



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on September 16, 2020

University of Chicago Only Wants English Ph.D. Students Interested in Black Studies

The University of Chicago's English department has gone fully woke, announcing that it will only accept graduate students interested in "Black Studies" this year and vowing to root out alleged racism in its university.

"The English department at the University of Chicago believes that *Black Lives Matter*, and that the lives of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and Rayshard Brooks matter, as do thousands of others named and unnamed who have been subject to police violence," reads a [faculty statement](#) posted on the department's website. "As literary scholars, we attend to the histories, atmospheres, and scenes of anti-Black racism and racial violence in the United States and across the world. We are committed to the struggle of Black and Indigenous people, and all racialized and dispossessed people, against inequality and brutality."

Thus, for the 2020-2021 school year, the department "is accepting only applicants interested in working in and with Black Studies."

Among the courses offered for the upcoming year is ["Black Shakespeare,"](#) which "explores the role played by the Shakespearean canon in the shaping of Western ideas about blackness, in processes of racial formation, and racial struggle from the early modern period to the present." [Last year's courses](#) included "Bodies of Transformation," which covered "trans studies, disability studies, histories of science, queer and postcolonial theory," and "Of Whiteness," which studied why black people purportedly want to be white. Students can also participate in the ["Race and Capitalism Project,"](#) which conducts "scholarship on how processes of racialization within the U.S. shaped capitalist society and economy and how capitalism has simultaneously shaped processes of racialization" by asking such questions as "How do white supremacy, patriarchy, financialized global capitalism, and other forms of domination articulate with each other?"

"English as a discipline has a long history of providing aesthetic rationalizations for colonization, exploitation, extraction, and anti-Blackness," says the faculty statement. "Our discipline is responsible for developing hierarchies of cultural production that have contributed directly to social and systemic determinations of whose lives matter and why."

"In light of this historical reality," they explain, "we believe that undoing persistent, recalcitrant anti-





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Blackness in our discipline and in our institutions must be the collective responsibility of all faculty, here and elsewhere.”

They add that they plan not just to study these issues but to engage in “activism about the university’s past and present role in the historically Black neighborhood that houses it” because the existence of the school has been a cause of “exclusion and violence.”

“The University of Chicago’s English Department has now made explicit that it is dedicated to political activism, not to the study of literature. No student should choose to take a class with the University of Chicago under the illusion that they are studying literature,” National Association of Scholars Director of Research David Randall told [Campus Reform](#). “Nor should any employer take an English degree from the University of Chicago, undergraduate or graduate, as a credential that actually signifies knowledge of literature. No donor who loves literature should direct any money to the University of Chicago English Department — or, indeed, to the University of Chicago as a whole.”

Randall further maintained that the department’s exclusive focus on black studies amounts to “thinly disguised race quotas” — unlike the [explicit quotas](#) demanded recently by students and faculty of Cornell University.

Rod Dreher, [blogging for the American Conservative](#), called the department’s move “dereliction of scholarly duty,” adding that the faculty apparently “believes there are no conversations about literature worth having with graduate students, except for conversations about black literature.”

University Assistant Director for Public Affairs Gerald McSwiggan tried to put the best spin on the English department’s decision. He told [Campus Reform](#) the school is greatly restricted in the number of graduate students it can admit because of both COVID-19 restrictions and “limited employment opportunities for English PhDs.” Since “the English department faculty saw a need for additional scholarship in Black Studies,” he said, only prospective students with an interest in that field will be considered.

McSwiggan is correct that there’s [not much of a job market for people with English degrees](#). Turning out graduates who know more about George Floyd than George Eliot is a sure means of keeping it that way.

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