



American Literature, American Learning: Class Constitution*

"Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other." --Paulo Freire, The Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1968)

WE BELIEVE:

1. Education can be a source of personal and social transformation. This is our aspiration.

The best education is...	- mastering the tools necessary to think critically and, in turn, applying those critical thinking skills to all new information that one encounters. - when we learn something we had not known before or when we educate ourselves to learn more, or differently about what we thought we already knew. - anything we learn, in school or out. - a process of personal growth that allows us to more deeply and meaningfully engage with the world and others. - the process of seeking answers to questions brought upon by life's constant and never-ending experiences. - a process of synthesizing new ideas and experiences, and utilizing them to create something original (an essay, a project, an idea, etc). - the process in which we simultaneously discover more about ourselves and more about the world. - the quest for not only answers but also self-empowerment. - empowering to ourselves and others. - encouraging agency and the belief that we can affect change. - learning how to question. --joyful. - transformational.
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2. American Literature, American Learning can become not just a class but also a community. We aspire to work together to make learning available to all. We aim to make higher education a model of a more just and equitable society. We use student-centered, engaged learning, critical thinking, lived experiences, deep listening, engaged inquiry, and collaborative learning activities.

We learn best when . . .	- we feel comfortable expressing our ideas and have an open mind to the material and our classmate's ideas. -we can be open to thinking and expressing ourselves freely. - we have time to think through ideas with peers or independently before being called upon to share them in front of the class. - we understand what is being asked of us so we can accurately process and answer any questions that come our way. -we're encouraged to work together and independently. - we make connections between what we learn and our daily lives. -we feel comfortable taking risks, but we also feel comfortable critiquing each other's ideas. --we can be rigorous while enjoying the process and product of our learning together.
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3. Working in teams, engaging in group discussions and research, and co-creating a syllabus of what we want to learn together, we can experience and model collaborative learning. This entails learning from each other; managing projects; and preparing ourselves for initiating and implementing further learning of this kind throughout our lives.

Our guidelines for working together effectively include . . .	--establishing clarity, when reasonable, with deadlines, expectations, and roles. --designing questions that will help make discussion significant and equitable. --"stepping up, stepping down": making sure people who have been dominating the discussion recognize this and step down, while those who have not contributed yet step up. -bloggers of the week taking charge of facilitating conversation about the readings during class. --everyone having veto power, --everyone getting up and moving around. --sharing our stories, empathy, and laughter.
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4. We will publish our findings and reflections throughout the course in blogs and in a final paper or project that constitutes a public contribution to knowledge. At the end of

the course, we will make public our research to benefit those who want to continue exploring topics related to *American Literature, American Learning*.

Our goals: We are going to be working together during the Spring of 2016 to...	-move beyond the disciplinary and interpersonal boundaries that limit learning and understanding. -express our thoughts and ideas creatively, in language that breaks down the divide between academic and non-academic audiences. -help create the kind of public higher education that benefits the public, both inside and outside institutions. -create an interdisciplinary environment for our learning community by sharing and integrating ideas, concepts, methods, and media from a range of fields. -help each other learn and grow, with compassion.
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***Acknowledgements:** *These ideas were composed by students in “American Literature, American Learning,” in Spring 2016, at the Graduate Center. The format and many ideas were adapted from Constitution developed by students in “Borges, Buddhism, and Cognitive Science” taught by Professor Amelia R Barili at UC Berkeley which was inspired by a students at Duke University in “21st Century Literacies” which in turn was based on prior Constitutions written by students in previous courses, inspired by the Mozilla Manifesto and other collaboratively written community documents.*