

The faculty and graduate students of the University of Kansas Department of English write to express our full and unconditional support for the spirit behind the demands of the student coalition, Rock Chalk Invisible Hawk. Their demands, born of an honest, urgent frustration with our campus' historically unwelcoming and alienating climate towards students of color, are a clear and convincing call for our administrators and faculty to make concrete strides toward change. As displayed in the November 11th Town Hall, the issues raised in the list are also representative of the overlapping identities that bind together all marginalized groups on our campus. We join in their insistence that substantive response to their activism requires real and immediate action, not further unproductive discussion. Their courageous actions have also motivated us to meditate on what we, as an educational unit of this institution, have or have not actively done to support these students in our department's activities and culture.

Because our coursework fulfills KU Core Goal 2.1, our department sees a significant portion of the university's undergraduate population early in their time on campus. Our website declares our place "at the core of the humanities, highlighting the 'human' through our individual, one-on-one interactions with our students, our emphasis on community and global engagement, and our abiding interest in our shared humanity through the stories of others." In their demands for a transformative faculty and curricula that include institution-wide "inclusion and belonging training," the Rock Chalk Invisible Hawk students have issued a challenge that strikes at the heart of what we proclaim to do in our research and teaching. As such, we believe it is vital to dedicate ourselves to rethinking our own pedagogy in this area. We acknowledge that, along with the rest of the university, we have not consistently met the standards that we espouse.

We therefore take this opportunity to affirm that, going forward, the core coursework of our department will include a more thoughtful engagement with diverse perspectives that challenge students to perceive the world through a variety of cultural lenses. In addition, we understand that we bear a responsibility to model the behavior we wish to see in our students. Thus, we will ensure that our faculty and Graduate Teaching Assistants have regular training and discussion around ways to introduce inclusive texts and difficult dialogues into our courses. In this way, we honor the courage of the Rock Chalk Invisible Hawk students to demand that our academic goals and principles are matched with practice. The task normally expected of students is simply to learn. But the emboldened activism of this coalition of students serves to remind us what our responsibilities, as faculty and GTAs, are. We regret our own complicity in the systemic educational shortcomings that necessitated the November 11th Town Hall Assembly. We pledge to rededicate ourselves to upholding our share of the educational bargain.

Faculty and Graduate Students
Department of English