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University Theatres Should Open People's Eyes to New Ideas

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University Theatres Should Open People's Eyes to New Ideas

By Heather Gibson
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Content guides and advisories, which list all of the parts of a production that a viewer might find offensive, are becoming commonplace with theatre companies.

I initially had mixed thoughts about providing one for Theatre UCF productions. While I do believe that customers of any product or service should be able to get the full details about what they are purchasing, when it comes to theatre, often the person who doesn't want to be exposed to controversial content is the same person who needs to see it most. One of the reasons we produce theatre is to elicit social change, to help open people's minds to new and different ideas, but we can't do that if people who are closed-minded don't attend.

But it occurred to me that a content guide might help *attract* audiences. After all, not every person wants to see only G-rated musicals. Some patrons may be happy to hear that their date night away from the kids will contain language stronger than in a Disney film. And a guide does provide an easy way to help parents who want to bring the younger siblings of our performers to the shows decide if the content is appropriate for the kids.

So we've jumped on the bandwagon: Theatre UCF now has a "Content Guide" on our [website](#), which will tell people if the plays we have scheduled contain nudity, gunshots, profanity, sexual scenes, smoking, drug use, alcohol consumption, or violence. It also suggests a Motion Picture Association of America rating, if the play were a movie.

There are also a few things you *won't* see in our content guide.

There will be no warnings about race or sexual orientation unless it refers to language (i.e., racial slurs), educational tie-ins (i.e., " 'Cloud 9' uses deliberate casting to question

the audience's expectations of gender, race and age."), or synopsis (i.e., "The women are assaulted by a man who sees them kissing in the street.").

Theatre is a reflection of society, and our production seasons are carefully created with that in mind. We live in a diverse society and there is no place on a university campus for theatre that does not champion that diversity. We strive for our productions to include racial and sexual diversity.

Our patrons should expect that all of our productions will be diverse in content and in company – not only in skin color and sexual preference, but in physical appearance, abilities, national origin and religion.

So, to the patron who called us and asked our student box office worker (who, coincidentally, is a member of the LGBTQ community) if there would be "any gay stuff" in the plays, the answer is yes. Yes, there will be.

From this season's PG-rated "The World Goes 'Round," to the mature-audiences-only "Cloud 9," to the family-friendly musical "Oklahoma!," all of our productions are positively impacted by our diverse mix of students, faculty and staff who sing, sew, direct, paint, teach, sell, dance and act. And that glorious population includes people who happen to love someone of the same gender.

We welcome everyone to come to Theatre UCF to see how much better our diversity makes us, and how much better it makes our community. Hopefully it will also help certain people understand how some lines of inappropriate questioning hurt.

We are Orlando, united.

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