

The English Department & Augsburg's Mission

The English Department honors, exemplifies, and critically engages Augsburg College's mission:

To nurture future leaders in service to the world by providing high quality educational opportunities, which are based in the liberal arts and shaped by the faith and values of the Christian church, by the context of a vital metropolitan setting, and by an intentionally diverse campus community.

Though they do not exhaust our relationship to the mission, here are some of the ways in which the English Department contributes to its fulfillment:

The study of literature and the practice of writing, in general and at Augsburg in particular, are integral to the liberal arts.

- ENL 111 and our mid- and upper-level writing courses prepare “effective, informed, ethical” citizens of the world by initiating the college-level discussion of diversity and by developing analytical skills and creative thinking; our literature courses, especially in the recently revised major, develop imaginative, interpretive, reflective, and analytical skills through encounters with diverse aesthetic forms and cultural worlds.
- Literary study promotes interdisciplinary learning and connections among diverse phenomena because it involves at its very base an encounter with otherness—another mind, another time, another people, another society, another world—and compels comparison with the reader's own life.
- Among its many attributes, literature is the record of human aspiration—how life is lived and how it ought to be lived; one key function of writing in our program is the exploration of self and the connections between the self and the world.
- As the foregoing suggests, reading, literary study, and the practice of writing both rely on intellectual curiosity and foster it; a firm grounding in the imaginative and technical skills that reading and writing entail make lifelong learning possible.

The study of literature and the practice of writing at Augsburg engage and challenge the faith and values of the Christian Church:

- The majors, minors, and others in our courses learn that writing can transform personal conviction into public action; many of these students work on *The Echo*, in the Writing Lab, on *The Murphy Square* board, and on the panel of judges for the High School Invitational reading.
- Our students value freedom—autonomy of thought and interpretation, particularly as embodied in the First Amendment—as the very ground that enables their work and the fulfillment of their passion; they also learn through their literary heritage the price of creating in the absence of freedom.
- Our department assumes that literature's wealth is our common heritage, that all who read deeply enhance their capacity for fuller lives and for imagining the lives of others, and that thereby literature fosters respect for and understanding of others.
- Our new curriculum makes a conscious effort to represent humanity in all its diversity—religious, cultural, ethnic, racial, linguistic, historical, etc.
- The very nature of literary interpretation and the act of writing entail constructive skepticism, dialogical thinking, open discussion of ideas and views, the formulation of convictions (aesthetic and ethical), and the readiness to concede both the worth of ideas we had not considered or had even rejected and the beauty of forms we had not or could not have previously imagined.

The study of literature and the practice of writing compel students to engage our vital metropolitan setting.

- Our journalism and other writing students are encouraged to find some of their inspiration in the Cedar-Riverside community; we have an established record of engagement with the community, its cultures, and its concerns (the cookbook, ties to news organizations, etc.).

- Our literature and writing courses take advantage of opportunities in local theaters, cinemas, art galleries, and other sites and institutions.
- Our literature and writing courses bring in local writers and speakers as part of the study of literature and writing; our alumni and high-school invitational readings engage local citizens in the arts we value.
- Our students come to understand the city—from its arts institutions to its neighborhoods—as a “classroom without walls.”

The study of literature and the practice of writing “bring us into contact with other minds and diverse voices and allow us to engage other minds in active conversation.” They are intended to teach skills and methods that promote successful communication among diverse writers and readers. Because the skills of close reading and clear writing are some of the most effective tools students can use to understand personal and cultural diversity, English courses emphasize the ways literature and written communication in general can promote understanding and productive engagement among different cultures and points of view.***

- The English Department is dedicated to developing the entry-level writing skills of all Augsburg undergraduates and understands the gravity of this commitment to the success of every student and many college programs.
- The English Department engages students of all religious and cultural backgrounds in the study of writing and the reading of texts that reflect the diversity of American society and acknowledge the even greater variety of world cultures; its development of overseas offerings (Thailand, France, and Cuba) has exemplified another aspect of our commitment to diversity and experiential education.
- The English Department affirms its students’ differences (learning styles, gender, culture, ethnicity, economic class, age); its close work with CLASS and other support staff and its commitment to the Writing Lab are two manifestations of this affirmation.
- The English Department’s special relation to the skills inherent in good writing, grounded in critical thinking and enhanced through development of speaking and research skills, provides a thorough grounding in the practices that make civil discourse among divergent viewpoints both a possibility and an ideal.

***The statement above is adopted from our model syllabus statement about Effective Writing and the Many Voices Project:

Effective reading brings us into contact with other minds and diverse voices; effective writing allows us to engage other minds in active conversation. While Augsburg College courses in Effective Writing do not teach “diversity,” they are intended to teach skills and methods that promote successful communication among diverse writers and readers. Because the skills of close reading and clear writing are some of the most effective tools students can use to understand personal and cultural diversity, these writing courses emphasize ways written communication can promote understanding and productive engagement among different cultures and points of view.

As students learn strategies for effective written communication, they engage issues of diversity through course readings and writing topics, including this year’s **Many Voices Project** texts, *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros and *Nickel and Dimed* by Barbara Ehrenreich. The **Many Voices Project** invites you to a dialogue with other minds, people whose experience may be different from (but perhaps also the same as) your own. Part of the dialogue will be with the text itself, as you reflect on it, write about it, and discuss it with other people in class. Since *The House on Mango Street* and *Nickel and Dimed* will be a common text for all ENG 111 sections, you may find that the dialogue continues beyond Effective Writing, perhaps into other classes and beyond.