

ENG 104 First Year Writing

Difficult Dialogues and Social Justice

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Course Description

This course is a special section of ENGL 104, focused on the Ford Foundation's initiative on Difficult Dialogues. The initiative is focused on fostering dialogue around critical and often times contentious issues like race, religion, sexual orientation, and conflicts in the Middle East. As such, the Foundation supports civic engagement and academic freedom.

As a course on rhetoric and composition, we will be interrogating the relationship between rhetoric and civic structures in way that can create space for dialoguing. This aspect of civic engagement will help us to address the concept of difference, which has been cited as a point of concern for Aggies in the workplace. In a growing global economy, professional skills require students to be able to communicate across difference; however, as a matter of civic concern, these "skills" are also necessary for a society to function on principles like "equality" and "justice for all." As such, we will not only be discussing categories of social difference like "race" or "religion," but we will also be discussing different paradigms of social and civic participation. A central concern for the course is "to what degree do paradigms of social, civic structure limit or enhance our ability to ensure justice and equality?"

Course Assignments

Below is a very general description of the assignments for this course. I can provide more thorough and detailed prompts for those who may be interested in seeing them.

Rhetorical Listening Paper

For this assignment, you will be practicing Jaqueline Jones Royster's theory of cross-cultural conduct that sees difference as a crucial point of communicating. In other words, rather than trying to find a "common ground" from which we can "advance an argument," we will instead try to listen for difference and honor and respect it, using "reasonable codes" created through understanding how power and privilege influence and affect difference. You will select two readings from our discussions to "listen to" in this way. Remember to think carefully about how Johnson defines the role of power and

privilege play in shaping difference from our readings in *Privilege, Power and Difference*. Keep in mind that this assignment asks you to go one step beyond summary and try to listen for how power is working in and around the texts.

Argument Paper

After you have had the chance to listen across lines of difference and rhetorical traditions, you will form an argument addressing a current social justice issue. Your paper must use rhetorical listening, and it must also *engage* Yolanda Chavez-Leyba's articulation of in ixtli in yollotl that we have been discussing in class. In other words, you must think about argument as something concerned with community. Think back to our stakeholder analyses and consider who is immediately affected by this issue? Who has the most power and influence to affect change regarding this issue? Has your line of argument considered all possible stakeholders, taking heed to "listen" to those most immediately affected by it? As Royster argues, we cannot simply find common ground with folks if that means erasing the differences that make up our identities.

(Rhetorical) Making

As you have learned from our readings, some rhetorical traditions are not written alphabetically. For this assignment, I want you to answer the question "what does social justice look like?" using a more multimodal project than a traditional essay. Additionally, I want to challenge you to do this using little to no alphabetic text. In class we have discussed various forms of digital composing, and I encourage you to consider making videos, screencast presentations, comix, or any other form of composing that does not overly privilege alphabetic text. Additionally, you think carefully about how audience, platform, and genre influence the design of your projects.