**Definitions**

The purpose of this document is to support the professional development of part-and full-time faculty in the Literacies and Composition Department. The Diversity and Inclusion Committee recognizes that language evolves and our understanding of specific terms change over time, and as such, this resource is meant to be a living document. If there are terms you’d like to see added, updated, or revised, please contact the chair of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee.

**Foundational Terms**

**Ableism** is “a set of beliefs and practices that devalue and discriminate against people with physical, intellectual or psychiatric disabilities” (Center for Disability Rights). Discrimination in favor of able-bodied people, such as websites that are not close-captioned, buildings without braille on signs, elevator buttons, lack of interpreters, mocking people with disabilities, using derogatory, abusive or negative language that impacts an individual’s identity and self-worth are all examples of ableism (Schreiner 2016). Both individuals and institutions can be guilty of ableism.

[**Access**](https://dept.writing.wisc.edu/blog/access-as-a-lens-for-peer-tutoring/) is a broadly used term, but scholars in disability studies have worked to elucidate how experiences of disability attune us to what it should look like. Sushil Oswal defines accessibility as “the ability to use, enjoy, perform, work on, avail of, and participate in a resource, technology, activity, opportunity, or product at an equal or comparable level with others. Separate is not equal and before or after the fact is also not equal” ([“Multimodality in Motion”](http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/18.1/coverweb/yergeau-et-al/pages/space/delivery.html)).”

[**Anti-Racism**](https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/54999/how-ibram-x-kendis-definition-of-antiracism-applies-to-schools) refers to “a powerful collection of racist policies that lead to racial equity and are substantiated by antiracist ideas” (Kendi, *How to Be Antiracist*, 20); “refers to those forms of thought and/or practice that seek to confront, eradicate and/or ameliorate racism. Anti-racism implies the ability to identify a phenomenon—racism—and to do something about it” ([Bonnet, *Anti-Racism*, 3](https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/32293291/Anti-Racism.Jan.2000_1_.pdf?1384241966=&response-content-disposition=inline%3B+filename%3DAnti_racism.pdf&Expires=1612995950&Signature=eR71gm9jMAzFzLuLcl334dcxh-Pu2ltJIkeKelEsBrEWOwtEzdYs5ZOd4mbDGb6h2KLVTeKy2851IkzRmQWg-Z7~5Y4m6inLkYMIOqKHmJ-zJj32Mf869--arS3OyWf1weZiykLjP-pXM3oNZEQiTWi~WdcLvTFVzrU97s2qYmr~0-azJpm0er3guJQtihrFOfa4qEw5PCIbVgrzfAhyGpb2Pks6Y0REmhx6VdS~2b5WXLicK8pk7BK6LbduxJIbjsYqgB-H9K~DgVh4rzAISsWfEB6vhW5Qp-q-GJqmXPoOQcWc7oB8RVD9Yby6GT0SaXj0pKV~MZ4wtMWjJNZ40Q__&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJLOHF5GGSLRBV4ZA));

**Brave Space** is a term that developed out of critiques of “safe spaces,” used to describe environments where people discuss sensitive or controversial issues. Brave spaces, as an alternative, recognize the risks involved in such discussions and usually are cultivated by first having a group discussion about the ground rules of the learning environment. Arao & Clemens (2013) article, [“From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces: A New Way to Frame Dialogue Around Diversity and Social Justice,”](https://culturallyresponsiveleadership.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/From-Safe-Spaces-to-Brave-Spaces.pdf) builds off of Boostrom’s (1998) critique of safe spaces and argument for bravery by suggesting a set of common rules to discuss when fostering brave spaces.

**Classism** refers to prejudice for or against groups based on socio-economic class or perceived socio-economic class: “differential treatment based on social class or perceived social class” (classism.org).Classism advantages dominant class groups.

**Diversity** refers generally to differences in race, ethnicity, gender, political and sexual orientations, education, age, socio-economic and religious backgrounds, academic skills, other abilities and other ways of knowing etc. The term, therefore, also includes accepting, respecting and celebrating these differences by “empowering people by respecting and appreciating what makes them different” (globaldiversitypractice.com)

**Equality** is often conflated with equity; it aims to promote fairness and justice for each person in access to resources, conditions, and outcomes. Equality recognizes that historically, certain groups (based on race, gender, sexuality, ability etc.) have experienced discrimination and aims to ensure that every individual has equal opportunity in all areas of life (Equality and Human Rights Commission).

**Equity** is a social justice term that emphasizes ensuring fairness and impartiality in how people are treated within an organization and/or system. Equitable ideas are reinforced in order to create, support and sustain social justice that, in turn, can enable individuals to reach their full potential. To distinguish the term from **equality**, we need to remember that “Whereas equality means providing the same to all, equity means recognizing that we do not all start from the same place and must acknowledge and make adjustments to imbalances. The process is ongoing, requiring us to identify and overcome intentional and unintentional barriers arising from bias or systemic structures” (National Association of Colleges and Employers).

**Inclusion** means involving all people regardless of any background identities. It is a practice where “different groups or individuals having different backgrounds are culturally and socially accepted and welcomed, and equally treated. These differences could be self-evident, such as national origin, age, race and ethnicity, religion/belief, gender, marital status and socioeconomic status or they could be more inherent, such as educational background, training, sector experience, organisational tenure, even personality, such as introverts and extroverts” (globaldiversitypractice.com).

**Institutional Oppression** is the systematic mistreatment of people within a social identity group, supported and enforced by the society and its institutions, solely based on the person’s membership in the social identity group (adapted from“Institutional Oppression,” Tools for Diversity).

**Intersectionality** describes the idea that all oppression is interconnected--gender, race, class, sexual orientation, ability, nationality, etc. In this way, intersectionality illustrates the phenomenon that individuals have unique experiences of discrimination and oppression even though the oppressive forces are systemic. The theory was developed by black feminist lawyer, scholar, civil rights advocate, and philosopher, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in her 1989 paper, “[Demarginalizaing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics](https://philpapers.org/archive/CREDTI.pdf?ncid=txtlnkusaolp00000603).”

**Microaggressions** are verbal and non-verbal (behavioral), intentional or unintentional, slights, snubs and insults which communicate hostile, derogatory and/or negative messages to marginalized persons (Limbong, npr.org). They reinforce a stereotype, and compounded over time can have as harmful an effect on the targeted person’s experience and psychological well-being as more overt expressions of discrimination. Microaggressions undermine a culture of inclusion.

**Microassaults** are a kind of deliberate microaggression expressed towards marginalized groups. They can be both verbal (name-calling) or non-verbal (behavioral discrimination) (library.cod.edu). Some examples of microassaults include accent jokes, mocking language styles, racial/ethnic jokes and slurs.

[**Nationality**](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nationality) involves the concept of belonging to a place, usually a country and it depends on context.

[**Prejudice**](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prejudice) refers to a “belief or attitude, usually unfavorable, about a person or group before the facts are known, a prejudgement” (Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*,170)

**Privilege** refers to benefits, advantages, and/or entitlement certain groups receive from unbalanced and unjust systems. It is “unearned social power accorded by the formal and informal institutions of society to ALL members of a dominant group (e.g. white privilege, male privilege, etc.). Privilege is usually invisible to those who have it because we’re taught not to see it, but nevertheless it puts them at an advantage over those who do not have it (ColoursofResistance.org, “Privilege”).

[**Race**](https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/race/)is a “notion of a distinct biological type of human being, usually based on skin color or other physical characteristics” (Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 170); “a power construct of collected or merged difference that lives socially” (Kendi, *How to Be Antiracist*, 35).

[**Racism**](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=9I7ExPk-920C&oi=fnd&pg=PA124&dq=defining+racism&ots=raTv1p0zAT&sig=ymYFZjPZxVdKWsq-5Gv-4gAnUw4#v=onepage&q=defining%20racism&f=false) is “a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racial inequalities” (Kendi, *How to Be Antiracist*, 17-8); “any program or practice of discrimination, segregation, persecution, or mistreatment based on membership of a race or ethnic group” (Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 171).

**Social Justice** is “a process . . . which (1) seeks fair (re)distribution of re-sources, opportunities, and responsibilities; (2) challenges the roots of oppression and injustice; (3) empowers all people to exercise self-determination and realize their full potential; (4) and builds social solidarity and community capacity for collaborative action” (Center for the Study of Social Policy). Basically, the concept advocates that everyone should have equal access to opportunities in wealth, employment, healthcare, housing, education etc. regardless of race, religion, gender, economic status, family background etc. The goal is to combat inequality by promoting a more egalitarian society.

[**Systemic oppression**](https://www.nationalequityproject.org/frameworks/lens-of-systemic-oppression#:~:text=Systemic%20oppression%20is%20systematic%20and,%2C%20language%2C%20etc.).) describes how unjust treatment and the inequitable exercise of power over has been baked into laws, institutions, and structures in order to sustain and reproduce inequitable power relations.

**Whiteness and white racialized identity** refer to the way that white people, their customs, culture, and beliefs operate as the standard by which all other groups of are compared” (National Museum of African American History & Culture).

[**White Supremacy**](https://www.pittsburghartscouncil.org/storage/documents/ProfDev/what-is-white-supremacy.pdf) is a term “used to characterize various belief systems central to which are one (1) or more of the following key tenets:

1) whites should have dominance over people of other backgrounds, especially where they may co-exist;

2) whites should live by themselves in a whites-only society;

3) white people have their own "culture" that is superior to other cultures;

4) white people are genetically superior to other people” (Anti-Defamation League)

**Gender/Sex**

**Gender** is a complex concept influenced by societal expectations about behaviors and characteristics. Often, gender is conflated with sex. However, people’s gender identities may not align with the sex they were assigned at birth. **Gender identity** is a person’s internal perception of their gender. **Gender expression** is how a person externally displays their gender, usually through a combination of style choices, social behavior, demeanor, and other factors. Gender is usually experienced on a scale between masculine and feminine, with people moving along that scale throughout their lives. People whose gender identity, gender expression, and sex align are considered **cisgender**, **gender normative**, or **gender straight**. **Gender fluid**, on the other hand, describes people whose gender identity is a dynamic mix of masculine and feminine. **Gender non-conforming** folks may express their gender in non-traditional ways and/or may have a gender identity outside the gender binary (masculine or feminine). There are many more relevant terms, including **third gender** and **transgender**. See [The Safe Zone Project](https://thesafezoneproject.com/resources/vocabulary/) for more terms and definitions.

**Pronouns** are gendered male and female respectively: **he/him/his** and **she/her/hers**. Although it is not always the case, these normatively gendered pronouns can be limiting for people who are transgender, gender non-binary, or others who choose to use **gender neutral pronouns**. Some people choose to use **they** in the singular as a gender neutral pronoun but there are a variety of gender neutral pronouns like **ze / zir /** “zee”, “zerr” or “zeer” (<https://thesafezoneproject.com/resources/vocabulary/>). Gender neutral pronouns have a long history ([UWM LGBTQ+ Center](https://uwm.edu/lgbtrc/support/gender-pronouns/)) and should be used in academic writing (<https://writing.wisc.edu/handbook/grammarpunct/genderneutralpronouns/>) to describe those who use gender neutral pronouns or for those whose pronouns are not known. [Try the pronouns practice app.](https://pronouns.minus18.org.au/)

**Sex** is a label typically assigned at birth based on a baby’s presenting genitals and/or chromosomes. Though male and female are the most dominant sexes assigned at birth, [1-2% of people born in the U.S. are **intersex**](https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/gender-identity/sex-gender-identity/whats-intersex).

**Sexual Orientation** describes one’s capacity to feel a sexual, romantic, and/or emotional/spiritual attraction for others. Sexual orientation, often confused with [**sexual preference**](https://thesafezoneproject.com/resources/vocabulary/), is “generally labeled based on the gender relationship between the person and the people they are attracted to” ([The Safe Zone Project](https://thesafezoneproject.com/resources/vocabulary/)). There are *many* sexual orientations, including, but not limited to: bisexual, pansexual, lesbian, gay, asexual, demiromantic, demisexual, same gender loving (SGL), and heterosexual. See [The Safe Zone Project’s LGBTQ+ glossary of terms](https://thesafezoneproject.com/resources/vocabulary/) for more details.

**Trans\*** is an umbrella term that covers a variety of identities that break from traditional, social gender norms. Using the asterisk (in written forms, not spoken) indicates “that you are referring to the larger group nature of the term, and specifically including non-binary indentities, as well as transgender men (trans-men) and transgender women (transwomen)” ([thesafezoneproject.com](https://thesafezoneproject.com/resources/vocabulary/)). **Transgender** is the term used to describe someone who has either transitioned or is transitioning from living as one gender to living as another ([thesafezoneproject.com](https://thesafezoneproject.com/resources/vocabulary/)). **Transition/transitioning** describes the process of changing gender markers (e.g. physical, name, pronouns, etc.) to better align with the gender the trans\* person knows themself to be. **Transgender** and **transexual** are often conflated. However, **transsexual** describes “a person who identifies psychologically as a gender/sex other than the one to which they were assigned at birth” ([thesafezoneproject.com](https://thesafezoneproject.com/resources/vocabulary/)). It is common for transsexuals to pursue physical changes via hormone therapy and surgery so that their bodies reflect “their inner sense of gender/sex” ([thesafezoneproject.com](https://thesafezoneproject.com/resources/vocabulary/)). Please see [The Safe Zone Project Vocabulary](https://thesafezoneproject.com/resources/vocabulary/) for other relevant terms, such as **transvestite**, **transphobia**, **non-binary**, **two-spirit**, etc.

**Race/Ethnicity**

**AAPI:** This acronym stands for Asian American and Pacific Islanders. It represents a diverse group with different experiences and histories.

[**BIPOC**](https://www.npr.org/2020/09/29/918418825/is-it-time-to-say-r-i-p-to-p-o-c) is a term that stands for black, Indigenous, and people of color. It is sometimes used instead of people of color (which described anyone who identifies as non-white) becuase it highlights Black and Indigenous as categories that are systemically marginalized within the broader category of people of color. See The BIPOC Project for more information (thebipocproject.org).

[**Chicanx**](https://www.exploratorium.edu/sites/default/files/Genial_2017_Terms_of_Usage.pdf) is a gender-neutral term to describe Mexican-Americans specifically and has political connotations in resisting labels that center European heritage and embracing pride for cultural and community identity. It has roots in the 1960s Chicano Movement.

[**Ethnicity**](https://documents.saa.org/container/docs/default-source/doc-publications/publications/the-saa-archaeological-record/tsar-2004/sep04.pdf?sfvrsn=6a0432b6_2#page=14) is a “group characteristic often based on national origin, ancestry, language, or other cultural characteristic” (Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 162); “social category of people based on perceptions of shared social experience or one's ancestors' experiences” that “cut across socioeconomic class differences, drawing members from all strata of the population” (People and Bailey, *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, 389).

[**Hispanic**](https://www.exploratorium.edu/sites/default/files/Genial_2017_Terms_of_Usage.pdf) is a term that arose in the 1970’s when the US government began collecting data on Mexican Americans to describe those who trace roots to Latin America and Spain. **Latino/a** arose in the 1990’s as a pan-ethnic alternative term that placed less of an emphasis on connections to Spain.

[**Latinx**](https://www.exploratorium.edu/sites/default/files/Genial_2017_Terms_of_Usage.pdf) is a gender-neutral (as opposed to Latino or Latino), pan-ethnic term to describe people who trace roots to Latin America and Spain.

**Language**

[**Code meshing**](http://www.umsl.edu/~alexanderjm/NahWeStraightbyYoung%20%282%29.pdf) is the “blending two idoimas or copping enough standard English to really make yo’ AAE be Da Bomb” (Young,“Nah, We Straight”: An Argument Against Code Switching,” 51); “blending dialects and languages with standard English” (Young and Martinez, *Code-meshing as World English: Policy, Pedagogy, and Performance,*

**Linguistic diversity** refers to the differences within and between languages. In terms of American English, the linguistic diversity framework treats differences as the norm rather than diversions from Standard American English. Similarly, the concept of **translingualism** also recognizes differences in language practice to be the norm. **Translingualism** notes the relationship between the language user and the language itself, suggesting that they are always “emergent, in process (a state of becoming), and their relations as mutually constitutive” ([Lu & Horner, 2013, p. 587](https://ir.library.louisville.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1064&context=faculty)).

**Literacies** refers to ways of meaning-making, and not only though the traditional foundational ways of reading and writing that reinforce the dominant culture, their power and privilege, as well as the deficit-orientation model. In the twenty-first century, the term “literacies” includes oral, visual, audio, gestural, spatial, digital, data and game literacy, among others. Such multiple literacies allow for shifts of power and remove the pedagogy of exclusion.

**Multilingual Writers** describes writers who practice more than one language in speech and text. English as a second language students (ESL), English language learners (ELL), L2 students, and non-native English speakers are sometimes used interchangeably with multilingual writers (CCCC Statement on Second Language Writing and Multilingual Writers). However, the term, multilingualism, is sometimes preferred as it doesn’t assume the order in which an individual learned the languages they practice, it does not label individuals as perpetual language learners, and it decenters English.