

## Revised Inclusive Excellence Mission Statement

Literary arts open us to others' perspectives and help us understand, as well as feel, a striking range of perspectives in the human experience. Inclusive reading creates opportunities for a sense of validation and belonging as well as for empathy across difference. We continue to study literature in order to investigate how the narratives, rhythms, and figures of language represent and help us imagine all the varied possibilities for our world. In thinking critically about these literary methods, we come to understand how they help to establish ideas about nation, language, culture, identity, self, and society.

Turning this critical lens to English literatures and literary studies, a striking contradiction emerges. On the one hand, the development of British and U.S. American literatures was integral to national cultures that reflected not just elites but everyday people. The first English Department at University College London helped open academia to an entire sector of the British public who had previously been classed out of higher education. However, English is also part of a colonial enterprise: throughout Asia and the Pacific Islands, the Americas, and Africa, the implementation of English literary studies also extended British and U.S. control over these territories and their people. English is at once a language of poetry and of violence, of inclusion and exclusion. English literary works stand as heights of imagination, and they serve, in the words of Gauri Viswanathan, as "masks of conquest."

Pressing questions surround all of us who love reading, writing, and teaching literatures in English. Amidst the rise of white supremacy, xenophobia, and growing class exploitation, how can we confront past and present legacies of domination - particularly the oppressive legacies of our own discipline? How can literature make visible the workings of power, including the unacknowledged nature of white privilege, heteronormativity, and able-bodiedness that accrue through contemporary forms of coloniality, individual and societal prejudices, and structural injustices?

We have no easy answers. We have work to do.

We commit to teaching, research, and creative work that examines social differences and hierarchies with the aim of fostering respect, support, and solidarity across these differences. In reading, writing about, and creating literature, we learn about and respond to the persistence of power and white privilege as well as the courage, creativity, and resistance of those who confront power across the centuries and around the globe. We strive to explore the power, beauty, and cultural importance of long unacknowledged literary perspectives.

We further commit to confronting hierarchies of power and differential vulnerabilities within our own department among students, staff, and faculty. We do so as we recognize that universities in general and CU in particular are hierarchical communities with uneven and at times inequitable distributions of authority and compensation; those

with the most power such as tenured faculty members must advocate for those who are most vulnerable including graduate student workers and lecturers.

Through literature we imagine new worlds and seek to turn that imagination into something real. Our department works to dismantle existing hierarchical structures as we translate what we learn in literature into an everyday ethics of solidarity, equity, and diversity in the classroom, the department, the university, and in communities beyond.