

Statement on Anti-Racist and Social Justice Work in the Middlebury Writing Center

The 2020 [Black Lives Matter](#) spring and summer protests for Black liberation and justice, as well as the global pandemic's disparate effect on healthcare and economic access in BIPOC communities, have promoted us to turn our gaze inward to explore and critique how our educational and programmatic practices uphold white supremacy. After reading anti-racism scholarship in writing studies and composition studies and attending several workshops on anti-racism throughout the fall 2020 semester, we created a document that articulates our commitment to anti-racist work and lays out a plan of action for dismantling racism in our writing center. This document was collaboratively developed by members of the Middlebury Writing Center, including over 33 peer and professional writing tutors, and the Writing Center Director.

Our Mission

The Middlebury Writing Center is committed to anti-racism and stands in solidarity with the [Black Lives Matter Movement](#). We recognize this statement as a living document that is more committed to anti-racism than to the statement itself. In other words, this statement is neither fixed nor comprehensive; it does not encompass all of the work that we plan to do to foster racial and social justice through our work.

The Writing Center is still learning and growing; we will make mistakes and learn from them as we continue to engage in anti-racist work. At the same time, we are aware of the complicated institutional history of writing centers, many of which were created at times of expansion and diversification of college-going student populations, and which often upheld--through their pedagogical approaches and labor practices—white racial habitus and assimilationist approaches to language instruction. More broadly, we know that racism underpins many of our academic and institutional structures—including the Middlebury Writing Center—and we acknowledge that we need to do better. We need to be intentionally anti-racist and we call on other educational spaces on campus to join us in this work, especially as it relates to writing.

Our Values

- Writing Centers are community-focused and encourage writers to connect. When they are at their best, writing centers are also compassionate—rather than disciplinary or punitive—spaces.
- Tutoring isn't a remedial practice—all writers benefit from sharing their writing with others—and in most non-academic spaces, as well as advanced academic spaces, sharing writing and receiving feedback is a critical feature of the writing process; therefore, we value and honor the role of collaborative and peer learning in our center.
- We believe our writing center can and ought to push back against the institutional power of Middlebury in order to challenge micro and macro aggressions that students experience in their education.
- We value the agency of all writers and aim to empower writers through inclusive and high impact tutoring approaches.
- We know that there are many ways to write; therefore, the writing center guides writers in intentionally developing their own writing, rather than solely moving towards the goal of what is conventionally considered “good writing,” which, as many scholars have noted, often perpetuates white supremacist notions of “excellence” in academic writing.

- We recognize that there are disparities in privilege that compound educational access and inclusion and believe writing centers can help to bridge those disparities and act as sites of inclusion and access.
- We support writers working in and across a wide array of languages and varieties of English. We legitimize non-standard writing styles/language and a writer's right to their language(s) and their experiences.
- While tutoring is an example of an [educational high impact practice](#), we recognize that [not all tutoring is equally efficacious or impactful](#); therefore, we are committed to intentional and inclusive program design and implementation.
- We are committed to professionalization and academic training in writing center studies, which prepares us to be reflective, proactive, intentional, and skilled in our tutoring practices; we are constantly learning and critiquing our work in order to improve.
- We are committed to fair labor practices—which are critical to racial justice—and we aim to pay our tutors for their work (including tutoring, prep-work, scholarship, and professional development).

Our Action Items

Hiring and Retention of BIPOC Tutors

- We are committed to a more transparent and inclusive hiring process that occurs regularly and through application and/or successful completion of WRPR 0212, rather than the previous tutor hiring practice of hiring nominees of the Ward Prize.
- We are committed to diversifying our staff and have taken steps to do so—roughly 40% of our tutoring staff are from under-represented groups. We will continue to make our staff demographics more diverse in the future.
 - However, diversity in and of itself is not enough, and the burden of anti-racism work should not be placed on BIPOC students to teach or otherwise lead the way in these initiatives. We are, therefore, committed to making the writing center a brave and compassionate space for people of color who work as tutors and who attend as writers and, also, call upon our non-BIPOC tutors and administrators to lead the way in this work which includes self-education, facilitation of and engagement in group training, and development of communal and individualistic anti-racist practices.

Tutor Training and Support

- We have committed to providing paid training to our staff in anti-racist pedagogies and critical theory. In Fall 2020, anti-racism was our featured training topic and we have dedicated 10+ hours to workshops, lectures, and readings.
- Because writing center workers have to navigate power hierarchies—especially as course tutors—our training addresses how anti-racist pedagogies can bump-up against, challenge, and even contradict other kinds of educational expectations.
- Because doing educational work like writing tutoring is emotionally taxing and demanding, we provide wellness training and support to our tutors.
- Going forward, we will continue to educate tutors and tutors-in-training in anti-racist pedagogies and critical theory, as well as discuss ways tutors can address racism and microaggressions as they arise in writing center work.

- Administratively, the Writing Center advocates for its peer and professional tutors including fair compensation for tutor labor, professional development and research opportunities for tutor growth, and tutor wellness support.

Tutoring Practices

- We will openly discuss social justice issues as they come up in writers' prompts, essays, and/or writing processes.
- We will take non-judgemental and compassionate stances in our tutoring work.
- We will empower writers to “take control” of their writing support and education.
 - In other words, we will not edit or write for students. Instead, we will engage with writers in writing activities and discourse with the goal of supporting writers in finding their writerly voices.
- We will provide writers with ways to be more aware of grammar as a rhetorical set of choices with various consequences.
- We will be advocates for students, especially in course-based tutoring work.
- We will share what we learn about anti-racism with faculty, even as we also advocate for implementation of anti-racist writing pedagogy.
- We will work against hegemonic, colonialist, and assimilationist notions of writing education.

Future Goals

- We will partner with multicultural orgs on campus to encourage students of different backgrounds and experiences both to apply to be writing tutors and to receive writing tutoring.
 - We will hold events in partnership with these organizations to uplift voices that have historically been underrepresented in writing centers.
- We will revisit the titles of “tutor/tutee” because of how those titles can define a relationship between the writer and WC employee (turn it remedial/imbalance power).
- When we return to in-person tutoring, we will consider spatial and other programmatic redesign initiatives.
- We will continually assess our anti-racist approaches to writing education and seek to further develop this work in our tutoring and administrative practices.

Signatories:

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