

The Department of English Hears [#BlackatUark](#):

[#BlackatUark](#) speaks out loud the realities of systemic racism at the University of Arkansas. The burden of telling the effects of racism should not fall on those most vulnerable to it; we are grateful for those who are undertaking to tell it anyway. Those sharing their experiences with the hashtag [#BlackatUark](#) bring home to us in a crucial way that our department is complicit in allowing anti-Black racism to continue. As one of the largest departments on campus, we must take a lead in changing these realities.

We must and will work to make Black, Indigenous, and People of Color students, staff, faculty, and guests safe at the Department of English. We must ensure that English Department faculty and staff treat BIPOC equitably and with dignity. This must translate into an actionable plan.

In consultation with the graduate students of the Department of English, we have several action points for summer that we have already begun pursuing:

- Relocating the glass-framed portraits of past department faculty, all white, that line the English office walls in Kimpel 331 and replacing with digital displays of current faculty and student achievements / announcements, as well as posters highlighting the full range of courses and other opportunities, to emphasize the diversity (real and aspirational) of our department and create a welcoming space for all our students.

- Making fall course books more affordable to students through greater use of e-resources.

- Recruiting graduate students with faculty visits to HBCUs.

- Encouraging all faculty to register with the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity through the U of A's institutional membership (membership we got thanks to Lora Walsh, Constance Bailey, Jo Hsu and Casey Kayser).

Further, given Senator Fulbright's active support for segregation, despite his support for international education, we applaud the removal of the image of his statue across the webpages of the College of Arts and Sciences, and would further support the removal of the statue itself.

Action points for the upcoming academic year:

- Ensuring that faculty of all ranks are complying with taking anti-racism trainings, through concrete review mechanisms.

- Requiring faculty at all ranks to write an inclusivity and equity policy into their syllabi, which must contain clear contact information where students can report grievances.

- Hosting open meetings during the fall semester to gather feedback for departmental anti-racism work, while realizing that it is not the job of those suffering from racism and exclusion to bring it to our attention.

-Creating a monthly anti-racism book discussion group in the department, without placing the burden of joining it or leading it on minority members.

-Actively pursuing, per our DEI plan, fiscal allocations to back up our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.

-Continuing to update, revise and enforce our DEI plan.

-Finding ways to make our DEI work more visible and inclusive, so that all departmental constituents are aware of efforts around the department in ways that let them participate in, critique and support those efforts.

We realize that the above are only initial and tentative steps, some of them symbolic--and we know this is not enough. These steps must actually be taken, and many more must follow if our department is to make real systemic change.

Changing systemic racism requires sustained work across all levels of educational and economic structures of the nation; it requires fiscal commitments and we call on our institution to allocate the funds to make change a reality. That said, we must begin where we have power to change: in ourselves and our department.

[#BlackatUark](#) participants, thank you for your courage and vision. We are word people, and your words are changing us.

Contact us at: engl@uark.edu