

Material Provided by Varlo to support his defense
at the Faculty Hearing.

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Peer Support Letters

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I spoke with Dr. Robert Nelson, a Professor and former Chair of the Theatre Department at the University of Utah, and a former Professor at BYU, on Saturday, December 6th. After explaining the situation to him, he sent out the following message to performance instructors at the UofU:

"Dear Colleagues,

"A colleague at another institution in the region--an acting teacher whom I've known many years--found out yesterday, Friday, at 5 p.m., that an acting student has lodged an accusation of assault during an acting class. My friend's explanation is that sometimes an acting teacher has to get "in the face" of a student in order to elicit a response and help the student get more deeply and honestly into a character. And sometimes that entails some "physical contact." I know no further details about the specifics of the accusation. But the administration is involved and taking the accusation seriously.

"At his request, I told him I would ask colleagues for anything that could help in general to explain or contextualize the kind of intensive work we do as acting teachers for others looking in from outside our discipline. Any quotes or exercises from Robert Benedetti, Uta Hagen, Michael Shurtleff, or others, that might help? Or anything from your own experience?

"Many thanks for your thoughts."

He received these replies:

"Wow! A good reminder of just how lucky we are in our department! I couldn't give you any quotes but I was pushing and pulling students around today in the name of helping them to feel what I was talking about, and I often push students--I usually warn them/ask them if I can do it--and then get them to do it to each other or to me....it is second nature to me to play/work physically with my students..."

and;

"You know, over the past few years I have noticed a lot of the ATP [Actor Training Program] and MTP [Musical Theatre Program] students have serious emotional problems. Instructors are walking into a mine field sometimes. We have to be very careful in dealing with some of these students; they can easily bring charges against us. We are left to defend ourselves for our behavior, and it can be difficult."

and;

"The Psychological Instrument: Imagination, and the willingness and ability to use it in service of art, is the major psychological component of the actor's instrument.... To the actor, nothing must be unimaginable; the actor's imagination must be a playground for expressive fantasy and darkly compelling motivations." --Robert Cohen, *Acting Power*, [major acting text]

Fundamentals of acting activities

To:

Davenport, Varlo;

To whom it may concern:

I am writing in support of Varlo Davenport and to give insight into acting techniques used in a basic Fundamentals of Acting Course.

The very nature of Acting is to discover a vulnerability in oneself, making the process difficult for the beginner. It is our task to enlighten young students in ALL aspects of the human condition.

Physical activity challenging individual comfort zones is the very process used in established acting techniques such as Stanislavski, Grotowski, Strasberg, Meisner, Adler and in nearly every acting text on the current market. These techniques push and pull, literally, physically at actors in order to inspire them to break down barriers and inform new emotional and physical freedom. This is the risk for a student and for an acting instructor. Exercises that allow the body to inform the brain often require physical impulse.

As an acting instructor myself, I inform my students orally and in my syllabus of these kinds of exercises and what they will require. A good acting instructor is one who helps students taking these risks in a safe controlled environment. These are academic exercises working toward skilled principles of Theatre Arts and yes, there is risk.

It is not always comfortable to be an actor, nor advisable to certain students, which is the purpose of fundamental acting class work. If you wish to discuss this further, please contact me.

Most Sincerely,

Douglas H. Baker

Professor of Theatre, Emeritus, College of Southern Nevada

702-682-4894

To whom it may concern:

1/8/15

Mikhail Chekhov, probably the greatest teacher of acting in the history of the world stage, instructed performing artists to remember that their only reliable access to truthful emotion is *through the body*. If you jump, your body releases hormones that excite you; your muscles stretch, contract; you breathe hard. Walk around slowly, then sit down; you feel relaxed. Slump: you feel at least a little sad. Wrestle someone (whom you trust), pull on each other's arms, exchange noisy (but physically harmless) stage slaps: you feel at least a little angry.

Chekhov passionately (and accurately) pointed out that remembering your grandma's funeral might or might not make you cry – but you can be sure that, after using this "substitution" a few times, its effect will diminish/eventually vanish. You can't tell your subconscious to behave, to dispense varied and deep emotions as if they were soft drinks. You'll see, if you watch them, the world's best actors *physically* preparing to act – both in rehearsal and before they enter stage. Nearly always, the corporeal preparation of intense feeling is demanding. In the best classes and practices, it is physically, ethically and emotionally safe.

Varlo Davenport knows, reveres and loves the art of acting as do very few people I know. He respects people, empathizes with their experiences, concerns himself unrelentingly with their safety and well-being – and he lets his students know, in advance of training, that learning to act will challenge (but not injure) their bodies and feelings. He takes care to access emotion with reverence for the instrument – and he establishes "safe" signals with his students that allow them to indicate when they feel over-taxed or threatened.

The science of acting is as old as ritual. It is as exact – and as deserving of caution - as any performance/athletic/military/endurance training there is. Those who study it should be prepared to be "stretched." They can have no better mentor/guide than Varlo Davenport. I send my best students his way.

Richard Hill

MFA-Acting/Penn State University – Teacher, Hurricane High Theater Arts



Mr. Will Craver
Director, Human Resources
Dixie State University
St. George, Utah 84770

Dear Mr. Craver

My name is John Campbell Finnegan. I am a professional actor/director here in Southern Indiana/Louisville Kentucky having worked at Actors Theatre of Louisville under the esteemed Jon Jory as well as most of the second tier theaters here. I have taught acting for Indiana University here and currently am on the faculty of Purdue University. I have acted/directed and taught acting all over the United States and internationally in Japan, South Korea and Melbourne Australia. I am a recognized fight choreographer, published author and have been teaching acting/narrative story telling for the past 25 years including Acting for Animators for Disney, Pixar and other studios producing animated films.

I'm writing to you today to support Varlo Davenport in his teaching of the art and craft of acting. I've known Varlo for 30 years. We were graduate students together at The Ohio State University where he was my primary acting partner both in the studio for training and onstage in many productions including *Dracula*, *Mame* and Shaw's *Heartbreak House*. In those shows, especially one as physical as *Dracula*, I trusted Varlo not only with my artistic life but also with my physical life as my character, Renfield, leapt about the stage including onto Varlo as Dracula. I had to trust that he would be there to support me in our pursuit of the story in that moment. I knew he had trained and trained hard to make this dramatic moment come alive on stage and I never waivered in my trust in him. To this day, Varlo is the actor I would choose to work with in any dramatic presentation where I had to either physically or emotionally expose myself in pursuit of the narrative story.

Varlo directed me in a number of shows and I have directed him in a number of shows both at that time and since then. Varlo is an actor who any actor or director would want to work with. He's a consummate professional. He seeks the truth in telling the story and uses the art and craft of acting to do so. He is kind and considerate and is always teaching others and giving back to the younger generation of artists with whom he works. I have observed his classroom teaching style and classroom management techniques and all of them are in line with current pedagogy on teaching the art and craft of acting.

An actor has only three tools with which to bring the text, the story and the character to life in a believable manner. Those three things are the body, the voice and the mind-- which includes the imagination center, the intellectual/analytical center and the emotional center.

In actor training we sometimes train those things individually such as singing classes, voice and diction classes or speech classes for the voice; dance classes, stage combat classes and actor movement classes for the body. The imagination is hopefully fed with experiences, which actors can recall and use on stage, reading dramatic scripts and all of our life experiences, which are stored inside. They need to be accessed, in fact, in order to bring the characters emotions and wants, wishes, dreams and desires to life in a believable manner. Actor training pedagogy asserts this and any acting teacher will verify it. The ways in which we can train to access our emotions and prior experiences primarily are physical-which is immediate and direct or intellectual which will ultimately lead to a physical response.

In the acting studio we combine all of those things and apply it directly to dramatic moments on stage to re-create human behavior believably. This is the art and craft of acting.

In the acting studio we do this with the aid of a coach, our acting teacher, the person who is responsible

for the training and achieving the desired effects for the results necessary in any given moment in the dramatic life of a character.

Often times as with young actors who don't have a lot of experiences on which they can call in order to re-create the characters moment to moment life on stage, the acting teacher will need to engage the students in any number of different ways. Some of these ways are analytical-asking questions with regard to a character's goals and objectives. Other times, it is necessary for a young actor to feel something in order to embody it, understand its effect on the body and mind of the actor and character in order to recreate it on stage. The experiencing of it or certainly something similar to whatever the character needs to be feeling is of the utmost importance. Sometimes this requires physical contact with the actor to give them an obstacle, something to work against, while they strive for, a goal—which is the lifeblood of the actor/character relationship—goals, objectives and the obstacles-physical, mental, emotional, that stand between the character and the goal.

An acting class that does not explore the physical possibilities of goal pursuit on the part of the actors, either to achieve their goal or to block their scene partner from obtaining their goal, isn't exploring the moment-to-moment life of the character in full. You are only preparing part of the actor/character relationship if it's only words and thoughts. I can't conceive of an acting studio that didn't utilize all the tools of the actor in pursuit of the truth in the story. To ask an acting teacher to withhold any of the available methodologies would cripple the teaching and learning in the studio.

I would be happy to talk with you further in this matter if you feel the need to do so. I can be reached by phone at 502-432-7946 or via email at finnegan@purdue.edu.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Finnegan', with a stylized flourish at the end.

John Campbell Finnegan
Associate Professor
Purdue University

To: Varlo Davenport
From: Michael Harding
Re: Active Physical Resistance Work With Students

It is my position that the job of the First-Year Acting Coach is to magnify the vessels of the students (i.e. their bodies) to a level with which they may begin to experience both the exhausting physical energy and extraordinary emotional range of creating stage-worthy acting. There are many methods through which this might be achieved. If the student is already dedicated to learning the craft of acting, this takes a relatively small amount of prodding. However, if a student - and by extension, the teacher - is not certain as to whether they are desirous of furthering their craft, the occasional push is necessary. There are three types of students in Acting I: they clearly want to be there and learn, they want to be there and aren't sure whether or not they want to learn, and finally they want to be there to fulfill credit hours and are not interested in learning. For the latter group, it is necessary for the teacher to recognize this lack of dedication and to "cut bait and run". The first group requires an energy from the teacher to push guide them on their way and gently guide through their growth. It's the middle group that becomes tricky.

In learning acting, one must be aware of, and ultimately be in control of, their natural responses to stimuli. I begin working with anger, because ironically it is the least threatening emotional state when one is pretending. Sometimes with this emotional state comes being startled, or uncomfortable in a variety of ways. A fantastic way to evoke emotional response is to limit a student's movement, or put them in a situation where they must be constantly on guard for physical change. A common example of this is the game wherein one student places their hands in front of them, palms down, in the air at belly level. Their partner places their hands, palms up, under the partner's hands. While the first partner is doing their monologue, they must also be aware of whenever the second partner might swiftly attempt to slap the back of the first partner's hands. This creates an energy of heightened awareness that must become habit for an actor.

Sometimes, physicality, by either the teacher or a student partner, is used to either restrict the movement of the student or give them a significant obstacle over which to conquer. Of course a teacher must always be sensitive to students' discomfort at this exercise and adjust accordingly, but if the teacher states the purpose before the exercise is enacted, students have the opportunity to say either yay or nay. This is a very common method of working with very high consistent results. Should a student feel uncomfortable with the outcome or performance of the exercise, any teacher worth their salt would be willing to listen and be sensitive to the student's concerns and perhaps employ another method. We as teachers are not counselors or mind readers, but Acting Coaches. Might a basketball player feel abused on the court if pushed too hard? A

dancer resentful if drilled to harshly? Of course... but in the case of tried and proven methods, these instances should be rare... as are any complaints of which I am aware at Dixie State University in the 8 years I have been teaching.

Michael A. Harding

Associate Professor of Theatre

Dixie State University

435-652-7725

Life is real. Theatre is more.

To:

Davenport, Varlo;

Dear Sir or madam,

First I would like to say that I am an adjunct professor at Dixie State University. I have known, Varlo Davenport for two years. We have worked together as colleagues at DSU, as well as outside of the college in a professional acting environment. I consider him a mentor and friend.

I would like to explain some thoughts about theatre pedagogy.

ACTING: OUR GOAL

The work is hard. The human condition begins to develop a series of emotional and mental blockages as we grow older. The skilled actor, however, must fully realize and embody the character they are portraying, regardless of every wall society has coaxed them to build up around themselves. Here in lies the necessity for extensive training.

As acting teachers, and coaches, we are set out to help actors break through those walls. The way we do this is by using techniques developed to aid the actor in finding their most organic approach. Resistance work, physical work, somatic training, kinesthetic exercise, etc. These are just a few of the approaches skilled teachers use in the classroom to help their students achieve their best work.

TECHNIQUES:

In my classroom I use a wide variety of techniques to train my actors. I do this because every actor is different. They have different degrees of skills, understandings, and most importantly, they all have different degrees of their own physical and mental resistances. One of the most successful tools I can employ as a teacher, is that of sensory awareness for the actor. We want our actors to engage in more than just thinking. We want them to feel. This, many times, is something that needs to be coaxed from them. This can be done through touch, physical resistance against the actor, and even by putting the actor in a physical situation that they do not normally embody.

An example of this in my classroom is when an actor is performing a monologue and they aren't able to tap into the actual emotion of the character. The actor is scared to "feel" that emotion (or maybe they're just lazy, etc). So I will ask that actor to change their physical stance. I will have them, for example, contort their torso and their neck. This change in their physical being will send sensory awareness to the brain and alter their thought pattern. Often, it will redirect the actors thoughts to their new physicality. That rerouting of thought allows the emotion of the text to come through the actor without being filtered by an over thinking actor.

There are literally hundreds of other physical techniques teachers use in the classroom that are designed to push the actor physically, emotionally, and mentally. Each one is aimed at the evocation of emotional response through physicality. Unless you have studied theatre, these names and techniques will mean little to you. I will, however, mention a few because I use them in every class I teach, whether it be acting, voice, improvisation, dance, et al. They are: Grotowski's plastiques and corporals, Meyerhold's Biomechanic's, Boal's, "Push Not to Win" exercise, and the approaches of the Alexander Technique.

THE ACTOR CAN FACE THEIR FEARS OR WALK AWAY:

Actors are human. Humans often cry, get angry, and even run away from the emotions that are the most raw, real, and palpable. It is common for actors to spend time crying and yelling after an acting lesson. They felt something, and if it was a great session, they felt something powerful and beyond themselves. It's a lot for one human to take on, so they react. In cases of young, new actors, they will sometimes shut down to those feelings or react without

the understanding of, "why" they are feeling those feelings. Either way, it is a rigorous and challenging thing to be an actor and once that actor reaches the university level, they are choosing to pay hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars to be the best actor they can be. So we, as educators, need to push them in new and demanding ways, even past their comfort zones, so that they may grow, learn, and ultimately improve.

This is an excerpt from my, Dixie State University: New and Adjunct Faculty Handbook 2013-2014. I feel it explains why we must challenge our students as far as we can:

Dixie State University is committed to quality instruction and authentic assessment. Education, it has been said, is the only thing people shell out a lot of money for . . . and then do everything possible to avoid getting their money's worth! Despite the financial and personal costs of their education, many students are afraid of the hard work that is required for that education to have maximum benefit. Thus, students often mistakenly seek out the easiest, least stressful, and often the least effective way to fill their requirements and complete their degrees. Students ask one another about individual teachers' grading standards, expectations, and assigned homework. An informal system of comparison exists among students: "Professor Smith is demanding, rigorous, and thorough . . . but Professor Jones has lower expectations and easier grading standards." Before long, students flock toward options that offer them the least resistance, the lowest expectations, and the least real learning, however detrimental this might be to their education. Even faced with such attitudes, Dixie State University is dedicated to high academic standards (Instructional Procedures, 8).

I do not know of one college or university that claims it wants to train their students mediocrelly. I have never read a mission statement that claims that the university will educate their students up to the point where the students become frustrated by the work. And I am unaware of any academic institution that desires their students be "somewhat" proficient in their studies. In fact, Richard B. Williams, President of Dixie State University said, "As a regional state university, we promote our campus-wide culture of learning by providing our students with rigorous instruction and personalized attention delivered by a talented roster of highly trained and educated faculty."

Acting is hard. I agree with our president that it takes a rigorous and personalized approach.

VARLO DAVENPORT

Varlo Davenport understands all of this. He is highly educated. He not only knows the theories and techniques, he teaches them well, he employs them in his own acting proficiently, and he elevates conversations and collaborations within the community in the name of betterment and achievement. Varlo is talented, highly trained, and extensively educated and I know this because not only have multitudes of students attested to that, the community has, his colleagues have, and now, I have. He challenges his students by asking them to be better life-long learners, to grow beyond their fears, to push against the boundaries that make them want to quit, and to explore everything possible. He is what Dixie State University has asked him to be; And more.

A UNIVERSITY THAT SUPPORTS IT'S FACULTY

I have a question for you now. Why would a university not support their faculty? If a student has an issue, they should be heard, yes. And if that student has a valid issue or complaint, that too should be heard and addressed. But why would the faculty member involved not be consulted and asked for their side of the story prior to being put on administrative leave? Is it possible that the student was misunderstood, misinformed, or even their feelings miscommunicated? Doesn't the faculty member have a greater understanding and relationship with the student than those who are not in the classroom with that student multiple times a week? I am for student's rights. We do, actually, work for them. I believe that their claims are valid. I also feel that the faculty, who is set forth into the classroom with the full faith and credit of the university behind them, has validity and merit within their claims too.

I can only ask that you consider this after having dismissed one of your faculty, without hearing his side of the story.

Thank you for taking the time and effort to read this letter. I hope that it gives you insight, awareness, and further understanding as you move forward in your decisions regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

Kelly Thomas, MFA, Naropa University
Adjunct Professor, Dixie State University

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Kelly Thomas
(540)-538-5542

Elizabethtown College
Fine and Performing Arts Department
Theatre and Dance Division
1 Alpha Drive
Elizabethtown, PA 17022
December 16, 2014

To Whom It May Concern:

It's come to my attention that Varlo Davenport has been challenged by a student who felt that a touch in an acting class was somehow problematic. Not only do I value Varlo as a colleague and as a person who I believe wouldn't use touch inappropriately, but I wonder if the frequency of human contact in an acting class has been considered fully.

I write to say that, after 25 years of college teaching, it is difficult to imagine teaching an acting class without some touching of another human being. There are a number of basic acting texts on my shelf, and when I pick up one at random – *The Actor in You*, by Robert Benedetti – there are drawings of classroom exercises that show one actor touching another – supporting them with hands on a back, hands on shoulders massaging. Of the other texts on that shelf, most include some similar drawing. Even demonstrating these exercises to a class would require that a student volunteer to demonstrate with the teacher. In my experience in the classroom, sometimes a guiding hand is needed to best show a student actor how to move a hand or arm. How can a teacher of acting avoid this, and hope to teach acting well?

I hope that the concerns raised in this case can be dealt with easily. If I can be of any further assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me. My phone is 317-590-5097, and I can also be reached at swansonm@etown.edu.

Sincerely,

Michael Swanson, Ph. D.
Director of Theatre and Dance
Associate Professor of Theatre

January 12, 2015

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Miss Ani Rogers; I am a former graduate of Dixie State University. It was there that I met and worked with my mentor and friend, Professor Varlo Davenport as an acting student for the very first time. The time I spent in class under his artistic instruction proved to be life-altering. Since that time I have collaborated and been in touch with him for the past ten years as I too have become a theatre educator and acting coach in the area. I am grateful to write this letter of support on behalf of Varlo as it gives me the opportunity to vocalize to you what a positive impact he and his spot-on acting methods have had on my life and career.

When I attended my first semester at DSU; it was a huge reality check. I soon believed that college just wasn't for me. It was my passion for acting that Varlo reinforced that kept me in school and eventually made me a DSU graduate. In acting class, I soon learned a variety of lessons from him: "Acting is the reality of doing, acting is reacting and performing real life onstage," "The process of becoming a better actor is the same as becoming a better person," and finally the idea that "... the true value of theatre comes from an actor's ability to believably tell a story to the audience so that they leave changed; having felt something that reminds them of their humanity..." These lessons have since anchored my performing and educational philosophy.

That being said, I firmly believe that an acting teacher's objective is to help his/her students reach that level of truth in their class projects and performances. Once reached, students experience a creative freedom and "high" because they are no longer trapped by "walls" that limit their performance abilities. As an acting student, Varlo got me performing truthfully by directly employing a variety of emotional, physical and interactive exercises in class. Varlo did this when he recognized the "wall of fear" I put up and how it blocked my ability to progress and produce an organic response. I. L.O.V.E.D I.T! It released me from everything that held me back in my art. I felt safe, I felt challenged and I felt that every minute he gave me turned into a valuable experience. I literally remember feeling disappointed when time wouldn't allow Varlo to work with me every day in class. Even now, I find myself using many of the traditional acting methods I learned from him in my own classroom. Like Varlo, it is my goal to create positive learning environments within the classroom that promote student success in acting. Like Varlo, I use a variety of teaching tactics to help me achieve my objectives - such as physical interaction activities that take place one-on-one and/or with a small group, impromptus', scenarios, scenes, asking questions and playing ice-breaker games. Like Varlo, interacting with my students is not abnormal behavior for my acting class. Together as teacher and student we learn theatre by doing theatre.

I have a great respect for this man and trust him completely; I owe him so much as he is one of the few men upon whose shoulders I stand. Without him and his artistic guidance I know without a doubt I would not be where I am today: happy, employed, contributing to my community and inspiring the young minds of the students I teach... students who I hope will one day have the opportunity to learn from his master teaching skills and methods.

Miss Ani Rogers
Pine View High Theatre Director

* Theatre Art Studies – Brigham Young University

Dr. Jerry D. Harris
Department of Physical Sciences
SMPS 235

December 11, 2014

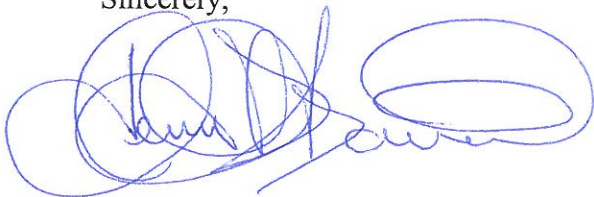
To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in support of Varlo Davenport with regards to the allegation that he touched a student inappropriately. During the Fall 2014 semester, I was a student in Varlo's THEA 1113/COMM 1400 Voice and Diction class. A portion of this class involved learning to breathe correctly and to feel vocal resonances in different parts of the body. In order to effectively teach these techniques and sensations, Varlo needed, on occasion and for purely educational purposes, to either (a) adjust students' postures by the shoulders, abdomen, and/or legs and feet, or (b) gently palpate various (non-sexual) parts of some students' bodies, primarily in the abdominal (diaphragmatic) region and on the neck and head.

Varlo stated explicitly in the syllabus for the course that he would need to do this on occasion; he also stated explicitly that anyone that would be uncomfortable with such touching was free to bring their discomfort to his attention and that he would take that into account. He also explained this explicitly in class, both when going over the syllabus and during class sessions when such touching may have been required. Furthermore, whenever he needed to touch any student, he requested permission and gave students the opportunity to "opt out" (which, in the Voice and Diction course, no one did, to my recollection). While I personally was not subject to any such physical contact, in my experience in the class, in the rare instances during which any such touching was required, I never saw Varlo do anything even remotely inappropriate—he was always very respectful of students' bodies and their individual rights. Also in my experience, Varlo made such physical contact equally with both male and female students—I saw no evidence whatsoever of a gender bias.

In your investigations of the allegation brought against Varlo, please take my testimony into account. I hope it is useful in helping clear up this matter quickly. If you have additional questions, I would be happy to discuss the matter further. Thank you very much for your time and attention!

Sincerely,



Dr. Jerry D. Harris

Associate Professor, Department of Physical Sciences

Alumni Support Letters

Much of this material speaks directly to what takes place in my classroom. They reference how I work with students, the "out" they are given if they become uncomfortable with any exercise, and, for those who have gone on to graduate school and professional work, the efficacy and value of the kind of work I do in my Acting classes.

Travis Cox
Brandon Price
Spencer Potter
Guy Smith
Melissa Erickson
Skyler Scott
Lanny Langston
Matt Russell
Brook Owen
DJ Pike
Crystal Bates
Heather Gibson
Ami Porter
Slate Holmgren
Alex Gubler
Jarom Brown
Bryant Larsen
Hannah Davenport

Letter to Craver. :)

Travis Cox <travlcx@gmail.com>

Tue 1/20/2015 6:17 PM

To: Davenport, Varlo;

To Whom it May Concern,

I'm writing this letter to add my voice of support to those you've already heard, on behalf of Varlo Davenport. It has taken me so long to write this letter mostly because I've found it extremely difficult to put into words the things that need to be said about him.

First, for context, a little background on myself.

I'm an actor. I'm currently living in Los Angeles, CA. I have appeared on "Criminal Minds," "Adam Divines House Party," "Crimestrike" and other TV shows. In the past four years I have starred in five feature films, over 15 short films, (Including one starring Nick Offerman from 'Parks and Rec' as well as one that won an Emmy) and five plays at professional theatre houses. I am a member of the Screen Actors Guild. I am also a former student of Varlo's, and an alumni of Dixie State College.

I don't write all of that to brag. Only to show that the things Varlo taught, the exercises we went through, the books we read, the drills we ran, the times he pushed, the times he pulled, the time he took to teach, coach, mentor, and support me... gave me the tools I needed to be successful in this incredibly competitive industry. And I'm not the only one. It seems like my facebook page is constantly being updated with success stories of my peers. Others who were fortunate enough to study under Varlo. That's not a coincidence. He is brilliant at his job.

As far as the situation at hand is concerned; I have only been given a quick outline of the things that occurred, and the accusations given. I wasn't there so I certainly can't give any input on what happened, but I was completely shocked to hear the news. My experiences in Varlo's classes are very fond to me. I grew immensely as an actor in those classrooms. Were some days difficult? Of course. Did Varlo ever make me and several of my classmates cry in class? Of course. Did he make us laugh? Of course. Did he make us feel angry, frustrated, elated, passionate, hopeless, courageous, powerful, weak, evil, innocent, heroic and brave? Of course. Because that's what a good acting coach does. Because that's what we paid for. Anyone who takes this craft seriously knows that being able to

tap into *real* emotions on command, to tell a story, even an ugly story, truthfully... does not come easy. It's real. It's uncomfortable. It's tough. It's beautiful. And it's going to take someone, like Varlo, to push you through it. But I ALWAYS knew, that if Varlo was pushing me, it's because he wasn't going to let me fall.

I NEVER felt attacked. I NEVER felt unsafe. I NEVER felt abused. I NEVER felt betrayed. I NEVER felt assaulted.

I love Varlo. I am so grateful for my time in his classes. I'm so grateful that I got to be in productions directed by him. I'm grateful that I could go to his office and talk about my life and the struggles I was facing. He is one of the kindest, most loving, most generous men I've ever met. It kills me to know that his sincere desire to make a student better has been interpreted as something so ugly.

The tools, and methods that Varlo uses in his class are not inappropriate. They are necessary. They are industry standard. Ask around.

For what it's worth. I can tell you that Varlo is a good man, and a brilliant director, actor and teacher. If Dixie State College loses him, the loss will be immeasurable, and your theatre program will never be the same.

Sincerely,

-Travis Lincoln Cox

[IMDB](#) - [Website](#) - [Twitter](#)

818.385.7241

Letter of Support for Varlo Davenport

Brandon Price

<brandonprice@outlook.co>

To whom it may concern,

My name is Brandon Price. I'm a recent graduate of DSU (now working at the University of Central Arkansas) and a former student of Varlo. I wanted to offer my experience in working with Varlo as a professor, director and administrator.

I'm not eloquent with words, but in the simplest terms I can state, working with Varlo as a director and professor was always a positive and enjoyable experience.

In the acting classes I personally had with him as a professor, I was constantly driven to achieve my best work. Acting can be a very difficult thing emotionally, because you are searching for and experiencing emotions that we as human beings tend to suppress because they are uncomfortable. It was always my experience that Varlo's classroom was a safe space, and I never felt threatened or intimidated while working with him. Classes weren't easy, but I always wanted to give my best and not settle for mediocracy. Hearing about the way he worked with friends in upper division acting classes was always insightful and made me look forward to being able to take some of those classes myself later in my educational career.

Every director has a particular set of exercises and things they like their actors to try, which may sometimes involve some sort of physical component. One vivid memory I have of such an exercise was while working with another director (not Varlo) on a competition piece. This was from a heartbreaking play where the two characters are on opposite sides of a fence at a concentration camp during WWII. In order to explore the urgency my character had to say his message to his love, this particular director asked if they could physically restrain me while I did the scene. I agreed, and ran the scene standing up, with my hands being held behind my back like a guard would do. The more I tried to get loose, the stronger I was restrained. During this particular exercise, while it was uncomfortable I always felt safe. Obviously, this is a larger example of an exercise used to help an actor find an emotion and I know that throughout my time as a student in the department there were many other examples of these type of exercises.

I was a student in the theater department for nearly four full years. I was working on my senior capstone project proposal when I made the decision to change my major to communications. This decision was probably one of the most difficult in life thus far. At this point, many changes had happened within the theater department: the department chairmanship had changed, professors had been fired, there was poor communication among new department leadership which resulted in a culture of gossip and laziness among a good part of the students in the department. It was taking a toll on me personally and most days I hated being in the department. The only positive point I was working with Varlo as he directed "Fiddler on the Roof." In everything else, I didn't feel like I was being challenged, listened to, or having my time used effectively (for example, having nightly rehearsals for another production from 7 until midnight or later). As VP of Academics for the DSUSA, I tried so hard to help give my suggestions of what the students in the department needed, but any suggestions or partnerships I offered fell on deaf ears. As I said earlier, by this part of my time as a theater student, working with Varlo as a director and mentor was the only positive thing I felt was left in the department.

In closing, I do just want to you to know how much I love and care about my school and former department and why I Some of my most treasured memories and moments of personal discovery and growth happened there. I would be extremely saddened to see the program lose one of it's greatest mentors and directors.

I appreciate your time in reading this. I've tried to summarize my feelings as succinctly as possible. If you have any questions or need any clarification or further elaboration about my personal experiences, please feel free to contact me via telephone or email. I hope you will genuinely consider my experiences as a recent alumni, former DSUSA leader and student.

Sincerely,

Brandon Price

brandonprice@outlook.com

December 10, 2014

Dear Mr. Craver,

My name is Spencer Potter, a proud Dixie State alum from the class of 2011. I earned my Bachelors of Science in Integrated Studies with emphasis in theater and psychology. Since graduating, I have gone on to complete my MFA in Set and Costume design at Utah State University. I have worked as a professional designer and technician throughout the state of Utah and throughout the nation. Currently I am based in New Jersey where I work as a resident designer and Production Manager for Cape May Stage. My design for Cape May Stage's 2014 production of *Blithe Spirit* was featured in the *New York Times*.

Blithe Spirit is a very personal and meaningful play to me. When Dixie State produced this play in the fall of 2010, I played the lead role of Charles Condomine and was also the set designer. It was the last time I performed as an actor at Dixie and in my career. The set design for this show was also the key piece in my portfolio that got me noticed by graduate schools. It was an honor and privilege to have Vice Presidents Dillingham-Evans and Lojko attend the performance. Another regular guest at my performances was Dean Beatty, a close friend and mentor. I worked with all three while I served as the Fine and Performing Arts Student Senator from 2009-2011, and as one of Dixie's candidates for Student Regent in 2010. I look back on my experiences at Dixie and under Varlo Davenport's mentoring with utmost fondness. I would not be where I am today if it were not for my training and experiences at Dixie.

I am saddened to learn the theatre program is currently undergoing a turbulent time with recent allegations of assault between a faculty member and student. The wellbeing of my alma mater is always important to me. As said, I trained under Varlo Davenport as a theatre artist in addition to studying psychology. My experience in acting and psychology gives me some unique insight into acting and its mind body connection. I hope my insight might lend some clarity to this complex situation.

Part of why I chose to pursue a career in design rather than acting is because acting is *hard work*. It's incredibly time consuming, physically exhausting, and emotionally draining. At times, it requires delving into the deepest darkest corners of your life, humanity, and your own comfort zones. Acting and physicality are part of basic and advanced actor training. Brilliant actors instinctually bring their performance into their bodies. They develop this instinct through various psychical exercises such as acting like animals, elements, or through psychical contact and touch with acting coaches and other students. This is the standard practice at the universities I've attended and the professional organizations I've worked in.

Reaching a deep emotional state is very difficult especially for young actors. It's scary to have those feelings and it's uncomfortable to show that vulnerability. When I was studying, I was very resistant to crossing those emotionally boundaries. I could not mentally bring myself to cross them. That is why acting with your head, or intellectualized acting, can only take you so far.

The other route to emotion, other than the mind, is the body. William James, the father of modern psychology, noted the mind/body connection in his famous "Bear Story." The lesson James taught with this story is famously summed up with the line "You're not running because you're

scared, you're scared because you're running." This has since be observed in many studies and experiments in cognitive behavioral psychology and neuroscience.

From James' observation, one can see emotions can be jump started, triggered, and perhaps even synthesized through physical movement. When I was a young theatre artist, the only way I could reach certain emotional states was through physical movement. Specific movement and touch used to help me reach these states were: physical restraint from others as I struggled to achieve an objective or connect my scene partner. Staying still and laying vulnerably on the floor as a scene occurred, and acting without being able to use my voice, sight, or hearing. Each of these physical exercises pushed me to a better performance by physically bringing feelings of struggle, powerlessness, loss, fear, and unease into my body. Please think on the last time you experienced any of these emotions. Do you think you could willingly go back and feel these again? If you could, do you think it would be easy or comfortable? I'm willing to bet that it wouldn't be easy or at all comfortable. You might be able to feel traces or memories of these emotions, but to physically manifest these emotions and relieve the experience moment by moment would be very, if not impossibly, difficult for most. In fact, our brain has adapted to block painful memories during trauma. Humans also actively engage in motivated forgetting in order to cope with emotional and physical pain. At the time, these exercises were uncomfortable, but I knew I was in the best hands and willing to follow through the exercise. The lessons I learned during this coaching were some of the most valuable of my career

The temporary discomfort and pain of an acting exercise is what enables a performer to repeat strong emotions night after night that most people only experience once in a lifetime. This is why people study this craft. This is why Tony awards and Oscars are given, essays written, and audiences brought to tears. Acting is hard. Acting is emotional. Acting is uncomfortable at times and not all students are prepared for this when they begin. One cannot seriously study acting without the emotional and physical discomfort accompanied by practicing this craft. Expecting to act without discomfort is akin to expecting to paint without getting paint on your hands, sculpt without dirt under your nails, or sing without a voice.

It is the duty of educational institutions to protect their students *and* faculty. I, of course, feel there should be a formal investigation and due process be followed. For as vulnerable as an acting student must feel at times, an acting coach is as equally as vulnerable as they help students navigate deep emotional waters. We must respect this relationship to ensure future students gain the same level of in depth training and not have acting teachers and coaches fearful of doing the very difficult job given to them.

With sincere respect,

Spencer M. Potter

Spencer M. Potter.

This is a copy of a message sent to Bill Christensen from Guy Smith.

Guy Smith <guylroy4@gmail.com>

Sat 12/13/2014 10:23 AM

To:

Davenport, Varlo;

You replied on 12/13/2014 12:40 PM.

Put together a little something. Wanted to make sure I said the right things before I sent it off, hope I can help,

Dear William

Good afternoon, my name is **Guy Smith**. I'm an alumnus of Dixie State currently residing in New York City, and was a student of Varlo Davenports for many years. I'm aware of Varlo's recent suspension from teaching following an assault charge from an acting one student. If I may, I would like to offer some of my personal experience with Professor Davenport, hoping to shed some light on the environment he creates in his courses.

In my years at Dixie I took nearly every single class professor Davenport has to offer from acting one through his most advance courses. Professor Davenport is by far one of the most influential and effective mentors I've ever trained under, and his effectiveness stems from a level of courage and trust I have yet to find in another mentor. From day one as his pupil he was always very clear that if I (or any student) was uncomfortable with his method of evoking reaction, I may halt the exercise at any time. I understood I was always in control of how far I allowed the training to go, and because of that trust I experienced overwhelming growth in his courses.

Acting, like an art, is an intensely immersive craft that should not be taken lightly. As someone who has spent their entire life in the arts, professional and otherwise, I will tell you it's not an arena for the faint of heart. The process of acting is just as physical as it is mental and those who are not prepared to undertake the strain can become overwhelmed. I do not know the student involved, nor do I have to know them; I've worked on Broadway, currently in television, and have been doing this long enough to see that most people do not have what it takes. I believe many students take an acting class hoping for a semester of bench warming and a fluffy easy A. Professor Davenport is very clear about his level of involvement with students, and his dedication to his students' growth.

I hope this offers some sort of perspective on the situation, and I know I'm not the only student (former or current) that feels this way. Please, if you're have any questions feel free to contact me. I'm on set most days during regular hours, but can sometimes find time in the cracks to speak on the phone. I hope this finds you well, enjoy the coming holiday.

-Guy

December 17, 2014

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in regards to Professor Varlo Davenport, who has been my professor and trusted mentor for over 6 years now. Professor Davenport originally recruited me from another college, promising more opportunities along with a more hands on experience in the theater world, and fulfilled all of these promises beyond my expectations. After my attendance at what is now Dixie University, I received my Bachelor's Degree in Theater the first year it became available in 2011.

Since then, I have worked professionally starting with the Utah Shakespeare Festival, along with 2 years of professional theater employment at various theaters in Minneapolis. Currently, I am now working in New York City after coming back from a 6 month national tour, along with working in production for a popular television show. I will soon take a job offer with the Philharmonic Orchestra this coming New Year.

My current work and success in employment has been heavily influenced by my education through various staff at Dixie, and I am grateful that Varlo was the one who supported me in my transition from my previous University. Not only did he bring me into this program, but he prepared me for a lifestyle working in the entertainment industry.

Professor Davenport has a teaching style that has helped break through walls that were holding me back from my own success. His acting classes continue to be an experience that I can still relate to from practices I shared in them years ago. Varlo's teaching style is down to earth and straightforward. He is skilled in using approaches that bring down barriers visible during acting exercises and performances which would not only help the performer, but the class watching this instruction as well.

As a performer, you put yourself on view for an audience. If there are obstacles or walls that prevent you from delivering, it can be a crucial point that can cost the casting of a role. As a professional, the loss of this role means loss of income and work. Professor Davenport is skilled at pinpointing these barriers, using approaches that break them down. Whether it be not reacting to a partner, not truly listening within a scene, along with many other acting flaws, Varlo uses practices that get a real response from an actor, who in turn can absolutely relate to these responses and use in future occasions. Some of my own personal and influential acting experiences have been a part of these exercises. While powerful, never once did I feel unsafe or lose trust for my professor or acting partners. I was in a secure learning environment where not only the actor benefits, but those watching can apply as well, provided with such raw reaction and demonstration.

One thing I can truly say I appreciate is never being "babied" in Varlo's classes. After starting to work professionally, I experienced a definite slap of reality in this line of work. This lifestyle can be cold, hard, and is always fast paced. There are times when you feel like you are literally fighting to keep your head above water. In the end, as everyone who stays in this line of work will tell you; we can't imagine doing anything else. I am grateful that Varlo's tone of teaching, along with his never-ending kindness and support, that has helped prepare me for something I could have drowned in.

Please feel free to contact me at any time with any questions you might have.

Melissa Erickson

(435) 669-6468

melissa_a_erickson@yahoo.com

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Skyler Scott. I graduated with an Associates of Arts Degree from Dixie State before four-year Arts programs were offered at the University. I then went on to graduate with a Bachelor's Degree in Theater Arts from Western Washington University with an emphasis in Directing. Over the past decade, I have ample opportunities to provide instruction in the theater arts. My work experience in an educational environment is briefly summarized below:

- Managing Director/Musical Theater Instructor of Center Stage Performing Arts Studios for St. George Musical Theater 2003-2005
- Acting Instructor for Summer Youth Theater Institute (SYTI) at Western Washington University 2009
- Musical Theater Instructor for Dixie Arts Conservatory 2011
- Acting Instructor for the Stage Door Studios 2011/2012
- Managing Director/Musical Theater Instructor for Adagio Performing Arts Studios 2014 to present.

While attending Dixie State, I had the opportunity to work very closely with Varlo Davenport, who was the Theater Chair at the time. I took more courses from Varlo than any other professor, and I was in several productions he directed. I would like to briefly share an experience that I had with Varlo that had a great impact on me as an actor, a director, and a person.

In the fall of 2004 I was cast in the role Henry Jekyll / Edward Hyde in Dixie State's production of Jekyll and Hyde, directed by Varlo Davenport. The production was a tremendous success and was invited to participate in the 2005 Region VIII Festival of the Kennedy Center American College Theater Association. I was one of only eight actors national wide to be honored with the 2005 Kennedy Center *Best of Festival* Award. I would never have received the reward if it wasn't for Varlo. He pushed me to my limits every minute of every rehearsal, and then after rehearsal he would often pull me aside and push me some more. He was, and is, committed to helping each of his students become their best.

I remember one rehearsal in particular when we were rehearsing perhaps the most intense scene of the show, which required intricate stage combat. The challenge in such a scene is to create and maintain a high level of emotion and intensity, while physically having calculated and complete control of every movement. While learning the stage combat choreography, Varlo was on stage physically interacting with the actors and demonstrating each movement, so that what appeared to be a chaotic brawl between actors was actually a polished ballet. Perhaps the reason I vividly remember this occasion is because it is the only time I ever remember Varlo yelling at me during a rehearsal. After running a difficult sequence several times at half speed, as we were instructed to do, I felt confident enough in the movements to run them in real time. I did. A sharp roar from the director stopped me in my tracks. Varlo made it very clear to me that was never to happen again. The safety of his actors would come before anything else.

As a director, getting on stage and *physically interacting* with students to reshape and even heighten the energy and intensity of a scene does not make Varlo unique. It's common in educational theater. What makes Varlo unique is he's really damn good at it.

Respectfully submitted,

Skyler Scott
Dixie State University Alumni

Lanny Langston
1371 Edmund Avenue
St. Paul, MN, 55104
December 11th, 2014

Dear Mr. Craver,

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. It is my hope in writing to you that I can offer unique clarification and insight into the inquiry of the incident involving Professor Davenport. It is not my hope to speak to the specifics of the incident, but rather to the overall pedagogy and methods used by acting instructors all over the country.

I met Professor Davenport in 1998, and worked with him often until my graduation from Dixie State in 2001 with an AA in Theatre Arts. The instruction I received at Dixie State led to the continuation of my work in the theatre, and since, I've obtained both undergraduate and graduate degrees in theatre, worked as a professional actor and director, as well as a teacher for university-level acting classes and children's theatres. In addition, I continue to take acting classes from other theatre practitioners as part of my artistic and professional development.

In the acting programs that I've been associated with, there's a buzzword that's been floating around for the past several years: *rigor*. It's an interesting word, because in the dictionary sense, it describes a state of being unyielding or inflexible. But in academia, educators use it to describe a desire to have learning experiences, and environments, that are intellectually and educationally challenging and stimulating; that on a day-by-day basis push students beyond who they were when they stepped into the classroom that day.

In traditional classes, this might take the form of extra assignments, a particularly difficult text, being challenged by a professor to support your answers, and myriad other things. In the arts, especially acting, those strategies don't apply as well. According to Konstantin Stanislavski, considered by most theatre educators to be the father of modern theatre pedagogy, the goal of the acting teacher is to train students to fully experience the lives of their characters. To feel happy when the character is happy, sad when the character is sad, angry when the character is angry, and so on. People not familiar with the technique of an actor might think they are just *pretending*, but in reality, the goal is always to actually experience those things first hand. I think you'll find in your own reflection of actors you most enjoy watching in films or on stage that it seems they are indeed living the lives of their characters, and feeling genuine emotions. The goal of all teachers is to create actors who do the same thing.

But achieving that state of genuine emotion is hard. People generally aren't excited about sharing their emotions, or being vulnerable in front of other people—especially young actors just starting out. It's scary! This is where the concept of being rigorous comes into play. Because, while a math teacher might assign extra problems to a student struggling to understand a concept, in theatre, the techniques are a little different.

One exercise I've personally participated in, and that is commonly taught, is called the "push-pull" exercise. The goal of this exercise is to help a student become more emotionally invested in a scene. In

any given play, or movie, there are always characters who want opposing things. This is called “dramatic conflict.” For example: in *Lord of the Rings*, Frodo wants to destroy the ring, but Sauron doesn’t want him to. In very basic terms, Frodo is “pushing” Sauron to get what he wants, and Sauron is “pushing” back to make sure Frodo can’t get it. In the push-pull exercise, the teacher, or another student, will literally push against, or pull back, the actor. In so doing, the hope is that the actor will be able to use the external stimulus of pushing or pulling as a mirror to the internal struggle their character is facing. This is sometimes done while speaking the actual lines of the play, and is also sometimes done with improvised lines. It is both physically, as well as emotionally, rigorous. It pushes against the edges of comfort zones in the hopes of getting the actor to a place where they feel genuinely connected to the piece they are working on.

In acting classes, it is not at all unusual for a student to be touched, sometimes even aggressively, by fellow students or the teacher. There aren’t many classes where you’re going to kiss people, or fight people, but acting is a class like that. Of course, it is always the goal to help students to feel safe in these high stakes environments, but sometimes students are moved beyond their comfort zones. It is inevitable—even desirable. It is also expected that if a student becomes too uncomfortable, they can always opt out. The exercise in Professor Davenport’s class is performed in acting programs across the country on a daily basis. I’ve personally been a part of the exercise dozens of times.

There’s a fine line you walk as an acting instructor: you have to push students out of their comfort zones, but also be supportive of them when they go to those vulnerable places. In my experience with Professor Davenport, he always walked that line well. His love and genuine concern for his students, coupled with his ability to push actors to excel, is a true gift.

It is my hope that in writing this letter, you can perhaps see a little bit of context for the situation that has arisen. Admittedly, a situation like this would seem strange to someone outside the world of theatre pedagogy, but please know that it is a very common exercise, done with the intention of helping a student to learn, grow, and become a better artist.

I would be happy to provide additional information and insight about the exercise in question and how it fits into standard acting curricula around the country and world. Please feel free to contact me directly at 435.232.2817 or lannylangston@gmail.com with any follow-up questions or feedback. I’d be happy to help.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lanny Langston". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Lanny Langston

waimpactno1@aol.com

Jan 2, 2015

This is Matt Russell

Here are the two papers that I promised I would send. I'm pretty sure you will read them first but I'm not sure who else will be reading them. They are just my story, in no particular format. If they need to be formatted or expanded on in any way, I will be happy to do so. My wife, Jessica, would also like to send her support as well. You are in our thoughts and our hopes are with you and your family and all the students at Dixie. Please keep me posted!

Matt

Character Reference:

I have been enrolled as a student in several different classes with Varlo as the instructor. I have also had the opportunity of having him as a director in a full-length musical. Each class that he taught requires different forms of activity: Theatre History and Lit. I & II is geared toward a scholarly, academic approach; Accents & Dialects is an in-depth study of language with a great deal of physical activity; and Theatre: Masks is a physically demanding and intense study of movement and character-building while wearing a character mask. In each of these settings, with their varying levels of mental and physical demand, Varlo made the class feel welcome, appreciated, and a part of the discussion. On a few occasions, when students disagreed with one another, he handled it calmly and even quietly. Though he has had to use discipline and 'tough love' on more than one occasion, I have never heard him raise his voice out of anger or frustration. He is a big guy but he has never used intimidation. I have always felt that he strives to make every situation a safe and pleasant experience.

Experience with DSU production of Camelot

In the Fall semester of 2013, Dixie did the musical Camelot. Auditions were open to theatre majors, music majors, and all other students. There was a large turnout of both men and women at this audition. The next day is when the cast-list was posted. Everyone was shocked to see that a young community member was given the lead role of King Arthur. There were many complaints made to Kelly Thomas the director, to Mark Houser the Department Chair person, and to all other Theatre faculty. That afternoon was the read-through rehearsal where the cast and production crew met together in room 156 to discuss the rehearsal process and become familiar with the script. Present were the director, Kelly Thomas, the Head of the Theatre department, Brent Hansen, department chair, Mark Houser, and all other cast members and production crew involved. After some words of greeting from director Kelly Thomas, the time was turned over to Mark Houser for an announcement. He took his position on the floor and announced that an error in communication had been made, that the department has a "students first" policy and that a couple community members were given higher roles than students. Then with a smile on his face he very proudly announced that Kyle Flowers would no longer be King Arthur but given the role of a Knight and that Jake Thomas, a college Senior, would be given the role of King Arthur. Everybody cheered and

applauded and congratulated Jake. They also shook hands and patted the shoulders of Kyle, showing their condolences and gratitude for him. After a few more words from the faculty involved, we began our read through. It was not long after we started that Kyle Flowers got up from his chair and walked out of the room. He did not return the rest of the evening, however, we did see him periodically walk past the door. After the read through, Jake could not have been happier. This was his last chance to play a lead before graduating and we were all so proud of him.

We did not have another rehearsal until the following week. At that rehearsal, when Kyle walked up to play King Arthur, everyone in the cast was shocked and confused. Jake was in the room but not on stage. We didn't know what to think. We later learned that the role was quietly taken away from Jake and given back to Kyle. This caused a lot of confusion and rumors to start spreading around the cast and the Fine Arts department. Later that week a flier was posted at several points in the Eccles building. The flier read to the effect of: "The DSU Theatre department has never stated a 'students first' policy. But as of this date we now do. Sorry for any misunderstandings this may have caused." It was Mark Houser who made and posted those fliers.

There isn't a department at DSU that does not have a Students First policy. There isn't a department in any school in the United States that does not have a Students First policy! Even if the words are not clearly stated in the department handbook, it's still in the constitution of the school itself. Just as a region or territory must adopt the constitution of the nation it wants to join, so it is with an educational department. They must adopt the constitution of the school AND THEN make their own policies and standards, NOT to supersede the standards and policies of the school! Mark's actions are evidence of his habit of lying to students and faculty. Either he was lying in that first meeting when he announced the policy to the entire cast and crew, or he was lying when he posted those fliers to justify his actions in changing the lead in the musical for the second time. Regardless of which occasion was the lie, it is clear he is not fit for a position of authority in the University when he only ever says or does what will make him look like the hero in any given situation. What he did with replacing Kyle in the beginning was harsh, but what he did to Jake was even worse. In posting those fliers and using that as an excuse for his actions, Mark Houser lied to the entire student body and faculty of the Fine Arts department.

Subject: Urgent, Sensitive Matter. Please Read

Date: Monday, December 15, 2014 at 6:08:18 AM Mountain Standard Time

From: Brook Owen

To: Craver, Will

I am writing to you in regards to the training I have received from Varlo Davenport.

I graduated with a Bachelors of Science in theatre and a Bachelors of Science in Communications (Organizational Leadership) from Dixie May 2013. Since graduating from Dixie I have been the Assistant Director/Stage Manager for Equally Represented Arts Theatre and Monroe Actors Stage Company. I will be directing a dinner theatre for Turkey Hill in March 2015 and I have a potential directing position with Monroe Actors Stage Company. I worked as a Venue Manager for the St. Lou Fringe Festival. I also founded Gateway Theatre Studio which had a successful 6 week children's acting training class and auditions for the first spring show/class semester in January. As I have performed outside collegiate theatre with other graduates in my general age range from other programs I am constantly grateful I decided to receive my training from Dixie State University.

I first auditioned for Mr. Davenport when I was twelve years old. When I was 16 I started studying with Mr. Davenport in his Acting one and Acting two classes. The training was partially based on the teachings and methods of Stanislavsky. According to the second edition of Acting (Re)Considered: A Theoretical and Practical Guide, edited by Phillip B. Zarrilli "Staniewski is provocative, forcing the performer to cut through psychological and physical resistance. He is not interested in clichés, but rather gestures, actions, and movements that surface from the depths and may even surprise the performer. Staniewski expects his actors to open up the range of possibilities, to be receptive to his suggestions and those of other performers, and to have stamina." (pg 211)

This concept of pushing against physical resistance is still used in workshops around the country. Backstage.com is a very well respected theatre website. Here is an example from their page of workshops:

"ACTORS GESTALT WITH RICHARD ZANE ROSS

"Intensives": Character development through "Pathological Expressive Gesture" and "Experimental Awareness" techniques, to free and heighten creative instinct and authenticity of emotional range, via monologue and scene work. Coaching: As above with additional focus on emotional and physical resistance. Also audition monologues.

"Audition Cold": Simplified, but specific "Cold Reading" technique."

[\(http://www.backstage.com/news/where-to-study/\)](http://www.backstage.com/news/where-to-study/)

Mr. Davenport was a educator and mentor in the truest sense. His classes were emotionally and physically demanding. Even in classes of twenty or more, each student got

personal feedback and training from Mr. Davenport. As a professor he created a relationship of trust with me. Because of this he was able to push me past what I believed I was capable of to amazing personal rewards. As I have often experienced with other theatre training I was frequently out of my comfort zone, but in my almost 14 years of working with Mr. Davenport I have never felt unsafe. I have never once seen him touch a student when he was angry or frustrated. In every situation I have seen him exhibit professionalism and control.

I would be more than happy to answer any questions you have regarding my experiences with Mr. Davenport. Please let me know and we can set up a time to speak.

Thank you,

Brook Owen

brookowen.stage@gmail.com

Stage Manager/Director

Owner/Instructor of Gateway Theatre Studio

To whom ever it may concern.

I am wanting to take this time to defend the situation with Varlo Davenport. I have taken a few of his classes as well as worked with him on a few productions and I have never felt safer in these situations. Right off the bat he explains to us that he will push us to help our acting skills and even before he demonstrates he always asks permission to show what he may want to portray. Even when I first took his class I understood that to enhance my acting skills and my interaction with people in general I would need to break down some walls and he helped me with that by some of the exercise we did in class. So I am hoping that by explaining my personal experiences with Varlo I can help clear up some of the confusion.

Thank you
DJ Pike

To Whom It May Concern:

I am an alumnus of Dixie State College and used to be a theater student. I participated in as many shows as I could do and was in many of Varlo Davenport's classes. I learned accents, acting techniques, and was really challenged to stretch and get out of my comfort zone in order to achieve a great performance.

Theater is a challenging art form. Like anything else, it takes a lot of practice and a lot of dedication to be able to really understand your abilities (especially as an actor). Varlo often challenged me to go beyond my comfort zone in order to achieve a higher realm of understanding. I was once asked to run around the school twice so that I could do my scene with a realistic amount of fatigue that the character would have been feeling. I was also asked to invade other student's space, yell as forcefully as I could, and feel emotions that are generally uncomfortable to feel. This is all a part of the art of acting. One cannot fully step into the role of a character without first exploring a side of them that maybe they have never tapped into, and it is always an uncomfortable challenge. The human experience is uncomfortable.

All students in the theater program at Dixie State University are expected to feel discomfort and are expected to go beyond their comfort zones to present the role of their characters the best that they can. All the professors have exercises to help you achieve this and all of the exercises are meant to make you feel an emotion or a physical feeling that maybe you have never felt before. This was the norm in my two years at Dixie, and I expect that it continue to be the norm in Varlo's classes and in other theater classes as well.

I can testify that Varlo Davenport cares deeply about his students. I lost my father in high school and he became much like a father figure to me. He not only cares that we continue to strive to perfect our art, but that we grow as people. He keeps up with his students and rejoices in our successes. He would never intentionally harm his students physically, mentally, or emotionally. Any discomfort he may cause is all in the name of perfecting the art.

If you have any further questions for me, you can contact me on my cell phone 435-319-9574. Thank you.

Crystal Bates

12/28/2014

From: Heather Gibson hgibson1018@gmail.com
Subject: Varlo Davenport
Date: December 15, 2014 at 7:21 PM
To: craver@dixie.edu



Dear Mr. Craver,

I am writing on behalf of Professor Varlo Davenport. I am a professional actor and former student of Mr. Davenport's currently residing in New York City. It is my understanding that an incident took place in one of his classes that is currently under investigation. I can assure you that the exercise used in this class is an authentic and legitimate technique in the acting profession. The use of a physical action is a standard resource to tap into a deeper connection with an actor's emotional choice in a scene.

I have known Varlo for over 9 years. During my time as his student I took more classes than I can count with him as well as acted in his shows. I always felt like I was in a safe environment working with him. Furthermore, I never witnessed or heard of a situation where he made another student feel uncomfortable or disrespected. Mr. Davenport is a dedicated teacher. He has passion for the knowledge and skills he is passing on to young actors. He is deeply devoted to his craft and his students. He goes above and beyond to get to know and take care of every person who walks in his door. I can say, without a doubt, that he would never knowingly violate a student's personal boundaries. My heart goes out to the student involved in this issue, but I am confident that this is a misunderstanding.

Warm Regards,
Heather Gibson

Sent from my iPad

To whom it my concern:

My name is Ami Porter; I graduated with my Bachelors' in Theater Arts from Dixie State University this past May, and am writing in behalf of my professor, Varlo Davenport. I was privileged to work under Professor Davenport's tutelage in class settings, play productions, and personal coaching and mentoring over the course of 3 years.

As an instructor, Professor Davenport always showed great respect, not only for the students but also for the subject matter being taught. He upheld punctuality and professionalism in the class setting. Students were expected to respect each other by not taking up valuable instruction time by being late or unprepared. If Professor Davenport was ever late an effort was always made to notify the students. He expected the students to be prepared to contribute to the class, whether it was being memorized, or having read the chapters for discussion. It was made clear that it was the students' responsibility to take part in their education. Professor Davenport always respected where the student was in his acting comfort zone and tried to encourage them to go to the next level. I always understood that a teacher's job was to help the student grow. In an acting class setting this would translate into helping the student push past their own insecurities by using a variety of tactics. The student was always told that they, the student, were in charge and that if they felt uncomfortable they would speak up. I have seen people break down in acting classes, but it was always resolved with care and compassion. This practice was standard across the theater faculty. I myself had a break down while under the tutelage of Michael Harding in his Acting Three class.

I was able to work with Professor Davenport in an actor/director relationship in at least four productions during my time at DSU. At the beginning of every production he would go over his expectations of himself and of us. All rehearsals would start on time and end on time, and when we weren't needed he would ensure that only those who needed to be there were called. In short, our time was respected and valued. We were told that no gossiping or back-biting of any kind would be tolerated. If we had an issue then we needed to resolve we needed to go through the proper channels. During my DSU experience I had the opportunity to work with every director on campus in both the class and production setting. While all of my experiences were growth opportunities, some more painful and unpleasant than others, Professor Davenport's productions were unique. His priority seemed centered on facilitating the students to create and experience collaboration in a safe and respectful environment. Putting together a production can be stressful, and while I did have experiences with other directors losing their control in rehearsal, I never heard Professor Davenport yell or debase anyone, not anyone. Even when there were occasions when someone came completely unprepared, he would ask that student to please leave, prepare his part and return when he was prepared so as to not waste the other cast member's time.

As a mentor, Professor Davenport made me stick to my deadlines, encouraged, prodded, but never coerced. My individual instruction time whether through private lessons or personal coaching was geared to my needs, he never had an overt personal agenda. He always made himself available if anyone ever need to talk to him, or if we needed some help working on an acting scene. His office was always open and we were encouraged to come by for assistance. It was due to his mentoring that I was able to graduate and have success with my senior project, which was the highlight of my educational experience. This support and mentoring was not just reserved for the students enrolled in his class, but for anyone who sought his help.

As a student I had the opportunity to witness Professor Davenport interact with the rest of the theater faculty and staff. In his communication about his associates he was always respectful, always supportive. Of the entire theater faculty, Professor Davenport was the only one of the faculty members who made an effort and succeed in being at nearly every performance produced at the University. I can't say that about the other directors, often they were not present. He

encouraged his students to support the other productions in an effort to foster a united student body.

In 2011, when I changed my major to theatre, it was largely in part to Professor Davenport and from what I saw as mutual support and a positive attitude in the theater department. It saddens me to think that my positive educational experience might not be available to every acting student at DSU. I don't know how I could honestly recommend any future theater students to the acting program at DSU without Professor Davenport being part of that experience. He is the heart of the department. Not only was Professor Davenport my teacher, director, and mentor, as a graduate of Dixie State University, I feel privileged to now call him my friend.

Thank you for your consideration.

Ami Porter

Dixie State University – class of 2015

From: **Slate Holmgren** slate.holmgren@gmail.com
Subject: Letter from Slate Holmgren
Date: January 19, 2015 at 10:32 PM
To: Varlo Davenport davenport@dixie.edu
Cc: Slate Holmgren slate.holmgren@gmail.com

To whom it may concern:

I'm writing this letter on behalf of Varlo Davenport with regards to acting and physical body work. I have studied acting at Dixie State College, Brigham Young University, and received my Masters in Acting from Yale School of Drama. For an actor, the body is his/her instrument. As a student actor it had been my experience, in order to encourage me through an emotional block in a scene it was helpful for the instructor to not only push me emotionally, but to also physically challenge me as well. I have had teachers push me physically, they have had me hit the ground with pillows, they have held up their hands to mine and asked me to push as hard as I could against them. These examples were done to help/provoke me into an emotional response. Nothing to physically caused me harm, but to break through my emotional barriers. This allowed me to tap into my natural instincts and delve deeper into my own emotions in order to connect with the characters struggle/intention.

All this was done to benefit me as an artist and my physical safety was always paramount. I understand that these exercises can seem intimidating but they can be beneficial in an artist's growth. It is imperative to know your own physical and emotional limitations; when I felt unsafe I would only have to tell the teacher and it would stop.

While working with Mr. Davneport, I never felt unsafe in his acting classes as well as the productions in which he was the director.

Sincerely,

| Slate Holmgren

Sent from my iPad

From: **Alex Gubler** <alexryangubler@gmail.com>

Date: Sun, Jan 18, 2015 at 5:50 PM

Subject: Varlo Davenport

To: carver@dixie.edu

To Whom It May Concern,

It has come to my attention that an old professor of mine, Varlo Davenport, has had some allegations made against him. I was amongst the first graduating class with a Theatre Degree from Dixie State and had the pleasure of taking many classes with Mr. Davenport. Acting is not easy work. In fact, it is very difficult and sometimes students have to be pushed emotionally and physically to places that they may be uncomfortable with to achieve the emotional integrity and truth in a scene. I can remember many times, not only by Mr. Davenport, but other Theatre faculty as well, where I was pushed in this manner which resulted in work that I am proud to say that I did. In the same vein, if we were ever pushed too far and asked for it to stop, the professors immediately stopped and respected our wishes. It wasn't uncommon for students to reach very vulnerable states in classes and express a range of different emotions from anger to sadness to reach their true potential. There was a level of trust in classes between peers and professors that it was ok and it was a safe place to explore this wonderful craft of acting and our own individual emotional range. In short, acting can be extremely frustrating, difficult, and exhausting, but without being pushed, we as students would have never been able to see the type of work that we were capable of creating and I am forever grateful for my years spent learning from Mr. Davenport and the Theatre faculty at Dixie State.

Sincerely,

Alex Gubler

Jarom Brown
1525 N 1100 West
Orem, UT 84057
801-634-6302
jarombrown@weber.com

12/15/2014

To whom it may concern,

Hello, my name is Jarom Brown and I am a performing arts adjunct instructor currently working at Weber State University in Ogden, Utah. I am presently writing this letter on behalf of Professor Varlo Davenport concerning his pedagogical methods – more specifically, the use of physical interaction and resistance in the actor’s laboratory. Actor training, like many other fields, sometimes requires physical resistance to produce growth.

Actor training is much like the other fields of physical performing. The yoga student at times needs an instructor or partner to help (literally) push the stretches to achieve beyond what solo work can do. The football player is often coerced to achieve maximum output. The dancer sometimes needs physical resistance to maintain the proper shape for the dance. Just like these examples, physical resistance is nothing new for actor training. Sometimes actors need to feel discomfort to accomplish their goals for a character or acting style. This is a process sometimes used by students and professionals alike.

Having taken many acting classes to prepare me for my career, few instructors have used physical resistance as a pedagogical approach. That said, it still plays a part and is often enough seen in the training of aspiring actors. I once had an instructor hold my arms back while I struggled to free myself to be reminded of the inner struggle/frustration of a character I was portraying. I’ve seen an instructor bear hug a student in an effort to help them realize the claustrophobic nature of the character that they were working on. I’ve used physical resistance this most recent semester by putting my hands on a student’s stomach and back while applying pressure to help demonstrate breath reinforcement and that it should come from the diaphragm and not from the upper lungs. Such physical resistance is seen from time to time, however, trust is what draws the line between beneficial and detrimental.

Without trust, any type of physical resistance can seem to be intrusive, awkward, and sometimes abusive. With this negative potential, there is and should always be a way out. The yoga student, football player, and dancer can always walk away if they are uncomfortable or feel that they are being put in danger. Just like these other physical performers, aspiring actors can walk away too. I have learned from the example of many of my acting teachers that one must always ask permission to touch another person. I have learned as a teacher, and from once being an intimidated student, that teachers should always remind their students that they have the

option of stopping the training if it goes too far. Varlo has been one such example to me, as he was a teacher of mine. I have been intimidated by him and have seen him in a fairly frightening light, however, I have always trusted him in the classroom because he established it as a safe place.

I have a profound respect for Varlo Davenport. He taught me a great deal that I still use in my teaching today. I remember him using physical resistance as he tried to help students reach their potential and break out of their metaphorical shells. Like any good teacher, he does what he can to help the student achieve what they can and can't see. Although I have not always agreed with Varlo's opinions or styles, I have always trusted him as my teacher and with that, his methods.

If there are any questions pertaining to this letter or my relationship with Professor Davenport, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jarom C. Brown". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Jarom Christopher Brown

From: Bryant Larsen sp-frontdesk@saltpalace.com
Subject: Varlo Davenport
Date: December 11, 2014 at 3:15 PM
To: craver@dixie.edu



Mr. Craver,

I was recently informed of an ongoing dispute within the theatre department at Dixie State University involving Professor Varlo Davenport.

I feel strongly enough about the issue to write to you today. Theatre training is emotional, physical, and often times taxing on you as a person.

Having worked with Professor Davenport as not only a student, but as a fellow actor, I can attest to the amount of care and understanding

he takes in order to promote a fantastic foundation of theatre education. Many times in his class he would ask his students, myself included,

to push the limits of what they thought they were possible of doing. This is a vital process to truly understand what it takes to become

an actor on a professional level. It isn't easy, and it isn't meant to be. It is simply theatre. Never once in my education at Dixie did I ever feel uncomfortable with

the methods or techniques implemented in Professor Davenport's classes. The accusations of his mistreatment of students is unfounded.

Professor Davenport is not only a fantastic educator, but a loving mentor, and outstanding friend. To ever consider that he would

on any level purposely bring emotional agony or physical pain on a student is outrageous. I want to ask you today to consider the voices of support

for Professor Davenport, and not allow his educational prowess to be marred by these events. I want to leave you with a quote from Professor Davenport himself,

that in itself highlights the strength it takes to become a working professional in the theatre industry,

"Theatre is hard. Acting is hard. In order to be successful, you have to push yourself emotionally and physically. Theatre is hard."

Thank you,

Bryant Larsen
Salt Palace Convention Center
Sales Admin.

Subject: Varlo Davenport

Date: Sunday, December 14, 2014 at 12:33:55 PM Mountain Standard Time

From: Hannah Davenport

To: Craver, Will

Mr. Craver,

I'm writing in regards to the recent complaint leveled against Varlo Davenport. As he happens to be my father, I won't waste your time with the obvious support and respect I have for him. However, as a proud graduate of DSU's theatre program, I would like to take a moment to discuss my experiences with hands-on acting training, both at Dixie State and elsewhere.

I attended Tuacahn High School for the Performing Arts in Ivins, and had the great privilege of training with incredibly gifted drama teachers in my time there. During classes and rehearsals, it was not uncommon for these teachers to use resistance exercises, many of which involved adjustments that required physical contact between teacher and student. Whether correcting my posture or helping me into uncomfortable positions to elicit an emotional response, the theory behind the practice allowed me to perceive these occurrences as exactly what they were: opportunities to strengthen my craft and expand my process. Similar incidents took place in workshops facilitated by THS, the Utah Theatre Association, and the Utah Shakespearean Festival. The first example that comes to mind is a Suzuki workshop taught by Mr. Michael Littig. One Suzuki exercise requires participants to squat, with the spine remaining completely vertical, and stomp across the floor for an indeterminate amount of time. Throughout this process I frequently saw Mr. Littig adjust my fellow students' posture, preventing any number of physical shortcuts from taking place and increasing their sense of discomfort. He made these same adjustments to me, as well. I distinctly remember the burning sensation in my calves and hamstrings as he pulled my shoulders back so I couldn't slouch -- something many of us tried to sneak by him in order to relieve the tension in our legs. I felt frustrated and tired and overwhelmed, and when the exercise came to an end twenty minutes later, the monologue I'd brought to the workshop had improved considerably. The pain and exhaustion that resulted from this actor training technique allowed me to perform with less inhibition, and granted access to many strong emotions that human beings constantly work to suppress.

I had a host of comparable experiences at Dixie State University, most of which took place under the instruction of Professor Michael Harding. Over the course of rehearsals for a 2010 production of *Macbeth*, Professor Harding frequently made hands-on alterations to my posture, head placement, hand movement, and other kinetic characteristics in order to help me realize the traits of Lady Macbeth that he wanted to emphasize in this production. There were also rehearsals where I was required to walk on tip-toe every time my character was on stage. (For context: I am not a trained dancer, and at the time of these

rehearsals I weighed over 260 lbs.) These activities were far from pleasant. My feet cramped. My neck cramped. My hands and arms grew weary from posing. However, even four years after the fact, I adamantly insist that this process was vital for the actualization of the character Professor Harding and I wanted to bring to life.

Acting isn't easy. There is a reason there is such a high rate of drug and alcohol abuse among truly great actors: it is emotionally, physically, and psychologically draining work that ceases to exist once the curtain falls. There is little, if any, evidence of the requisite training and discipline and passion because your resume, your portfolio, your entire career, consists of a series of irretrievable moments you can't prove existed. It should, therefore, be unsurprising that theatre education -- acting training, in particular -- can be traumatic. As my dad always says, "the basis of acting is the reality of doing."

Reality is terrifying.

Sincerely,
Hannah Davenport

Community Support Letters

Joel Thomas

Jessica Russell

Chrystine Potter Hyatt

John Parkinson

From: Joel Thomas jct179@gmail.com
Subject: Varlo Davenport - Professor extraordinaire
Date: December 18, 2014 at 11:29 AM
To: craver@dixie.edu



Hello Mr. Craver,

I would like to introduce myself. My name is Joel Thomas. I work in administration at Dixie Regional Medical Center (DRMC) in the Risk Management department. My background is in nursing (ICU) and I have worked at DRMC for just over 10 years. I am an alumni of DSU and graduated with the first group to obtain their Baccalaureate degree in Nursing back in 2006. After graduating with my BSN from DSU, I continued to attend DSU to pursue taking theater classes - as it was also something that I wanted to do and I found that I was able to at this time in my life. I started taking theater classes in the fall of 2006 and did so off and on until 2008. However, I have participated in the DSU theater department since 2006 to the present, with the "Comedy Storm" program each summer. It was in this aspect as a (student of theater) that I had the privilege and opportunity to meet Professor Varlo Davenport.

I understand that there are issues happening at this time in relation to acting classes and methods used to teach acting to students in which Professor Davenport is directly involved in. I wanted to write to you and share with you a little bit about my interaction with Varlo in the 8 years that I have known him as a professor, a director, a confidant, a colleague, a fellow actor and a friend.

Varlo Davenport is one of the best things to ever happen to the theater department at DSU. Varlo, very literally built this program to what it has become. He is always genuinely interested in his students and their progress. I remember first taking classes from him back in 2006 and 2007 and having the realization that he was different from all of the other professors that I have had interactions with at USU, WSU and DSU. Varlo knew each of the student's names and expected more from his students as well as himself. I was often in theater classes where Varlo was very much involved with the acting scene and driving students to illicit a response or an emotion. I understand that there are a variety of methods that are used and are the common core/standard practice for theater professors and teachers that are used in the classroom setting. I have never witnessed any inappropriate actions during his employment of acting and teaching techniques that have been used.

Varlo was always very upfront and honest with his classes about the techniques that would be used and or employed in acting classes and I saw many wonderful things happen from Professor Davenport utilizing these techniques with fellow students and actors/actresses. These techniques often included physical contact and or resistance applied by the instructor. Acting classes are like this - this is not unusual - It is very much the accountability of students taking a class to know what happens and what to expect in the class that they have signed up for. Varlo has always had an open door policy and would often meet with me to discuss my progress as an actor and a person and always seemed genuinely interested and I felt that he cared for me as an individual as well as my fellow students.

Varlo is one of the most dedicated teachers that I have ever met. He helped me grow immeasurably during the times that I was taking classes from him and or being directed by him on stage or in the classroom. I was often amazed at the engagement that Varlo had in his students progress and growth. I have also had the opportunity to work with Varlo on stage as an actor and have been inspired by him numerous times. He would always listen to acting experiences with delight and interest. We have shared laughs, we have shared tears, we have shared fears. Varlo is a true inspiration and leader in all aspects of the concept of leadership and being a leader.

I am so grateful for my association with Varlo Davenport. I have also known him and worked with him on a community member basis. Due to "life" - I have not always been able to take theater classes, but have always maintained a relationship with the DSU theater department. Varlo still maintained the same interest in my life and pursuits. I had the opportunity to go to London and Scotland with the DSU theater department and participate in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival - which Varlo was very instrumental in arranging and organizing - just another testament to his dedication and inspirational leadership and to the teacher and professor and friend that he is to his students.

In closing, I know that Varlo always has the progress and growth of his students at the forefront of his mind and teaching methods. I know that Varlo follows what the standard is for theater professors in the methods employed. Varlo is such a gigantic asset to the DSU theater department and to DSU as a whole. Varlo is also a gigantic asset to the community. He gives back so much in the form of participating in theater, either as an actor or a director, many times doing so for very little or no pay - but because he has a passion and a "why" for doing what he does and influencing our lives the way he does. It will be a great disservice and loss if Varlo is no longer a part of DSU and the DSU theater department. I truly hope and pray that an investigation takes place that is fair and objective. That the standards and common practices are evaluated and considered from a theater perspective. I hope that DSU does the correct thing.

Please let me know if you have any questions or need any clarification. Once again, I am so grateful for my association and friendship with Varlo. I truly love him and his family and have been changed for the better because of him - both as an actor and as a human being. I thank you for your time and consideration of my experience and thoughts.

Sincerely,

Joel Thomas
435.229.2999
jct179@gmail.com

To Whom It May Concern:

It has come to my attention that there has been a question regarding Varlo Davenport's character, and I wanted to share my personal experiences in working with him.

During the spring semester of 2014, I was the rehearsal pianist for *Sunday in the Park with George*, which was directed by Varlo. First, let me say how impressed I was with him professionally. He ran his rehearsals efficiently and showed respect to every single person, regardless of what their job was. I was particularly impressed when a cast member had been very disrespectful toward me personally and Varlo took the time to speak to the cast about how important it is to treat the rehearsal pianist well. I don't know what all was said to the group, but I do know that the problematic cast member did not know he was the problem and did not create trouble again.

Another key incident during the rehearsal process came when the girls in the cast had to start wearing corsets and bustles. The boys in the cast would tease these girls, which led to a lot of embarrassment for the girls. By definition, the boys were committing sexual harassment. Some of the girls took the issue to Varlo and I was so impressed with how he handled it. He brought everyone into the auditorium (cast and crew) for announcements and notes, and explained that comments had been made by various cast and crewmembers that made the girls uncomfortable. He reminded them that the costumes are uncomfortable enough for the girls without the crude remarks of their peers. He told them to stop it and show more respect for the female cast members. Sure enough, the comments ceased and the show was a better experience for those involved after that. He never was mean or tough about it; he just explained the situation and expected everyone to keep the same professional and respectful attitude that he himself maintains.

I found throughout my experience with *Sunday in the Park* that people listen to and follow Varlo because of the respect that he consistently shows them.

Jessica Russell

December 14, 2014

To Whom It May Concern:

I am honored to write this letter of reference for Varlo Davenport.

I first became acquainted with Varlo many years ago when he was hired by DSC to revitalize and build their Theater Department. The Theater Department had seen a decline in the years after Dr. Paul Anderson retired, and the college realized they needed to find someone with the knowledge, talent, and vision to develop and build the department into the DSU theatrical powerhouse it has become today. Varlo Davenport was and still is that guiding force.

As a career educator and professional actor and director, I have worked with many different directors at the Utah Shakespeare Festival, Tuacahn Centre for the Arts, Neil Simon Festival, The Space Between Theatre Company, as well as various university and community productions over the years. The shows I worked with Varlo at DSU have been among my most fond and memorable experiences in theater. He brings such a wealth of understanding both of theater and of the human condition that his productions become more than just entertainment; they become a life-affirming connection between the audience, the performers, and the message of the show.

Each director has his or her own unique style of directing and working with the cast and crew. During the rehearsal process and subsequent performances of the productions, stressful situations arise. It is the nature of any collaborative artistic endeavor. I have seen Varlo at his best and at his worst. Yet through it all, I have never seen him lose control or lash out at someone who has made a mistake. In fact, the thing that stands out foremost in my mind regarding my experience with Varlo is the way he has created a caring, nurturing, and compassionate environment within his shows. His encouragement to "Take care of each other" both while on stage and off has stayed with me, and I have tried to implement this same atmosphere when I work with students or direct plays myself.

Please feel free to contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Yours truly,

Chrystine Potter Hyatt

#435-619-1121 / chyatt@cherrycreekradio.com

John Parkinson

As a producer/director, I look for an actor who has developed his body, mind and soul to a level of consciousness that enables him to become a part of an ensemble. interested in creating art as opposed to seeking roles for the purposes of entertainment alone. As a teacher I am interested in working with absolute beginners and with the most advanced professional artists. Beginners often come to the first acting classes with preconceived ideas related to the vision of seeing themselves becoming a member of an art form or, more often, an entertainment industry. Little thought is given to the art in the actor rather than the other way around.

To prevent novice misconceptions, I begin class at the outset with movement. Awareness of the body-emotion connection remains at the root of good training. (Thank you Stanislavski.) I believe developing ensemble awareness in the new student must be done in an ensemble type of classroom environment. Stage movement should not be related to the individual alone, but rather constantly related to the ultimate goal of excellent ensemble work. In introducing beginning physical exercises, I speak, briefly, of the need to be aware of one's self in space and our physical relationship to others. We must begin with openness and expectation of discovery. The beginning movement lessons will involve mirror image work, responsive movement, " push hands," group sculpture, trust exercises, yoga and martial-art derived exercises.

In these lessons the new student learns to carefully observe physical movement and respond to it by following and then leading the impulses which express one's feelings, not thoughts. Partner and group work at this stage allow the novice to understand the beginnings of ensemble.

In "The Actor at Work" page 144 – 145, Benedetti discusses the flow of bodily energy. "Consider next whether the energy is impeded or even blocked from flowing through certain areas of your body. Some of the most important points of blockage are the Job, nape of the neck, small of the back, across the chest, or between the shoulder blades." In order to increase the student's awareness, the teacher or another student may restrict parts of the body to bring emotions to consciousness that would otherwise be weak or missing.

The beginning student starts to experience relaxation along with an expanded awareness of the group and the environment. These exercises involve considerable physical contact and emotional exploration. The history of this type of training goes back to Saxe–Meiniangen, Stanislavski with his partner Nemirovich-Danchenko then progresses through Europe to the Western Hemisphere. Our teachers of techniques inherited from the Moscow Art Theatre, in the US, have come to us through The Group Theater and The Actors Studio. Many important teachers and their studios in the United States have given us a good foundation in those techniques which must be mastered to achieve the level of acting every serious producer or director seeks. The learning of all performance techniques is best acquired through an apprentice type of training. One interested in understanding the training of a performance artist is advised to attend an acting class or a beginning dance class.