

Free Discourse Statement:

Department of English & Philosophy

Free discourse in an academic setting includes an embrace of different perspectives, interests, and inquiries and the freedom to pursue thoughts, ideas, and experiences with reading and writing without the threat of censorship. Here are some ways you can actively support free and respectful discourse in our class, in other classes in the English & Philosophy department, and at MCLA:

Affirm other people's lived experiences. Listen to and affirm the stories of others.

Develop a taste for discomfort. Being exposed to different perspectives, new voices, writers and thinkers who have something to say about being human isn't always comfortable.

Embrace paraphrase over judgment. Paraphrase is the written art of listening. It's an attempt to exquisitely understand (and communicate to others) what someone else is saying in all of its force and complexity. *Do this first.* Deciding whether a piece of writing, or a person, is right or wrong, good or bad, isn't our goal-- neither is agreement or subscription. Being only concerned with if something's good might impede your ability to listen.

Celebrate acts of testimony and witness. Many writers and artists produce texts to say something about what they have experienced, to mark themselves and others as human, as having endured, known or witnessed life. As readers we are often invited to witness things that are difficult and also discordant with our own experiences or emotions -- or, just as often, things we can relate to. Creators want all kinds of things from us. They want us to think, to feel, maybe even to act -- to have some kind of provocative experience with their text. They want something to happen. Celebrate that you are on the receiving end of this imperfect wish.

Recognize and respect the speed of others. You might find yourself uncomfortable with something others are not, or vice versa. You might respectfully share your feelings about this while recognizing that others may be having a different experience.

Take agency with self-care when reading in this course. It's great to challenge yourself to be uncomfortable while being exposed to new ideas and texts but only you know when that feels like too much for whatever reason. You might respectfully express your discomfort during class, lean back during conversation to give yourself some space, or take some space outside of the classroom. Note that your professors cannot anticipate what might provoke discomfort, nor can they account for all that might come up in an assigned text or student writing.

Take agency with self-care with writing assignments. Assignments are open enough to invite a whole range of discourse. If you are interested in writing about difficult topics, you are able to. If you are not interested in doing so, find the speed that's right for you as you consider each assignment.

Refrain from hate speech and don't use derogatory words for Black people, LGBTQIA++ people, or women, or anyone, unless you belong to that identity category and are using these words as an act of reappropriation. The United Nations defines hate speech as: "offensive discourse targeting a group or an individual based on inherent characteristics (such as race, religion or gender) and that may threaten social peace."

Refrain, also, from writing identifiably about any member of this course or the MCLA community without explicit permission to do so.