

Founding Statement of the English Department Diversity and Inclusion Committee

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The Committee for Diversity & Inclusion in the English Department of Boston University was formed in the summer of 2020 as an immediate response to the global protests against racism and police brutality, catalyzed by the police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. In this moment of heightened awareness of ongoing systemic racism and anti-blackness in American society, the Department of English formed this committee to acknowledge the need for decisive action at all institutional levels within reach to promote racial justice and confront disparities of power more broadly within race, gender, sexuality, class, and institutional structures. To this end, this committee looks both within the department and outward toward the university to assess diversity, equity, and inclusion, recommend best practices, consult with the department Chair, and work in solidarity with adjacent social justice advocacy efforts.

In the spirit of democratic action, the Committee for Diversity & Inclusion is the first English departmental committee to have a mixed composition of tenure-line faculty and at least one graduate and one undergraduate student. The objectives of the committee are ambitious and long-term, and we lay them out for institutional memory and future efforts. Together, the members of the committee aim to address at least some of the following issues:

- Prioritizing the hiring and retention of more faculty of color, women faculty, queer and trans faculty, and scholars of race & ethnicity more broadly, ideally at the tenure-track level. This must be a sustained, long-term priority that does not settle for tokenism, but rather positions the Department of English as a future model for faculty diversity and scholarship on power, difference, and identity, including ethnic studies, gender studies, and queer studies.
- Ongoing reflection and intra-departmental self-criticism to promote a culture of inclusion. Recognizing inevitable imperfections and mistakes on this front at all levels, while producing a culture of growth and collective, mutual learning. Encouraging an expansive, restorative approach to reconciliation when conflicts arise. Researching, refining, and incentivizing best practices for inclusive, justice minded pedagogy.

- Examination and reform of the undergraduate and graduate curricula of the department with specific attention to degree requirements in order to equalize the status between literatures long enshrined at the center and minoritized literatures that have lingered on the periphery. We must continually interrogate standards of what constitutes a “proper” or “rigorous” education, expanding epistemic frames of reference beyond traditional canons.
- Increasing student diversity at both undergraduate and graduate levels across race, gender, class, and sexuality, while placing an equal emphasis on retention of underrepresented populations.
- Formation of stronger ties with student organizations on campus, as well as with other administrative units on campus committed to social justice & inclusion.
- Recognition and confrontation of ongoing systemic power imbalances within the university labor structure. Advocating for graduate students, contingent faculty, administrative staff, and operations workers, particularly when no other institutions stand for their interests. Involving graduate students and contingent faculty in broader roles of faculty governance. Supporting a graduate students’ bill of rights, including the right to unionize. Recognition that student laborers are workers and are entitled to the protections and appreciation thereof.
- In the context of Boston University’s often gentrifying presence in the city of Boston, developing stronger ties, through service or advocacy, with public institutions of learning such as the Boston Public School system, especially schools with historically marginalized and underrepresented--i.e. Black and Brown--student populations.
- Supporting additional campus-wide efforts to confront systemic racism and police brutality, including the current movement to defund and divest from companies and institutions complicit with the exploitative structures of the contemporary prison-industrial complex.

It is our hope that the Department of English at large takes seriously the recommendations of this committee as it moves forward in its discussions and examinations. We acknowledge that the work of diversity and inclusion is ongoing and will change over time, and so we welcome future versions of this document.