

A Statement of Solidarity and a Plan of Action to Make Black Lives Matter within the English Program Faculty at CSU Channel Islands

"The true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations that we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within us."

--Audre Lorde

We, the faculty of the English: Literature and Writing Program at CSUCI, grieve and condemn the brutal killing of George Floyd and the countless other victims of white supremacy. We stand with Black Lives Matter in saying "Enough!" and dedicate ourselves to cultivating a space where Black lives are valued. We believe that the work of rooting out white supremacy and settler colonialism is necessary at every level, from the personal and institutional to the national and international, and we know that it will require instituting new practices that call us to question ourselves and each other in productive ways.

We are cognizant of the fact that English literary production and literary studies have been implicated in the intellectual and cultural dimensions of domination that served to justify and legitimize white supremacy, empire, and settler colonialism since the 16th century. Though the literary-critical debate continues over contested texts, many point to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Rudyard Kipling's "White Man's Burden," Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, among others, as examples. On American soil, one result has been the development of a remarkably stable national canon strongly resistant to works by authors of color and by women. At Channel Islands, we will support and initiate reflection on what, how, and why we read and write, and we will analyze the power structures that influence curricular change. Reimagining the canon with transcultural texts and activities--including the acts of story-telling, reading, writing, listening, and shared analysis--offers us a particularly powerful tool for creating greater equity.

We want to work with you to transform our stories and storying practices into ones that value us all. To our students of color, we say: you are not alone. We are here to support you, listen, and learn from you. We are here to help model and mediate difficult conversations; together, we can contextualize the broader, historical nature of injustices. To our white students, we say: we are in this together. We will join you in developing tools for allyship and for antiracist literacy, tools to self-reflect and do the work that we need to do to understand the injustices that structure our larger community. To all our students, we commit to supporting your emotional and intellectual growth as you encounter and produce texts in our classes and explore the transformative power of stories.

The disciplines and strengths within the English: Literature and Writing major particularly position us to address the systemic injustices that we see on the national and local stage--ubiquitous police violence, whether in Minneapolis or Oxnard. We see examining the stories and cultural products of human experience and questioning social, educational, and economic inequities as central to our collective work. In this way, we are intentionally reframing the discipline from its early political formation to rise up to the challenge of these times. These are tumultuous times, but we believe they also represent a critical moment for change and growth.

Who we are

"The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in the outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our heads."
 --Gloria Anzaldua

The program of English: Literature and Writing is focused on questioning the production of meaning and engaging in critical thought. We analyze and interrogate voice, narrative, language, meaning, and rhetoric. With these tools of the trade, we are in a unique position to engage together in this moment, to use critical thinking as a method to combat white supremacy and racism on the national stage and within our own communities.

At the same time, we recognize that our discipline has a long history of silencing and marginalizing voices through the social construction of canonical literature and exclusionary publication practices, which have systematized racist practices and skewed literary understandings from early childhood through college. To combat this, we commit as a faculty to the regular practice of interrogating our curricular decisions and pedagogies, welcoming and listening to student voices, and assessing our own blind spots. The remaining portion of this document addresses how we conceive of our responsibility and what concrete actions we plan to enact in order to support Black lives.

What we do

"Empathy is not simply a matter of trying to imagine what others are going through, but having the will to muster enough courage to do something about it. In a way, empathy is predicated upon hope."
 --Cornel West

Through creative and intellectual work and textual analysis, as literary and composition scholars in our fields, we share tools that have the power to transform reality. We will continue to imagine and support emotional literacy, more accurate and nuanced understandings of history, and critical reflection. We advocate for the creation of critical tools to challenge oppression and white supremacist narratives.

One of our primary tools in the Humanities is social and historical discourse. We believe that learning happens when there is tension. We want our students to practice systemic analysis, independent thinking and action to uncover sites of tension, identify and examine moments of discomfort, and counter feelings of fragility, guilt, or inferiority. We affirm our growing commitment to mediating difficult conversations and seek to provide intentional opportunities and spaces for courageous conversations that lead to growth (critical, emotional, spiritual, political).

We value writing and composition as foundational tools for life practices of questioning our own ideas and values, as well as those in which we are all steeped, especially as related to inequities, and for exploring new ways of thinking, acting, and being in relationship with each other. As such, we recognize that our discipline uniquely offers students important skills to not only navigate, but to articulate and change inequitable systems, including the larger University system. We support the use of language and literacy as a catalyst for personal discovery and growth to promote social efficacy, community connection, engagement, and leadership among our students. Moreover, for our students who plan to teach, we seek to inspire in them the values of critical thinking, literacy, and reflection for the benefit of future students in our community.

What we commit to doing

“This is precisely the time when artists go to work. There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity. No need for silence. No room for fear. We speak, we write, we do language. That is how civilizations heal.”

--Toni Morrison

As English: Literature and Writing Program faculty, we recognize our responsibility in doing the difficult work of combating institutional racism throughout our program and University, with a particular focus on the scope of teaching and learning. We also recognize the embodied stresses that doing this hard work day-to-day creates in our students and in ourselves, and we pledge to model kindness and grace when we fail, yet at the same time hold ourselves accountable to get better, to learn from failure, and to grow. Specifically, we commit to the following plan and praxis cycle until equity is real:

- Prior to the beginning of every academic year, we commit to reviewing each of these actions, evaluating our progress and revising and renewing our commitments, holding ourselves accountable to more equitable practices.
- We will hold conversations among students and faculty at least twice per year, toward the end of each semester, to discuss the stories that are told and valued in our courses, to recalibrate who we consider literary and to identify who the gatekeepers are in our discipline. These conversations are also intended to expand the range of literary voices we offer by reducing unintentional redundancies and building understandings across courses and faculty.
- We recognize that BIPOC faculty are regularly perceived through prisms of racism and that mediating difficult conversations can produce negative feedback for faculty, resulting in student evaluations that comment explicitly about discomfort with these discussions and/or texts, such that, as an assessment by the American Sociological Association notes, using SRTs “as the primary measure of teaching effectiveness in faculty review processes can systematically disadvantage faculty from marginalized groups.” Each year in the fall all faculty in our program will share and discuss research on the ways

these assessments disadvantage faculty from marginalized groups and those who dare to engage students in challenging conversations. Reviewers will review and committees discuss the research together before each assessment process to better enable reviewers to appropriately contextualize student comments with the goal of transforming the review process such that Student Ratings of Teaching (SRTs) serve their purpose while not disadvantaging faculty from marginalized groups or faculty due to their efforts to honor the commitments stated here in their teaching practices. After each review process, reviewers will report on their process and self-assessment in relationship to these commitments and faculty will engage in program-wide discussion and suggestions for improving the process. As we refine these processes within our program, we will share what has worked with colleagues at every level and press for transforming practices of assessing teaching effectiveness that account for these well-documented inequities.

- One of our strongest tools is the ability to amplify voices in literature and writing and bring those voices to our community. We will support and compensate writers of color throughout our reading series, inviting Black authors to come to campus, and where we are spending program money and student fee revenue. To increase access to these presentations, we will record these presentations and post them for student access; ahead of each set of presentations, we will also discuss how to incorporate these presentations into our courses alongside a discussion of whose stories are told and valued.
- We intend to renew our commitment to closing equity gaps and improving academic achievement for students of color within English courses. Prior to the beginning of each academic year, we will work with our institutional research data to examine which courses show equity gaps and to find ways to address these challenges directly. As our program evolves, we will use our roadmaps, advising, catalog copy, and Canvas community to make our course changes and designs as transparent as we can to students.
- We will be more intentional about ways to ensure that student voices are invited, heard, and addressed in our program conversations. We will invite a range of majors from diverse backgrounds to participate in at least one program meeting per semester, seeking their input in our ongoing decision-making and planning; furthermore, we will provide compensation (either monetarily, in-kind, or course credit) for participating students in recognition of the value of their time and contributions. To gain a larger student perspective beyond the major, we will invite more students to speak to us from campus groups (Empowered Womxn of Color, BSA students, MEChA, and so on).
- We will continue to examine and problematize ways that we can address our own biases, particularly those of us who are white professors teaching in a HSI campus with a majority of students of color, so that we might better engage anti-racist pedagogy. We commit as a first step to working with the office of the [Student Success & Community](#)

[Engagement](#) to begin looking at relevant course data and ways to operationalize that data to transform our teaching and advising practices and curricular design.

- We recognize that belonging is not only cultivated by the conversations within a program but most importantly by identification with the voices and faces that work within it. Therefore, we will recruit more students of color into the English major, reaching out both to composition courses and our feeder community colleges. At the same time, we will actively seek consultation from the Faculty Affairs office and others with recruitment expertise to design successful searches for Black faculty and faculty of color in our program as new positions open up, both for lecturers and tenure-track faculty, carrying forward the pledge approved by CI faculty in [Senate Resolution 11-03](#). We understand that Black faculty and faculty of color are asked to perform disproportionate amounts of service, amounting to cultural taxation, and we commit to intervening in that in a meaningful way. For example, we could advocate on behalf of those faculty for course releases when available, identify cultural taxation factors in RTP or retention reviews, or research and apply for grants that would support faculty of color as a program.
- We recognize the importance of physical and virtual space in creating community and spaces especially in forming a sense of belonging among our BIPOC students. The English Program commits to celebrating Black culture through multiple means, including our speaker series, partnering with other units on campus to amplify Black History Month, and through funding the purchase of materials honoring the work of Black authors, to be displayed where students gather, including within an English space when we are back in a face to face format.

Through these efforts at systemic changes within the English Program, our goal is to create an inviting, dialogue-rich community for every student, through our curriculum and our institutional practices--the books that we teach, the conversations that we have, the writing we assign, the faculty we hire and the students we recruit into the program—and we pledge to be intentional about how we welcome, support, sustain and encourage Black students, staff and faculty, with the goal of real belonging and true success at CSUCI.

*Eight minutes and forty-six seconds.
In extremis, I can't breathe gives way
to asphyxiation, to giving up this world,
and then mama, called to, a call
to protest, fire, glass, say their names, say
their names, white silence equals violence,
... Whatever
contracts keep us social compel us now
to disorder the disorder. Peace. We're out
to repair the future.*

*--Claudia Rankine
Excerpt from "Weather"*