Summary

This program is dedicated to keeping equality in its rightful place, being celebrated and performed. Kenna is an active proponent of women and people of color as composers or musicians. What made this project challenging was the historical preference of caucasian men in music. This has undermined the performative creativity of many other musicians. While none of these pieces were premiere performances, there is so much value in celebrating diversity in music. Every composer, musician, and student progresses through continual practice and performance. The support of their peers and colleagues helps determine how dedicated they are to their craft. My recital stands as a testament of my influences. I was powered by the role models I could relate to and my recital helped promote diversity by choice for upcoming generations.

This recital was the culmination of over a years worth of practice. By January of 2018, I found Fusion Suite from a google search of saxophone music by female composers. It was very difficult to sift through all published music in search of someone to whom I could relate. I thoroughly enjoyed the process of practicing and working with my piano accompanist in Fusion Suite. The composer’s name is Catherine McMichael and she has written exquisitely for baritone saxophone and piano. She covers the entire range of each instrument and does it so melodically. My pianist and I performed Fusion for my jury, which is the final exam for saxophone.

This piece meant so much to me that I decided to reach out to the composer and implored her to come to my recital for the performance of it. She was able to meet with me on Friday the 25th of October, the weekend before my recital. Her timing worked out very well because I was able to spend the entire day with her; not just to listen to the final performance. She drove six
hours to Dekalb and we worked together on her performance ideas on *Fusion*. After a lengthy two-hour rehearsal, we ate dinner and spoke more about her process of composition. Catherine was very pleased with how eager and well-researched I was on her and all of my music. It meant so much to me knowing that an established composer wanted to help ameliorate my performance.

This laborious task inspired me to find more pieces that were composed by non-white, and prefereably living people. My endeavour became more profitable the deeper I searched. From there, I needed to fill a requirement of standard saxophone repertoire. *Scaramouche* was written by a French-Jewish man during the time of Nazi-occupied France. The other pieces I played were *Lullaby* by Jennifer Higdon and *Scenes From The City* by Telmo Marques, a man from Portugal. I emailed Higdon’s press secretary, who is also her wife, to ask her questions about *Lullaby*. She has won a pulitzer prize and two Grammy awards for pieces she has written. I did the same with Marques and learned that he focuses on commercial, ambient, and electronic music. His piece was also written for a very atypical pairing; a baritone saxophone and vibraphone. This pairing was an important factor in my decision as I wanted to show the variety of how a saxophone can be performed.

By selecting my works from modern music repertoire, I was able to contact the three living composers, and study how other people have previously performed Darius Milhaud’s music. Milhaud was by far the oldest of my chosen composers and so his music is universally recognized at high standards. My experiences at NIU have also led me to collaborate with people from all around the world. My pianist is studying at NIU from China, my assistant saxophone on lullaby is also a woman, and my assistant vibraphonist is a first generation Mexican-American.
Every composer I chose and every musician who helped my performance was chosen for their skills and level of expertise. I am very pleased with the effort that everyone put in. I made invaluable connections with multiple composers and with professional musicians. My senior recital combined exactly what I wanted, research on a meaningful topic and making new music more accessible.