

Breck English Department Anti-Bias Statement 2020

Acknowledgment Statement

Dear Students and Parents,

As English teachers and stewards of discussions that connect us to the human experience, we want to affirm that we are committed to the growth and development of our students, and that includes our own growth and development as teachers. We acknowledge that some decisions we have made, be it of the curricular nature or classroom environment, have caused harm to individuals in our community through the years. We reaffirm our values as a department because all of our students deserve the best learning environment we can provide. We choose progress, though messy, as our direction; however, we commit to acknowledging mistakes when we become aware of them and acting upon them toward our vision. We commit to our community through the following anti-bias statement.

Sincerely,

Katie Scherer and the entire 5-12 English department

Breck English Anti-Bias Statement

Breck English strives to be an anti-racism, anti-oppression department.

Our Department Culture

With the goal of deepening student understanding of racism, patriarchy, homophobia, ableism and other forms of oppression, we believe that justice-committed English educators purposefully identify, discuss, and challenge representations of race, gender, sexuality, and ability and explore those elements' impact on how literature is read and written, how we as educators teach, and how students learn.

Recognition, Trust-Building, Disruption

We commit to continuously challenging ourselves to understand our own implicit biases, to recognize the systemic advantage and oppression structures of our world, and to amend inequities we and our students discover within our department and in our classrooms. To foster trust with our students, their families, and our larger community, we seek feedback and scaffold classroom discourse that prioritizes dignity, warmth, and humanity and actively works to reduce harm. We are committed to the continued development and implementation of strategies and best-practices that disrupt and dismantle racism, cultural oppression, homophobia, misogyny, and ableism within all aspects of our department.

Celebration, Protection, Empowerment

We are dedicated to celebrating, protecting, and empowering our Black, Indigenous, and of Color students, families, faculty, and staff. Now and moving forward in our long American history of anti-BIPOC racism, discrimination, and microaggression, we strive to awaken consciousness of privilege and racial harm, pursue systemic and institutional change, address imbalances in power, and make amends for historical and present-day harm. We equally commit to the protection, celebration, and empowerment of our community members with disabilities, our LGBTQIA+ community, and our female community.

Lotze, August 2020

Land Acknowledgement

We are also committed to recognizing that the land on which Breck School stands, was stewarded for thousands of years by Dakota and Anishinaabe people. This too is an injustice with a painful legacy that continues today.

Hate Speech

We do not speak aloud racial, cultural, ableist, or sexual slurs when they appear in literature but continue to grapple with the power and history of the words and what they mean in our culture. We introduce literature and film where slurs are present by examining and challenging both historical and present-day context, emotional impact, and author intent.

Inclusive Language

Our department sees language as both a reflection of and a guide for our values. The way we speak reflects what we value and, in turn, the words we choose can shape the way we think. We aim to equip students with grammatical skills that honor cultural and gender identities, while establishing students' knowledge of grammatical expectations in many contexts. Acknowledging that language is always evolving, we ask students to use inclusive language when writing and speaking.

Impact Over Intent

We are committed to opening ourselves to feedback, and we aim to formalize the feedback loop to ensure we understand the ways our classroom content is reaching all students. We will own our mistakes, understand what went wrong, and return to our students with acknowledgment and a clearer understanding of the impact of our missteps on the experiences of our students.

Our Goal

Ultimately, the Breck English Department focuses on engaging and collaborating in teaching, service, scholarship, and publishing that challenges oppressive and unjust forces as we work to reduce injustices in our school. We strive to empower students to pursue their lives' work with profound understanding of their own identities, consciousness of their choices and actions' impact on others, and a calling to "strive for justice and peace among all people... respect[ing] the dignity of every human being."

Works consulted: UNC Charlotte School of Social Work, Cascade Engineering, Me and White Supremacy