal opportunities for students vs. community members?
• What are your thoughts on the upcoming production of Memphis?

RESULTS
The reason for the lack of representation of African-American students in their productions is due to the fact that they make up a very small portion of the performance track majors. This is probably what lead them to not choose shows like Memphis before now, in recent years there has been a few community members and students that have stood out (got larger roles) as well as a few successful productions of musicals and plays within the area that have been made up of casts that are a majority African-American. I believe this encouraged them to widen their horizons and take what many may look at as a riskier route. I also believe they realized that many of their casts have been made up of the same cast members and wanted to make a change and give more people opportunities as well as reach out to new audiences.

CONCLUSIONS
Although there seems to be a lot more community members getting bigger roles in the productions and there seems to be a little bit of favoritism, as proved by the majority of students continuing in theatre and transferring to prestigious schools, this clearly hasn’t hindered them from achieving their goals. When it comes to race at Parkland College Theatre Productions, in my opinion, there is equal opportunity for everyone. The theatre department is as inclusive as they could be. Though the upcoming production of Memphis is the first musical they have done that demands a majority of the cast to be African American, by doing so now, proves they are willing to be inclusive to all races and all audiences.