

Department of English, Statement of Principles Committee for Professional Ethics and Collegiality

In the context of a presidential transition that threatens to normalize discrimination based on gender, race, immigration status, religion, sexual orientation, and/or ability, we reaffirm our department's commitment to a non-discriminatory and proactively diverse and inclusive learning environment that condemns all acts of bigotry and supports dissident voices.

The department's commitment to ethical behavior is based on a recognition of and mutual respect for the intellectual space in which we operate as a community. This commitment requires that we take responsibility for incidents of perceived bias—past, present and future. As a living document drafted in response to a specific set of incidents, this statement should be subject to revision on a regular basis since the conditions under which we work inevitably change. As literary scholars and creative writers we are well acquainted with the power of language to shape reality and the need for diverse modes of representation. Thus, our shared objective is to enact these values in communication with colleagues and in practices of teaching, learning, and research.

We are all, directly or indirectly, affected by the national and local histories informing the current climate of violence, income inequality, and racial inequality – crises that are both national and global. What happens beyond Vanderbilt campus affects our community here: It is the larger context within which we operate. We embrace the reality that as a department we occupy a unique space in which to challenge received ideas, uncover persistent biases subtending cultural production, and discover how far these products suggest alternative ways of thinking, acting, and being. Yet we navigate a larger culture – and a university one – in which the impact of daily experiences of difference are not always acknowledged or respected.

The members of the English department have long expressed the desire to invite and sustain diversity at all ranks and have implemented on an *ad hoc* basis various measures to achieve it, with varying degrees of success. We recognize that building such a community is an ongoing, collective process that requires careful planning, thought, consultation, and creative energy. In the spirit of fostering collegiality, respect, and intellectual responsibility among all members of our department as we pursue this goal, we state the following objectives:

- We must strive to develop spaces that enable diverse forms of creative, cultural, and intellectual expression to flourish. We recognize that this shared practice requires not only intellectual and artistic labor, but also a commitment to honest communication among all parties. Faculty, staff, and students bear an obligation to keep channels of communication open.

- We recognize that such obligation imposes varying levels of risk and responsibility. Thus, we will seek to define chains of communication with input from the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion and guidance from successful models implemented at peer institutions.
- We will build community as a department by creating occasions, events, and structures to share the varying forms of knowledge that we produce.
- We shall work with the university to foster and strengthen intellectual communities and collaborations that promote cultural and racial diversity.
- We encourage cross-departmental networks spanning different stages of study to form around emerging areas of research and inquiry. Within academic and artistic arenas, fields of study rapidly change. We are fortunate to have among us distinguished scholars and writers who have achieved and contributed much to their fields and our community. We encourage the formation of new intellectual and creative networks, which in turn should support collegiality among graduate cohorts.
- We acknowledge that labor conditions for faculty are variable across ranks and value the contributions of faculty who occupy differing relations to the hierarchies that structure our university in particular and academia more generally.
- We support greater transparency and clarity in outlining the terms of employment for non-tenure track faculty and seek to define a range of potential paths for professional advancement off the tenure track.
- With respect to our work in the graduate program, we understand our endeavor to be shared and dynamic: Faculty members and graduate students work together to launch the department's graduates on their own careers, many of them as teachers, assessors, guides, and mentors.
- We recognize the professional contributions of our staff to the intellectual community we inhabit and respect their time and labor in enabling the work of the department to continue. We therefore commit to familiarizing ourselves regularly with the shifting labor conditions experienced by staff, in order to support and advocate on behalf of these invaluable members of our community.

This committee will persevere—charged with seeking input from faculty, staff, and graduate students annually—in developing these statements as integral parts of a living document and to suggest standard practices that benefit our department and its members.