

An Open Statement on Black Lives Matter, White Supremacy, and Institutional Racism from the English Department's Composition Program at Washington State University

The Composition Program at Washington State University supports and upholds the message that Black Lives Matter and condemns all forms of police brutality including the recent murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Ahmaud Arbery, Manuel Ellis, and many others.

As rhetoricians, scholars, and educators of language in a predominantly white institution situated on Indigenous lands, we understand the relationship of language, knowledge, and power to the structures of oppression which enable and seek to justify police brutality and continued systemic racism. We maintain that white supremacy and the nuanced language that attempts to rationalize or deny the existence of racism must be openly examined and dismantled. This begins by valuing and amplifying the language, narratives, and lived experiences of our Black students, faculty, staff, friends, family, and fellow humans.

Further, we understand that the ideologies which built and maintain the American academy were designed within a societal structure of racism that privileges and upholds the discourses, rhetorics, and epistemologies of the dominant white culture at the expense and oppression of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and other marginalized communities. We acknowledge that as members of this society, we are implicated in institutionalized racism, and affirm that it is our responsibility to interrogate our roles and examine our complicity within it so as to halt the perpetuation of violence and oppression on BIPOC.

We understand that in order to make clear the overt and covert oppression in our curriculums, pedagogies, practices, and interactions, we must begin by individually examining ourselves and our implicit biases. We must educate ourselves to the intricacies of racism, its actions and language, in all its historical and contemporary forms. We commit to ask difficult questions of ourselves and one another, and to embrace the discomfort and dissonance we will inevitably experience as we engage in this work. We accept this as essential to the dismantling of generations of oppression and suffering caused by white supremacy. We promise to support one another--and to support our students--in the face of this necessary discomfort. We recognize our responsibility as educators to face, challenge, and dismantle racist institutions that have for centuries oppressed Black bodies.

We support our colleagues already engaged in anti-racist pedagogies and practices and call on all educators to take action against systemic injustices both within and beyond the classroom and institution.