

## ENGLISH DEPARTMENT DIVERSITY COMMITTEE ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT ACADEMIC YEAR 2020-21

The members of the English Department Diversity Committee respectfully submit this yearly report of accountability as promised in our summer 2020 [letter](#) of solidarity with Black Lives Matter. First and foremost, we reaffirm our commitment to anti-racism, decolonization, and justice work amidst the entrenched cultural and institutional white supremacy within the department, college, and university. As outlined in that summer 2020 letter, this report is meant to provide a public and transparent account of our work over the past academic year, and we warmly invite all members of the department community to submit their feedback on that work. We're here to listen.

Despite the difficulties of doing this work in the virtual, pandemic environment across the course of the academic year, the English Department, through the work of this committee, made notable progress with regard to curriculum, instructor training, community programming, student awards, and ad hoc advocacy. Nonetheless, the department continues to struggle with honoring its commitment to justice in hiring.

The committee appreciates the following support for its work this year:

- From the College of Liberal Arts: funding for instructor training, community programming, and student awards
- From the History Department: funding for community programming
- From the Friends of the Humanities: funding for student texts
- From the Guilbeau Charitable Trust: funding for community programming

However, the committee has not yet received any material support for its initiatives from the English department or the university, nor has it received nearly sufficient support from the college. Sustaining current progress, let alone increasing it to where justice demands it should be, requires more resources from these three bodies. Discouragingly, on top of insufficient support, there were attempts to coopt the work of this committee and its allies across the college for self-congratulation regarding the university's diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

Our community, especially our students, need and deserve more. And this committee wants to do more. It's the responsibility of the department, the college, and the university to provide the resources—material and otherwise—to make it happen. Put directly, this committee needs the following to continue to do its work:

1. Most importantly, a cluster hire aimed at increasing Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) faculty. As recently [reported](#) in the *Acadiana Advocate*, the department, the college, and the university remain very, very white. Students deserve to have faculty who look like them.
2. The resources to expand our course offerings in Black literatures and cultures, and ethnic literatures and cultures more generally. The university's neglect of hiring in the field of Race and Ethnic Studies, given the volume of faculty in the field who have resigned from the university, limits the department's and college's ability to expand course offerings. In addition to a cluster hire, the department and college must provide release time and other

support for faculty to develop new and enhance current offerings. Students deserve to take courses that de-center whiteness.

3. Material support for the sizable service burden of time commitment, emotional labor, and care work involved in participating in this committee. This begins, but does not end, with the department following through on its commitment to prioritize release time for the committee chair. To date, the lack of such support has been a significant obstacle to continuing the committee's vital work.

In what follows, we replicate the substance of the five demands that we made of ourselves as a department in our summer 2020 letter. Beneath each demand, we bullet point the progress that we made this academic year.

- **Listening:** We pledge to listen and respond to the needs of our BIPOC students, faculty, and staff.
  - We're planning a listening session for early next academic year.
  - We're actively soliciting feedback on this report over the summer.
- **Hiring:** We will increase Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) faculty to 15% of overall faculty, at all ranks, within five years. Additionally, we will prioritize hiring faculty specializing in Black literature & culture and ethnic literatures & cultures at both the assistant and the associate rank. Finally, we will ensure that a member of the department's diversity committee is a member of all hiring committees. See this article in *Educational Foundations* and this essay in *The Atlantic* on the absolute necessity of hiring Black faculty. Over and over we heard from our BIPOC students that they would like, just once, to walk into a university classroom and see a professor who looks like them. Our department must therefore better reflect the population of the university, city, and state.
  - We participated in developing a cluster hire proposal across the College of Liberal Arts.
  - We were significantly stalled by hiring freezes at the university level.
- **Curriculum:** We commit to begin decolonizing our curriculum by requiring all English majors to take a course designated as Race & Ethnic Studies, by making introductory and advanced courses in Race & Ethnic Studies part of our core course offerings, and by continuing to expand these offerings as we move forward.
  - We instituted a Race & Ethnic Studies course requirement for undergraduate English majors.
  - We established dedicated Race & Ethnic Studies and Gender & Sexuality Studies sections of English 211.
  - We established a teaching rotation for Race & Ethnic Studies courses, including English 371, and Gender & Sexuality Studies courses.
  - We reviewed academic year 2021-22 course offerings with attention to Race & Ethnic Studies inclusion and equity.
  - We revised course descriptions for English 433G and proposed a graduate seminar in Black Literary and Cultural Studies (English 534).

- We received support from the College of Liberal Arts to continue to advocate for course development grants (both future-thinking and retroactive) and a commitment not to cancel under-enrolled courses in Race & Ethnic Studies.
- **Financial & Mentoring Support:** We will seek out **financial support** for BIPOC faculty, staff, and students, and for research that engages anti-racist/decolonizing practices. Our plans include grants for student researchers, grants for faculty developing new courses, and awards that recognize undergraduates who, through scholarship or service, work toward justice. We will establish an **anti-racist reading group** for interested students, staff, and faculty; invite **student participation on key departmental committees**, including the Diversity committee and the English Majors committee; and create a mechanism through which students can safely and confidentially offer feedback about instances of racism and exclusion in the classroom and about our efforts to address inequities.
  - We received support from the College of Liberal Arts for: \$500 for a graduate student research grant in Race & Ethnic Studies; \$200/year for 5 years for an undergraduate social justice award; and \$1,500/year for a Race & Ethnic Studies speaker fund.
  - We partnered with the History Department and the Guilbeau Charitable Trust to offer Black Study Within & Beyond Crisis, a Critical Black Studies working group and speaker series that meet biweekly in Spring 2021 and featured six talks by prominent Black Studies speakers worldwide.
  - We created an Anti-Racist Reading Group that met twice a semester to read and discuss anti-racist literature. We secured a Friends of the Humanities grant to provide complimentary texts to students participating in the group.
  - We solicited interest in and appointed undergraduate students to the Diversity Committee and the English Majors committee. Ultimately, we observed inactive participation. We're going back to the drawing board next year.
  - We received guidance from Title IX staff, directed faculty, staff, and students to Title IX resources, and prompted revisions to department policies and procedures with Title IX guidance in mind.
- **Learning:** We will fully commit to working with the departmental Diversity Committee and the UL Office for Campus Diversity to educate ourselves on anti-racist and decolonizing pedagogies and practices, to better understand how our pedagogies relate to the goals of justice movements, and to institute faculty workshops that encourage the implementation of pedagogical theory as classroom practice.
  - We received \$2,000 from the College of Liberal Arts to host a college-wide Anti-Racist Teaching Workshop with prominent pedagogical expert Felicia Rose Chavez in Spring 2021.
- **Accountability:** We will honestly and thoroughly re-evaluate our initiatives and progress, including soliciting feedback, yearly for at least 5 years. We will report that progress publicly on our website.
  - We're soliciting feedback on this report.

- We're posting this report, along with the feedback we receive on it, on the department's website.

We know there is much work yet to be done, and we're listening.

Yours in solidarity,

The Members of the English Department Diversity Committee