



Dear Students,

The Department of Literature and Language at East Tennessee State University is outraged by the homicide of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer, the killing of Breonna Taylor by Louisville police, and the shooting of Ahmaud Arbery by White residents of a Glynn County, Georgia neighborhood. We grieve not only for those who have lost their lives but for all victims of brutality, racism, and marginalization. We declare that Black lives matter, and that no one will be free until we are all free from oppression.

As Ijeoma Oluo writes in *So You Want to Talk about Race*, “There is no neutrality to be had towards systems of injustice—it is not something you can just opt out of.” I want to assure you that the Department of Literature and Language is not neutral when it comes to social injustice, bigotry, institutionalized racism, and all forms of intolerance. We affirm that it is not enough to “not be racist.” Indeed, all people have a responsibility to be anti-racist by fighting to eliminate prejudice within ourselves, our systems, and our institutions.

We denounce all forms of bigotry and intolerance. Moreover, we will continue to actively cultivate an atmosphere of self-examination where, by bringing our diverse personal experiences to the shared experience of studying literature and language, we seek to locate our own biases and understand the historical and social factors that allow discrimination to continue. We reaffirm now that all students, faculty, and staff have a right to attend a university where the free exchange of diverse ideas and perspectives never descends into harassment, hostility, or hate speech.

The department stands with the many other units on campus, such as The Multicultural Center, The ETSU Counseling Center, and The Office of Equity and Inclusion to name only a few, who invite you to share how you are feeling or ask for help. Please feel free to reach out to me personally with any questions, frustrations, or fears. Likewise, please do not hesitate to share with me ideas and opportunities to effect change. Even in the climate of COVID-19, the #LiLaFamilia stands together, united against persecution and oppression.

With solidarity,

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