Guidelines for the Pedagogical Use of Offensive Language
Passed by Diversity Council, 10.12.2020
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As educators, we must confront and reckon with our history, troubling though it may be. However, engaging with the language and practices of our past is not the same as embracing them in our current moment. To that end, we offer the following guidelines for the pedagogical use of offensive language (e.g. using historical texts or lyrics in class).

- Review older texts to evaluate potentially outdated language. Make a plan in advance using these guidelines as to how you will address it.
- Out of respect for your students and colleagues, if you are not a member of a specific marginalized community, avoid using in speech or writing derogatory terms to refer to that community (e.g. the "n-word").
- As much as possible, substitute those terms with dashes or asterisks, or using some other way of denoting them without replicating them. Ask your students to do the same.
- If you are a member of an aforementioned specific community, consider carefully what your goals are when using a potentially offensive word for an identity that you also hold.
- If you must replicate a specific term, offer students a warning in advance and an explanation of your reason(s) for using it.
- Familiarize yourself with current accepted terms for various social identity groups.
- If you anticipate a problematic word or phrase coming up in course material or discussion, plan in advance which alternatives you will use and which you will ask your students to use.

This document was inspired by Ruth A. Starkman, ["Dropping the N-Word in College Classrooms,"](#) *Inside Higher Ed*. 24 July 2020.

SAMPLE SYLLABUS POLICY FOR ADDRESSING OFFENSIVE OR ARCHAIC LANGUAGE

Throughout this class, we'll read texts by authors from minority communities. In telling their stories, some of these writers use offensive slurs. <u>I will always provide you with advance warning when this is the case. If such terms are triggering to you, please let me know so that we can decide how to proceed.</u>

I will refrain from replicating offensive language in my lectures, class discussions, and written course materials. If I must reference an offensive term (in speech or in writing), I will do so elliptically--for example: n-word, f-word, etc. <u>I ask that you do the same in your discussions and in your written work. If, in a written assignment, you are quoting from a section of our reading that makes use of an offensive term, please use dashes or asterisks rather than writing out the word (ex: n----- or f**). If you are uncertain whether or not a term is offensive, please email me to ask.</u> If by chance someone accidentally replicates such a term, I will correct the error and ask

them to avoid using it in the future, and/or ask the student to resubmit written work after deleting the term in question.

Additionally, some of our readings are historical. As such, they will make use of archaic terms when referring to specific minority groups. I will provide advance warnings when this is the case, and I will use contemporary terms for various identities in all lectures and discussions. <u>I ask that you do the same. If you are unsure of the correct terminology for specific groups, please email me to ask.</u> If by chance someone uses an archaic term during discussion, I will correct the error and ask them to use the contemporary term in future conversations.

As a class, we will discuss and collectively decide how to handle archaic terminology in our writing. Options might include only using such terms when quoting directly from our readings, or replacing outdated terminology with the contemporary vocabulary by using brackets--for example [African American] or [LGBTQIA+]. Once we mutually agree upon how we would like to handle such terms in our writing, I will expect everyone to abide by that decision. Those who do not will be asked to correct their work and resubmit it.