

Philosophy and Commitment to Antiracism

The origins of education in the United States are, simultaneously and paradoxically, assimilatory and exclusionary, and, despite the longstanding myth that literacy is key to liberation, postsecondary writing has too often served a gatekeeping function for Black students and other Students of Color. Writing centers have the potential to reinforce or resist hegemonic ideologies of literacy and to uphold or challenge limited views of academic discourse. At the CSUDH Writing Center, we stand firm in our commitment to challenge limited conceptions of writing, rhetoric, and language, and to resist outdated and inequitable approaches to literacy instruction.

In its mission and values statements, California State University, Dominguez Hills promises to provide accessible and transformative educational experiences that respond to the students and communities we serve. To live up to this mission in ways that are equitable rather than acculturating, it is imperative that our programs and practices honor students' identities and experiences and contribute to the dismantling of educational structures that perpetuate racism and white supremacy. When the CSUDH Writing Center was established in 2019, it was grounded in a philosophy of antiracism. Our founding faculty members, including the current Director, are scholars of race rhetorics and antiracist composition theory. Our current staff also includes Writing Professionals (faculty tutors) and Writing Associates (graduate and undergraduate tutors) dedicated to learning and modeling equitable approaches to tutoring pedagogy. Since its inception the CSUDH Writing Center has emphasized student agency, cultural relevancy, and critical literacy, and has actively resisted white language supremacy and deficit-oriented approaches to writing tutoring. Our antiracist ethos is by design.

The CSUDH Writing Center is committed to decentering whiteness in the following ways:

We support and encourage multiple Englishes in order to challenge white language supremacy. Writing instruction in higher education too often valorizes a so-called “standard American English,” which, in keeping with contemporary composition and sociolinguistics scholarship, we instead refer to as *standardized Englishes*, while denigrating other dialects and forms of English. Black English, for example, is erroneously and pejoratively labeled as “slang.” We honor linguistic theory that reminds us that Englishes believed to be standard have been defined in opposition to dialects already designated as nonstandard, designations that are influenced not by theories of language formation but by historical and contemporary cultural and political ideologies about the people who speak those dialects. Erroneous assumptions about language, which lead to erroneous conceptions of writing quality and grammatical correctness, have long served to reinforce ideologies of anti-Blackness in systems of schooling and higher education as well as to prevent the academic success of multilingual learners. To best serve our multilingual community, our staff includes tutors who are fluent or conversational in multiple Englishes as well as languages other than English.

We recognize and affirm that there is no single standard academic writing. Just as there is no single English language, there is no single academic discourse. Each disciplinary discourse community for which we write has its own epistemologies, ideologies, and ways of saying,

being, and doing, all of which are reinforced through the writing and rhetorical practices common to that community. The writing a student engages with as both reader and writer will differ in a journalism course and a biology course, for example. The CSUDH Writing Center supports students writing for and/or in all disciplines across the university. For this reason, our approach to tutoring contextualizes writing within disciplinary discourse and encourages writers' rhetorical flexibility and critical genre awareness. Our staff includes tutors from various fields of study, all of whom are also educated in Writing Center theory and practice.

We apply assets-based pedagogies to working with writers. We recognize that writers come to us with linguistic and rhetorical assets and we encourage writers to identify and build upon these assets as they add to their writers' toolboxes. We acknowledge that, because of implicit biases cultivated by white supremacy and linguistic racism, we may not initially recognize these assets and we understand that these assets may not be recognized by instructors or by writers themselves. Notions of quality and correctness are generally informed by assumptions about academic discourse and standardized Englishes that perpetuate the marginalization, acculturation, and silencing of student writers, particularly student writers who are Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and/or multilingual learners. In keeping with an understanding of writing as a social activity, we recognize and assert that grammaticality and rhetorical effectiveness are interrelated but distinct from one another, and we encourage writers to consider the rhetorical effectiveness of the choices they make about grammar and style and the impacts of those choices on particular audiences, including those with whitely assumptions about language and academic discourse. We stand firm in our denouncement of deficit-model writing instruction and assessment that aims to "correct" or "fix" students' writing, rhetoric, or language use.

We apply a critical lens to reading, writing, and language pedagogy. Our antiracist mission is built from a critical framework that acknowledges and examines the ways in which language and text represent, reinforce, or resist ideology. We encourage writers to develop a critical consciousness about the choices they make in writing, how they use language, and how their language is received and perceived by particular audiences. We recognize the increased significance of critical literacy and critical media literacy in a global, digitally mediated society defined by the tug of war between access to information and racist, xenophobic political rhetoric and disinformation. This critical lens informs all of the work we do as a program, from our administrative policies and programmatic offerings to our tutoring pedagogies and the ongoing professional development we provide for Writing Professionals and Writing Associates.

We support and encourage student agency. Any piece of writing emerges from the choices writers make about purpose, audience, genre, tone, diction, and style. We affirm that writers' rhetorical and linguistic choices are their own and we encourage students to negotiate their goals as writers with the goals and expectations of the discourse communities for and in which they are writing. Our Writing Associates and Writing Professionals work to provide writers with as many linguistic and rhetorical tools as possible but do not prescribe particular linguistic or discursive approaches. Put very simply, we work with writers to identify the options available and to reflect upon their rhetorical effectiveness but we leave the choice to the writer.

We offer a low-stakes space outside of the classroom that is free of judgement and assessment where students can explore and develop their own writerly identities. In courses

and classrooms, writing experiences are typically accompanied by grading and assessment, practices that, though often unavoidable in classroom settings, have deep roots in white supremacist notions of discourse, knowledge, and language. A writing center, by virtue of being outside the official classroom, is a low-stakes, grade-free environment in which students can work toward their own writing goals, whether or not those goals relate to their coursework. Writing assessment is too rarely formative and too often punitive, and, in many universities, instructors require students visit the writing center or punitively “send” students to the writing center to address a low grade or perceived deficit in students’ writing. The CSUDH Writing Center recommends instructors do not mandate such visits but instead encourage students to consider the many benefits of our judgment-free writing community.

We celebrate collaborative learning. In the writing center, writers work *with* tutors in individual sessions and with other writers in group workshops. In these sessions, though the writer has authority over their text, knowledge is co-constructed and members of the CSUDH community work together to make meaning of ideas, texts, and language. This approach disrupts dominant Western frameworks of learning, writing, and rhetoric as individualistic and unidirectional, and emphasizes the social contexts of communication and the collaborative nature of meaning-making. These collaborative experiences also enhance the professional development of Writing Professionals and Writing Associates, who learn from the writers they work with and the experiences, discourses, and ways of knowing those writers share.

We commit to ongoing critical reflection upon our own positionalities, biases, and practice. Because we live and work in a white hegemonic society with systems and institutions that maintain white supremacy and racism, we must continue to reflect upon the ways in which our own beliefs, positionalities, and practice serve to reinforce or resist educational inequity. Racial literacy is, in the words of critical race and legal scholar Lani Guinier, an ongoing process of “learning rather than knowing.” Just as literacy is never finite, the work of antiracism too is never finished. There is always more work to be done and more to be undone. We offer ongoing professional development for our Writing Professionals and Writing Associates and strategic programmatic assessment to ensure we remain true to our mission. Our internal mentorship structures support the professional and intellectual growth of our student staff members, and faculty who work in the Writing Center staff are expected to stay current and active in the field of composition and rhetoric. Our discipline teaches us that writing is a way of learning and, by remaining active as academic, creative, and reflective writers ourselves, we continue to engage critically with language, writing, rhetoric, and academic discourse, and the oppressive, assimilative, and liberatory potential of literacy.

We, like all programs within institutions of a white hegemonic system, certainly have more work to do, but we are building from a strong foundation of antiracist principles. The principles that inform our practice are not unique to the CSUDH Writing Center but align with contemporary theory and pedagogy in writing studies and, therefore, are part of our broader vision for writing studies here at Dominguez Hills.

This includes intentional alignment and deep collaboration with the Writing Across the Curriculum Program, or WAC, at CSUDH. The mission of the WAC Program is to draw upon our students’ greatest strengths—their diverse educational, cultural, and linguistic

backgrounds—to cultivate a robust culture of writing at CSUDH, and so to facilitate the creation, integration, and synthesis of critical writing experiences both across the curriculum and throughout students’ time at the university. The WAC Program vision is that through integrated writing education and experiences, students will learn to use rhetorically forceful and effective writing to transform their own lives, their communities, and their world to help create a more socially just and sustainable future for all. Drawing on the program’s core values, WAC at DH works daily with faculty, administration, and programs like the Writing Center to help build, deepen, and sustain a culture of writing at CSUDH that is socially just, accessible to all, collaborative in methods and approach, academically rigorous, educationally and personally transformative, and accountable to all stakeholders.

We aim to stay true to our mission by offering all members of our campus community an alternative to high-stakes, assessment-oriented writing experiences and by serving as a model for student-centered, culturally relevant writing pedagogy grounded in disciplinary best practices and a philosophy of antiracism. Moving forward, we aim to increase our antiracism efforts through professional development, policy, and pedagogy. To that end, we are working on the following initiatives, which we plan to roll out during the 2020-21 academic year:

- Community events (including online events) like open mics and poetry slams that honor Toros’ varied literacies and rhetorics and expand what it means to identify as a writer within and beyond the DH community through sharing of both scholarly and non-scholarly writerly projects,
- Professional development workshops for instructors in all disciplines, on topics such as designing critical, culturally relevant writing assignments, equitable approaches to writing pedagogy, assessing students’ writing, and providing feedback on students’ writing in an online environment,
- Ongoing professional development for our staff oriented toward antiracist writing center theory and practice,
- Inclusion of faculty from across the university in professional development for writing center staff to promote familiarity with academic discourse in various disciplines,
- Collaboration with academic and support programs campus-wide to provide holistic support to students, and
- Increased outreach efforts including social media campaigns that meet students where they are and invite students’ input on future Writing Center programming.

Resources for Writers and Teachers of Writing

We offer the following resources for writers, students, teachers, and all interested members of the Toro community to explore antiracist writing theory and pedagogy and the frameworks in which our work is situated.

Alim, H. S., and Smitherman, G. (2012). *Articulate while Black: Barack Obama, language, and race in the U.S.* Oxford, UK: Oxford UP.

- Bonilla-Silva, E. *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in America*, 5th Ed. (2017). Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Condon, F. (2012). *I hope I join the band: Narrative, affiliation, and antiracist rhetoric*. Logan, UT: Utah State UP.
- Condon, F. and Young, V. A. (Eds.) (2017). *Performing antiracist pedagogy in rhetoric, writing, and communication*. Fort Collins, CO: The WAC Clearinghouse.
- Conference on College Composition and Communication. (1974). Students' right to their own language. *College Composition and Communication* 25.
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- Crowley, S. (1998). *Composition in the university: Historical and polemical Essays*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Devitt, A. (2009). Teaching critical genre awareness. In Bazerman, C. (Ed.), *Genre in a Changing World* (pp. 337-351). Anderson, SC: Parlor Press.
- Gee, J. P. (1989). Literacy, discourse, and linguistics: Introduction. *Journal of Education* 171(1), 5-17.
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- Greenfield, L. (2011). The 'standard English' fairy tale: A rhetorical analysis of racist pedagogies and commonplace assumptions about language diversity. In Greenfield, L. & Rowan, K. (Eds.), *Writing Centers and the New Racism: A Call for Sustainable Dialogue and Change*. Logan, UT: Utah State UP.
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- Inoue, A. B. (2015). *Antiracist writing assessment ecologies: Teaching and assessing writing for*

- a socially just future*. Anderson, SC: Parlor Press.
- Keisch, D. M., and Scott, T. (2015). Tim Scott. U.S. education reform and the maintenance of white supremacy through structural violence. *Landscapes of Violence* 3(3), 1-44.
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- Lea, M., and Street, B. (1998). Student writing in higher education: An academic literacies approach. *Studies in Higher Education* 23(2), 157-173.
- Lippi-Green, R. (1997). *English with an accent: Language, ideology, and discrimination in the United States*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Macedo, D. P., Dendrinos, B. and Gounari, P. (2003). *The hegemony of English*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.
- Naynaha, S. (2016). Assessment, social justice, and Latinxs in the US community college. *College English* 79(2), 196-201.
- Nielsen, K. (2014). On class, race, and dynamics of privilege: Supporting generation 1.5 writers across the curriculum. In Zawacki, T.M. and Cox, M. (Eds.), *WAC and Second Language Writers: Research toward Linguistically and Culturally Inclusive Programs and Practices* (pp. 129-150). Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse.
- Saidy, C. (2018). Inez in transition: Using case study to explore the experiences of underrepresented students in first-year composition. *WPA: Writing Program Administration* 41(2), 17-34.
- Shen, F. (1989). The classroom and the wider culture: Identity as a key to learning English composition. *College Composition and Communication* 40(4), 459-466.
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