



Statement of the Faculty Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and Discourse

In the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and Discourse (WRD) at DePaul University, we teach students to write because writing expands their agency, power, and responsibility to act in the world. We teach students to write to help them move through the world with increased confidence so that they can use their writing to confront constraints and to imagine new possibilities. We also understand that writing can perpetuate injustice. Words do harm not only when they are offensive and overtly racist, but also when they are withheld when they are needed to advance justice or when they could compel us to make a commitment.

We, the faculty of the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and Discourse, stand in support of the Black Lives Matter movement and of the protesters fighting against systemic injustice, white supremacy, police brutality, and the anti-Black violence that took the lives of Ahmaud Arbery, Sandra Bland, Philando Castile, George Floyd, Tony McDade, Laquan McDonald, Nina Pop, Tamir Rice, Breonna Taylor, and so many others. We support our Black students and colleagues. As a department that is overwhelmingly White, we understand that we must do so from a position of humility, yet also with urgency.

In the past days, our faculty and students have advanced numerous ideas for action. To advance this needed work and concretize our commitments, we will take these actions.

Institutionalize Structures and Accountability for Advancing Equity

The Department will seek to establish, no later than October 2020, a standing committee (provisionally, the Equity Committee) with a charge to assure that course design and assessment methods are antiracist; to develop program-specific course evaluation questions related to antiracist and decolonial teaching practices; to identify course offerings outside of WRD that can fill gaps in our offerings; to audit our community partners to be sure we are working with a diverse group of partners, led by people of color.

The Equity Committee will also receive reports of racist or aggressive behavior in WRD (including in courses, meetings, advising sessions, and electronic communications) and advise students of University reporting resources and policies under the Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy and Procedures.

The Equity Committee will produce an annual report that details the implementation of antiracist strategies across Department programs. Successful implementation of antiracist strategies in undergraduate and graduate programs will be added as an evaluative criterion for the Chair and other administrators within the unit. These changes to evaluative criteria will be proposed for the Department bylaws at the June 2020 Department meeting and, if approved, will take effect beginning in the 2020-2021 Academic Year. They will apply to the 18-month evaluation of the Chair scheduled for January 2021 and the annual review of all other department administrators.

Implementation of antiracist and decolonial course design and assessment practices by part-time faculty across programs will be considered as a positive performance attribute in Performance Reviews. Participation in workshops and events in these areas will be considered professional development for the purpose of Term Faculty review.

Invest in Diversification Efforts

Over the next five years, the Department will request tenure and term lines prioritizing African American rhetoric or writing, an area in which the Department is currently extremely weak. All tenure and term line requests over the next five years will prioritize Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) rhetoric and writing and/or cultural rhetorics. We also commit to recruiting and retaining diverse faculty of all ranks through proactive searches and inclusive interviewing processes.

The Department will review its current curricular offerings to assess how extensively and in what ways African American, antiracist, and decolonial rhetorics are addressed in existing courses. We will share this information at the January 2021 faculty meeting and develop ongoing training for faculty to increase their knowledge, expand their approaches, and share related pedagogies.

The Department will use funds earmarked for its Speaker Series (Writing and Rhetoric Across Borders) to facilitate a broader antiracist strategy. Over the next two years, this use of funds will include at least one workshop (open to all faculty and students) on antiracist and decolonial course design and assessment; the Speaker Series committee will prioritize BIPOC speakers focusing on antiracist and decolonial rhetorics for its funded Speaking invitations. The Department will also continue to seek co-sponsorship opportunities for speakers in other units, and provide funds to support such speakers or related activities where available.

The Department will develop a strategy for recruiting BIPOC students at all levels and use funds earmarked for marketing and recruitment to promote its programs for BIPOC applicants.

The Department will devote funds as needed and available and take all required steps to assist the First-Year Writing program in implementing its own ongoing action plan.

Diversify Undergraduate and Graduate Program Offerings

The Department will propose to the College Committee on Curriculum and Programs that a Cultural Rhetorics course be added to the Writing and Rhetoric major core.

The Department will build undergraduate curriculum through course creation, hiring, and cross-listing with the aim of providing undergraduate students with a wider range of course options in

BIPOC and/or cultural rhetorics and writing. In order to enrich undergraduate options immediately, the Chair will seek cross-listing opportunities with programs across the College and University, and provide a range of cross-listed courses in advising materials distributed to Majors and Minors.

Because of the scarcity of courses in diverse, BIPOC, and/or cultural rhetorics within the MA WRD program, the number of courses permitted to count for credit from outside the MA WRD program will be increased from two to three if at least one of those courses addresses these or related topics. The Graduate Director will update the Student Handbook with policy language to reflect this change and the policy will apply to all current students. In collaboration with the aforementioned Equity Committee, the Graduate Director will seek out and include courses outside of the MA WRD program in advising materials.

The Graduate Committee will seek out opportunities for cross-listing courses in the MA WRD with courses relevant to diverse, BIPOC, and/or cultural rhetorics in other programs.

No later than Spring Quarter 2021, the Department will produce and distribute (including to students) an action plan for addressing career outcomes for BIPOC students, with particular focus on graduates in the MA WRD program.

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We recognize that these actions are the beginning of our work to imagine other ways of teaching writing and of learning together. We will listen with humility, and we commit to act with urgency.

Faculty
Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and Discourse