

February 8, 2021

Dear members of the NEC community,

Last December, I wrote to affirm NEC's imperative to build a more culturally equitable and inclusive institution; for your reference, I have included that message below. I continue to have sincere gratitude for the contributions of students, faculty, staff, and alumni who have called upon NEC to better understand, identify, and dismantle intentional and unintentional imbalances of equity, equality, and access.

As a reminder, through more than one hundred listening sessions and the launch of the NEC Perspectives Forum, Special Advisor Stanford Thompson and his colleague Emily Master, in collaboration with NEC's DEI Task Force, acknowledged the need for an advisory body, guided by a clear charter and more inclusive of the entire NEC community. Subsequently, the DEI Task Force—the activities of which are summarized on the [NEC website](#)—voted to conclude their work in favor of the formation of a new Cultural Equity and Belonging (CEB) Advisory Council. I am so thankful to the members of the DEI Task Force for their commitment to helping us advance this initiative, and for their dedicated service to NEC.

The Cultural Equity and Belonging (CEB) Advisory Council seeks broad representation across our community, including staff, faculty, students, alumni, board and president's council members, and community members. The CEB Advisory Council will serve as a thought partner and advisor around NEC's cultural equity and belonging strategies and activities. I sincerely hope you will consider nominating yourself or others to be a part of this critical effort; further information, including nomination and application information, is available on the [NEC website](#). The deadline to submit nominations is February 28.

As we form the CEB Advisory Council, a CEB steering committee is working towards defining the charge for the new Center for Cultural Equity and Belonging, which will provide leadership in implementing a number of complex changes. The steering committee has also provided invaluable guidance on the development of the position description for the Center's director.

These are crucial steps in important work that, in many ways, is just beginning. I am grateful beyond measure for your continued partnership, and I hope you will join with me in building a more inclusive, equitable NEC.

Sincerely,

Andrea Kalyn  
President

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Message to the NEC community  
December 15, 2020

Dear Members of the NEC Community,

In June I wrote in response to the many impassioned expressions of pain and concern from students, faculty and alumni calling on NEC to address our own long-standing inequities. My letter acknowledged our deep-seated need to review and revitalize the NEC educational experience to build a more culturally equitable and inclusive institution. I expressed my gratitude then for the many voices who spoke up, ready to hold NEC accountable as an institution of integrity, heart, and impact, and to participate in the meaningful action that would take place over the months and years ahead. And I committed to systemic change to build an institutional culture that consistently lives up to our shared values—values essential to sustaining and advancing the excellence that has always characterized NEC.

The scope of work is significant, and it requires steady, purposeful action, progress, and accountability. I stand ready to ensure NEC remains consistent with accomplishing the institutional changes needed to advance the sense of belonging, mutual respect, and support experienced within our community. To that end, I share with you now information about our work in progress toward the commitments we made: actions that have been taken, and those that lie directly ahead.

Our first priority was to provide the support and resources requested for Black students by the Black Student Union (BSU) in June. Ongoing connection with the BSU will be essential as we work towards furthering these goals: developing virtual content recognizing Black culture and music; bolstering financial and administrative support for BSU-led programming; and providing institutional support for economically and socially at-risk Black students.

Long-term success at designing and implementing change of the scope that we have undertaken requires careful and consistent movement toward a vision informed by the lived experience of our students, faculty and staff, and alumni. Listening and genuine, institutional introspection, therefore, were a first order of business, an essential foundational step toward fully understanding the real experience at NEC, anchoring the needs we must address. To that end, Stanford Thompson, appointed in June as Special Advisor to the President, and his colleague Emily Master, completed a summer-long process of seeking out and listening to voices from amongst all our constituencies. Their

report, which I have attached here, affirms the needs we must address and offers a pathway for the hard work ahead. Drawn from the experiences and needs articulated in more than 140 interviews, Emily and Stanford have identified core issues (“themes”) that should guide the direction of our planning and action, as well as a series of recommendations. While responses to a number of the recommendations are already underway, all the recommendations require consideration and decision-making across a number of NEC departments and constituents, as true and lasting progress will depend on community-wide energy and coordination. Many of the report’s recommendations involve phased implementation for short-, medium-, and long-term rebuilding.

Both the data that Stanford and Emily gathered about the lived experiences of students, alumni, faculty, and staff, and the relationships they initiated between NEC and diverse participants, are extremely valuable, and both will inform and ground our work ahead. With this foundational work complete, NEC will move forward during the upcoming semester with key formative efforts; key among them are action steps to achieve a sustainable support structure for ongoing change:

> We will establish and launch a CEB Advisory Council. The Council will include individuals from various stakeholder groups across the institution and it will advise, provide feedback, and make recommendations to me in the effort to create a safe learning and working environment in which all voices are valued and every person feels a sense of belonging.

> Pending the formation of the CEB Advisory Council, a CEB steering committee has been formed to help me name the charge for the new Center for Cultural Equity and Belonging, the structure that will provide the leadership and cross-institution collaboration necessary to implement a number of complex changes. The CEB Steering Committee will also help develop the position description and the profile for the Center’s director, the individual who will lead the Center to secure our consistent, intentional progress over the years to come.

Stanford and Emily will continue to work with us through the hire of a director for the Center for Cultural Equity and Belonging, helping to advance our actions to achieve progress. I’m deeply grateful for their commitment to our community and to this vital work. We will be sharing regular updates about our progress on our website at <https://necmusic.edu/commitment-cultural-equity-belonging>.

I want to thank the greater NEC community for your attention and energy as we address our challenge together. I am confident that as you read the CEB Report you will see clearly how the actions it recommends will advance NEC and empower us to enhance our legacy, to thrive as a culturally equitable, inclusive learning environment, and to take on a leadership role among esteemed conservatories across the country.

Sincerely,

Andrea Kalyn  
President

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NEC's Cultural Equity and Belonging (CEB) Advisory Council serves as the central body to make recommendations regarding institutional goals, strategies, and commitments around equity and belonging. The council functions as a thought partner for the president, providing perspective, advice, and insights to make NEC a welcoming place to learn and work. The Council is a volunteer group comprised of individuals drawn from students, staff, faculty, alumni, trustees and president's council, and other members of the NEC community, serving one-year terms. Between each of the council's quarterly meetings, members have the opportunity to participate in smaller working groups.