

Respect, Difference and the Work of English at this Historical Moment A Departmental Statement

The Department of English engages at all levels the power of words to shape the human condition in its diversity. We educate our students about the many ways that our language organizes our imaginative capacity to understand, respect, care and find common ground with one another across real differences, or else to inhibit those capacities.

The humanistic education that we offer in English involves learning to read texts, enjoin discussions, write works and hear interlocutors whose ways of framing the world we may find unfamiliar or even uncomfortable. We do not expect agreement in our classrooms. We do encourage intellectual encounter, deeper understanding and personal growth. We believe that the reflective encounter with difference is a vital step toward becoming a citizen in the world. Whether across lines of nationality, language, history, race, gender, class, sexuality, religion or ability, a reflective encounter in the contact zone of the English classroom fosters basic democratic values such as a sense of justice, civic concern, critical thinking, and an appreciation for diversity.

In the service of this educational mission, we conduct our classes as places where, however challenged by new ideas, our students and faculty feel respected, unintimidated, and safe to explore. At this historical moment when many students and other members of the higher education community are feeling vulnerable to threat and intimidation, English at the University of Arizona re-dedicates itself to this vision: to assert critical imagination and a culture of respect for all our students, whether in the classroom or in the world beyond its walls.