

June 9, 2020

Dear Lehman English Students and Alumni,

In the last few days (weeks, months, years), we have been reminded that the coronavirus and other public health crises are not the only threat that Black and Brown people in the U.S. face. Rather, the pandemic exacerbates the systemic racism and violence on which the U.S.—including U.S. universities—was built. The essential workers—the nurses, EMS providers, grocery store workers, MTA employees, et al.—that government officials are so quick to celebrate are the very Black and Brown people who are at disproportionate risk of both COVID-19 and state violence. That violence continues even more acutely at the hands of law enforcement and racist vigilantes, as we have seen in the devastating murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, David McAtee, Tony McDade, and so many more.

We, the undersigned Lehman English faculty, pledge to combat the racism, injustice, and brutality that structure American life and by extension our curriculum. We are angry too, which is why we are publicly declaring our commitment to decolonize the English curriculum and work towards dismantling curricular and institutional racism at CUNY.

We know it might seem as if our English curriculum has nothing to do with people rising up in over 75 cities across the country, and in solidarity protests all over the world. But it has everything to do with it. In January, the English department began the long overdue process of overhauling its curriculum by reflecting on what it means to teach within a Hispanic Serving Institution. Prompted by student activism, including the [November 10, 2019 open letter](#) circulated by the Latinx Student Alliance, we recognized the urgent need to redesign the curriculum with you, our Lehman students, in mind. This spring, we agreed to dismantle the section of our Majors Worksheet that grouped together Postcolonial literature, African American literature, Latino literature, and Asian American literature in its own section. This sub-requirement, a vestige of a previous curriculum revision from 20+ years ago, no longer serves us or our student body, and the suggestion of “Choose one of the following” made it difficult for you to prioritize these courses.

At a March department meeting, we took a further step. Our faculty voted by an overwhelming majority to make Black and Latinx literatures the centerpiece of a new English core. Under this new curriculum, in addition to ENG 300 and ENG 350 (Senior Seminar), the required core for all English majors will include ENG 339 Latinx Literature and ENG 340 African American Literature. Faculty have volunteered to work over the summer to complete our overhaul of key courses so that our new model can be voted on in September and passed by the Faculty Senate for implementation in Spring 2021. update: Summer 2021

This timeline is an ambitious one. We share it with you for transparency, and so you can hold us accountable. Our revised Majors Worksheet—with this new English core at its center—will reflect our commitment to using our academic community platform to begin

combating the systemic racism that structures our country and to prepare a new generation of English scholars and writers to partake in this fight.

To our students, especially our Black and Brown students, who have consistently pushed us towards curricular revision: we see you; we hear you; and we are emboldened by you. You remind us that none of us is powerless, and that we each have the power to fight for racial justice by acting decisively and collectively in our local communities. Lehman College, and the Lehman English Department, more specifically, is one of our homes, and it should also be one of our refuges: an anti-racist space where we celebrate the intellectual, political, and artistic brilliance of the people of color who make up the majority of our college, this continent, and world.

Black lives matter. Brown lives matter. Until Black and Latinx intellectual, professional, and artistic contributions are normalized within the fabric of everyday American life, racist incidents that cause bodily harm will persist everywhere, from Minneapolis to Louisville to Central Park.

In Solidarity,

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Vani Kannan
Bret Maney
Olivia Loksing Moy
Melissa Castillo Planas
Dhipinder Walia

Siraj Ahmed
Allison Amend
James Anderson
Will Bailey
Dainy Bernstein
Genevieve Bettendorf
Justine Blau
Ralph Boone
Rebecca Breech
Charlene Cambridge
Nora Carroll
Marsham Castro
T.K. Dalton
Mario DiGangi
Susan DiRaimo
Stacey Engels
Lisa Estreich

Zeke Finkelstein
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