



May 11, 2022

Edward M. Feasel, PhD  
Office of the President  
Soka University of America  
1 University Drive  
Aliso Viejo, California 92656

*Sent via Electronic Mail (feasel@soka.edu)*

Dear President Feasel:

FIRE<sup>1</sup> is deeply concerned by Soka University of America’s investigation into Professor Aneil Rallin’s pedagogical choices in their WRIT 305 class, “Writing the Body.” Although Interim Faculty Dean Michael Weiner says several students complained about the material in class and characterizes the allegations against Rallin as “extremely serious,” none of them—including that Rallin’s teaching techniques and course materials failed to “create a safe space” or “triggered” some students—constitute grounds for discipline. Instead, Rallin’s pedagogical choices are fully protected by SUA’s commitment to academic freedom, even if some students or administrators object to them.

As an institution that promises its faculty academic freedom, it is SUA’s apparent abandonment of this promise that constitutes an “extremely serious” infraction, not Rallin’s classroom instruction. The timing of the university’s actions—its first disciplinary action against Rallin during a 16-year career—is also highly suspect given Rallin’s recent public criticism of SUA administrators in a journal article.<sup>2</sup>

SUA must immediately abandon any investigation into Rallin’s protected classroom speech. It must also ensure subjective and amorphous standards like the ones imposed on Rallin are never again used to infringe *any* faculty members’ academic freedom rights or to retaliate against faculty members for protected criticism. To prevent chilling faculty speech, SUA must also reaffirm its laudable commitment to faculty members’ rights to teach their subjects

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<sup>1</sup> As you will recall from previous correspondence, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) is a nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to defending liberty, freedom of speech, due process, academic freedom, legal equality, and freedom of conscience on America’s college campuses.

<sup>2</sup> Victoria M. Huynh, Kristen Michala Storms, Jordyn Solidum-Saito, Professor X, and Aneil Rallin, *Mobilizing BIPOC Student Power against Liberalism at Soka University of America: A Collection of Voices*, RADICAL TEACHER: A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING, Dec. 9, 2021, <https://radicalteacher.library.pitt.edu/ojs/radicalteacher/article/view/899>.

without undue administrative interference and to speak out on matters of public concern without retaliation.

**I. SUA Charges Rallin and Convenes Faculty Adjudication Committee After ‘Student Complaints’ About Course Material**

The following reflects our understanding of the pertinent facts. We appreciate that you may have additional information, to which end enclosed please find an executed privacy waiver<sup>3</sup> authorizing you to share it with us and to otherwise discuss this matter with FIRE.

Aneil Rallin is a tenured professor of Rhetoric and Composition at SUA and Director of its Writing Program. Rallin was SUA’s Professor of the Year in 2008, 2009 and 2015. Their research interests include “Activist Rhetorics and Critical Pedagogy,” “Transnational Cultural Studies and Queer/Postcolonial/Feminist Theory,” and “‘Experimental’ Writing, Film, and Video.”<sup>4</sup> One focus of their scholarship is sex and sexuality. Rallin has never been the subject of a formal student complaint or other disciplinary action at SUA.

In the Fall 2021 semester, Rallin taught a section of a required writing course: Writing 305 (Advanced Communication Skills), “Writing the Body.” The syllabus explains that the course “aims to consider how bodies are politically, socially, sexually, racially, culturally, metaphorically, and historically constituted, as well as to promote the invention of insurgent forms for reading and writing bodies that do not reinscribe the body in narrative myths and dualistic structures that dominate conventional understandings of bodies.”<sup>5</sup> The syllabus advises students to “[e]xpect missteps, hurdles, detours,” in the course’s pursuit of “examining/interrogating bodies as sites of meaning, modes of representation, political signifiers, and lived experiences—of central concern to work across the disciplines.”<sup>6</sup>

While Dean Weiner’s letter does not specify which course materials allegedly generated complaints, Rallin believes they stem from several publicly available writings and a short film by acclaimed queer creators and academics of color. Those works include:

- “Ash Wednesday,”<sup>7</sup> by Samuel Delany, an award-winning, queer black American author, professor, and literary critic.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Encl.

<sup>4</sup> Faculty & Staff Directory, *Aneil Rallin, PhD*, SOKA UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA, <https://www.soka.edu/about/faculty-staff/aneil-rallin> (last visited May 6, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> Encl.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* Rallin’s WRIT 305: Writing the Body course was one of two different versions of WRIT 305 offered in Fall 2021, and was approved by SUA’s dean of faculty. Students who wished to avoid this topic had the option to enroll in the alternative WRIT 305 section.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel R. Delany, *Ash Wednesday*, BOSTON REVIEW, May 9, 2017, <https://bostonreview.net/articles/samuel-r-delany-ash-wednesday>.

<sup>8</sup> T: *The New York Times Style Magazine* ran a profile of Delany last month. See Samuel R. Delany, *Writer Samuel R. Delany Reading in His Library*, T: THE NEW YORK TIMES STYLE MAGAZINE, April 21, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/21/t-magazine/samuel-r-delany.html>.

- “Taking the Knife: On Kink in Queer Spaces,”<sup>9</sup> by Randa Jarrar, an award-winning, Arab-American writer, translator, and creative writing professor at California State University, Fresno, and a prior SUA lecture invitee.
- “My Body is a Cage of My Own Making”<sup>10</sup> by *New York Times* bestselling author, *New York Times* contributing opinion writer, and Occidental College professor Roxane Gay. That piece is an excerpt from Gay’s book *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body*, a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award for Memoir<sup>11</sup> and winner of the Lambda Literary Award for Bisexual Literature.<sup>12</sup> Gay is also the recipient of a PEN Center USA Freedom to Write Award and a Guggenheim Fellowship.<sup>13</sup>
- “The Attendant,” a short film by queer black British filmmaker Isaac Julien, considered a pioneer of “new queer cinema,”<sup>14</sup> who is currently a distinguished professor of the arts at University of California, Santa Cruz.

Outside the classroom last semester, Rallin was a named co-author on a journal article in the Winter 2021 edition of *Radical Teacher: A Socialist, Feminist, and Anti-Racist Journal on the Theory and Practice of Teaching* titled “Mobilizing BIPOC Student Power against Liberalism at Soka University of America: A Collection of Voices.” The article, which featured four other co-authors—including one who used a pseudonym due to concerns over retaliation by SUA—was deeply critical of what they described as SUA’s use of “liberalism as a technology of imperialism.” The authors argue that SUA, misguided by liberalism, fails to support BIPOC students.<sup>15</sup>

“Since its founding,” Rallin and their co-authors wrote, “there have been and continue to be no resources specific to working-class and/or BIPOC students, whose needs and demands are viewed as ‘special-interest,’ with suspicion, as threatening, as too divisive, met with derision, and continually dismissed, ignored, rejected.”<sup>16</sup> “We come together,” they wrote, “to resist the imperial university from where we stand.”

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<sup>9</sup> Randa Jarrar, *Taking the Knife: On kink in queer spaces*, GAY MAG, Oct. 10, 2019, <https://gay.medium.com/taking-the-knife-ab9eb0baccad>.

<sup>10</sup> Roxane Gay, ‘*My body is a cage of my own making*’, THE GUARDIAN, July 1, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jul/01/roxane-gay-my-body-is-a-cage-of-my-own-making>.

<sup>11</sup> Library of Congress National Book Festival, *Authors: Roxane Gay*, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, (last visited May 9, 2022), <https://www.loc.gov/events/2021-national-book-festival/authors/item/no2014051741/roxane-gay>.

<sup>12</sup> *Lambda Literary Award Winners Announced*, ASSOCIATION OF WRITERS & WRITING PROGRAMS, June 6, 2018, [https://www.awpwriter.org/magazine\\_media/writers\\_news\\_view/4478/lambda\\_literary\\_award\\_winners\\_announced](https://www.awpwriter.org/magazine_media/writers_news_view/4478/lambda_literary_award_winners_announced).

<sup>13</sup> David Canfield, *Roxane Gay, Masha Gessen among 2017 National Book Critics Circle finalists*, ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY, Jan. 22, 2018, <https://ew.com/books/2018/01/22/national-book-critics-circle-2017-finalists/>.

<sup>14</sup> Virginia Yapp, *Watch This: Nearly 30 Years Later, Filmmakers Reflect on the Birth of New Queer Cinema*, SUNDANCE INSTITUTE, June 25, 2021, <https://www.sundance.org/blogs/new-queer-cinema-anniversary-panel>.

<sup>15</sup> Encl.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

On April 1, Dean Weiner sent Rallin a notice of charges<sup>17</sup> alleging multiple violations of the SUA faculty handbook stemming from “several” student complaints about the WRIT 305 course, including (as stated verbatim in Weiner’s letter) that:

- They felt violated since they were required to read graphic, deviant pornography, discussions on rape and assault, watch a video and a reading about the sexual activities of a couple, gratuitously violent material, etc.
- They indicated that the assigned material was disturbing and unrelated to the course.
- At least one of your assigned readings suggested that “kink” was a way of healing childhood trauma, and that sex and sexual deviancy can be exciting new ways to understand their bodies.
- Several students felt the mandate to write with anger and rage about their bodies and share with the class was triggering and inappropriate.
- One student was a rape victim whose mental health issues were triggered as a result of the material and mandate to write with rage regarding her body. Another student was a survivor of sexual abuse.
- You did not create a safe space.
- Students found a writing to be vaguely pedophilic.
- Students skipped classes due to discomfort with class material, but returned, but worried they would fail if they did not return.
- You censored and stifled alternative student views.<sup>18</sup>

Weiner alleged at least four violations of the SUA faculty handbook, including its mandate that “[p]rofessors demonstrate respect for students as individuals and adhere to their proper roles as intellectual guides,” and “avoid any exploitation, harassment, or discriminatory treatment of students.” Weiner’s letter also warns against “serious instructional deficiency,” “actions and behavior that exhibit moral turpitude or gross indifference to the well-being of others,” and “introduc[tion] into their teaching, controversial matter which has no relationship to their subject.”<sup>19</sup>

Pursuant to the handbook, Weiner said he is convening SUA’s Faculty Adjudication Committee for a hearing on May 17 at 10:00 am. If found responsible, Rallin’s punishment may include revocation of tenure.

## **II. SUA’s Promises of Free Speech and Academic Freedom Protect Rallin’s Teaching and Journal Article**

The investigation into Rallin’s teaching violates their pedagogical autonomy—protected by basic tenets of academic freedom—to determine whether and how to approach material that

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<sup>17</sup> Letter from Michael Weiner, Interim Dean of Faculty, Soka Univ. of Am., to Aneil Rallin (Apr. 1, 2022) (on file with author).

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

may be challenging, upsetting, or even deeply offensive. A faculty member’s right to navigate difficult subjects like sexuality, pornography, or violence is well within the university’s published commitment to academic freedom. And to the extent SUA’s actions are motivated by Rallin’s criticisms of the university in the journal article, those criticisms are protected by SUA’s promises of expressive freedom and may not trigger punishment.

*A. SUA Makes Strong Promises of Free Speech and Academic Freedom*

While SUA is a private institution not bound by the First Amendment, it has nevertheless promised to protect free expression and academic freedom. To punish community members who exercise rights SUA guarantees betrays the expectations the university has set through its faculty handbook.

The SUA Undergraduate Faculty Handbook includes two separate promises of free expression and academic freedom, the first of which is made an explicit part of the university’s mission.<sup>20</sup> First, the “University-wide Statement of Academic Freedom, Rights and Responsibilities” assures members of the SUA community that “[b]y accepting membership in the University, an individual joins a community ideally characterized by free expression, free inquiry, intellectual honesty, respect for the dignity of others and openness to constructive change.”<sup>21</sup> The mission statement expressly extends these rights to its faculty, and further states that the “University places special emphasis, as well, upon certain values which are essential to its nature as an academic community. Among these are freedom of speech and academic freedom[.]”<sup>22</sup>

The second promise—titled “Academic Freedom and Statement of Rights and Responsibilities” in the handbook’s “Faculty Policies” section—culminates with SUA’s own strong and clear commitment to academic freedom that its “[f]aculty has teaching autonomy, including evaluation of student work, selection of teaching methods, selection of material to be presented, and maintenance of a class atmosphere conducive to learning.”<sup>23</sup> SUA also has adopted the American Association of University Professors’ (AAUP’s) conception of academic freedom,<sup>24</sup> expressly including the AAUP definition<sup>25</sup> and stating, in relevant part, “[t]eachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject, but they should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter which has *no relation* to their subject.”<sup>26</sup>

“The freedom to teach,” the group has said, “includes the right of the faculty to select the materials, determine the approach to the subject, make the assignments, and assess student academic performance in teaching activities for which faculty members are individually

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<sup>20</sup> Mission of the University and the Program, Undergraduate Faculty Handbook, SOKA UNIV. OF AM. (on file with author).

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> Faculty Policies, Undergraduate Faculty Handbook, SOKA UNIV. OF AM. (on file with author).

<sup>24</sup> *Id.*

<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

<sup>26</sup> Statement of Principles, Academic Freedom, ¶ 2 (emphasis added). *See also Statement on the Freedom to Teach*, AAUP (Nov. 7, 2013), [https://www.aaup.org/file/2013-Freedom\\_to\\_Teach.pdf](https://www.aaup.org/file/2013-Freedom_to_Teach.pdf).

responsible, without having their decisions subject to the veto of a department chair, dean, or other administrative officer.”<sup>27</sup>

SUA’s policies laudably reflect the AAUP’s stance, as well as our national commitment to academic freedom. As the Supreme Court of the United States has explained:

Our Nation is deeply committed to safeguarding academic freedom, which is of transcendent value to all of us and not merely to the teachers concerned. That freedom is therefore a special concern to the First Amendment, which does not tolerate laws that cast a pall of orthodoxy over the classroom.<sup>28</sup>

SUA’s commitments to both free expression and academic freedom create moral and legal obligations on the part of the university to avoid chilling academics’ expression.<sup>29</sup>

***B. Academic Freedom Protects Rallin’s Right to Discuss Pedagogically Relevant Material***

Professor Rallin’s pedagogical choices related to course materials, writing assignments, and discussion about topics related to “Writing the Body” are theirs alone under SUA’s prevailing academic freedom policies. These policies grant faculty members substantial breathing room to determine how to approach subjects and materials relevant to their courses. How to approach these materials must be a question left for the faculty member in the classroom—not the administrator, donor, legislator, or outside authority.

Pedagogically relevant material may include words, concepts, subjects, or discussions that some, many, or most students may find upsetting or uncomfortable, including discussion of sexuality and violence. Faculty members confronting and examining these issues must be free of institutional restraints in doing so.

Because SUA makes strong promises of expressive freedom coextensive with those provided by the Constitution, First Amendment jurisprudence provides a useful baseline for delineating the full measure of rights students and faculty should reasonably expect on campus. To that end, a decision by the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit concerning the scope of an academic’s in-class speech is instructive. In *Hardy v. Jefferson Community College*, the Sixth Circuit rejected “the argument that teachers have no First Amendment rights when teaching, or that [authorities] can censor teacher speech without restriction,” as “totally unpersuasive.”<sup>30</sup> There, a white adjunct instructor teaching “Introduction to Interpersonal Communication” lectured community college students about “language and social constructivism,” discussing how “language is used to marginalize

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<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> *Keyishian v. Bd. of Regents*, 385 U.S. 589, 603 (1967).

<sup>29</sup> *See, e.g., McAdams v. Marquette Univ.*, 2018 WI 88, ¶84 (2018) (private Catholic university breached its contract with a professor over a personal blog post because, by virtue of its adoption of the AAUP’s 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure—which SUA has adopted—the blog post was “a contractually disqualified basis for discipline”).

<sup>30</sup> 260 F.3d 671, 680 (6th Cir. 2001).

minorities and other oppressed groups in society.”<sup>31</sup> Students, solicited by the instructor for examples, suggested the words “lady,” “girl,” “faggot,” “nigger,” and “bitch.”<sup>32</sup> The instructor’s use of those words was “clearly” relevant to his lecture exploring the “social and political impact of certain words,” and was not “gratuitously used . . . in an abusive manner.”<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, it remained protected expression.<sup>34</sup>

*Hardy* stands for the proposition that expression “germane to the classroom subject matter” — “however repugnant” to some — is “protected by the First Amendment.”<sup>35</sup>

Here, as in *Hardy*, students complained of comments or exchanges that were clearly relevant to the course material, even though some took offense to them. Likewise, in a course on “Writing the Body,” inextricable facets of the human bodily experience such as sexuality, race, and violence must not be off limits. Rallin makes clear in the course syllabus that the class will challenge students to consider bodies and bodily experiences outside of the mainstream “in the context of racial capitalism and globalism.” Because the course is focused on parsing how bodies are “politically, socially, sexually, racially, culturally, metaphorically, and historically constituted,” Rallin asks students to consider the experiences of a wide range of humans, including ones in black and queer bodies. Rallin’s selected course materials and related discussions are therefore clearly germane to the course material, protected by fundamental tenets of academic freedom, and may not be subject to censorship.

***C. Rallin’s Conduct Did Not Violate SUA Policies, and SUA’s Implementation of Vague, Unwritten Standards Invites Arbitrary Enforcement and Chills Speech***

Despite Dean Weiner’s allegations, Rallin’s speech does not rise to the level of harassment, nor do allegations that Rallin failed to “create a safe space,” had students discuss rape, violence, or deviant sexual behavior, or “vaguely” referenced pedophilia sufficiently allege expression falling into any unprotected category or violative of any SUA policy.

SUA defines discriminatory harassment as unwelcome conduct *on the basis* of a protected class that is “severe or pervasive” and “unreasonably interferes with, limits, or effectively denies” the complainant’s “employment access, benefits, or opportunities.”<sup>36</sup> There is no evidence Rallin targeted any students based on a protected class, let alone engaged in conduct or expression that was “severe or pervasive,” or unreasonably denied any student access to educational benefits or opportunities. Even if Rallin’s discussion of certain topics in their “Writing the Body” course upset some students, for SUA’s promises of expressive freedom to

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<sup>31</sup> *Id.* at 674.

<sup>32</sup> *Id.* at 675.

<sup>33</sup> *Id.* at 679.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.*

<sup>35</sup> *Id.* at 683.

<sup>36</sup> Discriminatory Harassment, Equal Opportunity, Harassment, and Nondiscrimination Policy, SOKA UNIV. OF AM., <https://soka.app.box.com/s/nlt1l9qp5oezd99ns1g7nztlt752q9w>.

have any import, a finding of harassment requires “something beyond the mere expression of views, words, symbols or thoughts” that others find offensive.<sup>37</sup>

To the extent SUA seeks to punish Rallin under vague and undefined standards such as failing to “create a safe space” and “trigger[ing]” students, such an aim is fundamentally at odds with the institution’s strong policies governing expressive rights. These standards are not only unpublished, failing to appear in any SUA publication or policy, but impermissibly vague. Whether speech is “triggering,” “create[s] a safe space,” is “vaguely pedophilic,” or is otherwise upsetting or offensive, requires a subjective inquiry, while regulations of protected speech must be *objective* and “give a person of ordinary intelligence a reasonable opportunity to know what is prohibited, so that they may act accordingly.” The lack of objective criteria as to what speech is or is not appropriate leaves SUA’s administration with unfettered discretion to punish any protected speech it subjectively deems inappropriate. When evaluating whether faculty are teaching pedagogically-relevant material, the question is whether those materials are germane to the course, not whether a group of students is satisfied that they are not “triggering,” “deviant,” or otherwise offensive or upsetting. In any event, allowing students to mandate that instructors alter their course materials is a clear violation of the principles of academic freedom.

SUA cannot exceed the constraints imposed by its promises of academic freedom when investigating student allegations of discrimination or harassment in the classroom. Even taken as true, the allegations here fail to allege any actionable policy violation beyond the subjective discomfort of some students with assigned material, and cannot legitimately serve as the basis for investigating or punishing Rallin.

Importantly, initiating a disciplinary investigation into plainly protected expression is itself an affront to the principles of academic freedom and freedom of expression, even if no formal penalty is ultimately imposed. Subjecting a faculty member to a disciplinary investigation for a classroom discussion of potentially offensive but obviously relevant material signals to faculty that SUA’s policies offer no actual protection, and that self-censorship is necessary to avoid punishment. Forcing a faculty member to attend a mandatory meeting to answer for their protected pedagogical decisions betrays SUA’s purported mission as an institution of higher learning committed to academic freedom.

The Supreme Court has noted that official investigations “are capable of encroaching upon the constitutional liberties of individuals” and have an “inhibiting effect in the flow of democratic expression.”<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, several appellate courts have held that government investigations into protected expression violate the First Amendment.<sup>39</sup> In the university context, federal courts have consistently protected public university faculty expression targeted for censorship or punishment due to subjective offense. In *Levin v. Harleston*, for

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<sup>37</sup> U.S. Dep’t of Educ., Dear Colleague Letter from Gerald A. Reynolds, Assistant Sec’y for Civil Rights (July 28, 2003), <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/firstamend.html>.

<sup>38</sup> *Sweezy v. New Hampshire*, 354 U.S. 234, 245–48 (1957).

<sup>39</sup> See *White v. Lee*, 227 F.3d 1214, 1228 (9th Cir. 2000) (holding that a government investigation into clearly protected expression chilled speech and therefore violated the First Amendment); *Rakovich v. Wade*, 850 F.2d 1180, 1189 (7th Cir. 1988) (“[A]n investigation conducted in retaliation for comments protected by the first amendment could be actionable...”).



example, The City College of the City University of New York launched an investigation into a tenured faculty member's writings on race and intelligence that were viewed as offensive, announcing an *ad hoc* committee to review whether the professor's expression—which the president of the university announced “ha[d] no place at [the college]”—constituted “conduct unbecoming of a member of the faculty.”<sup>40</sup> The United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit upheld the district court's finding that the investigation constituted an implicit threat of discipline and that the resulting chilling effect constituted a cognizable First Amendment harm. SUA's investigation of Rallin will engender a similar chill on faculty expression and must be abandoned.

#### *D. Rallin's Expressive Freedoms Protect Their Right to Criticize SUA*

The journal article critical of SUA administrators to which Rallin contributed<sup>41</sup>—released just before SUA took action against Rallin for the first time in 16 years of teaching similar material—is wholly protected expression that cannot be punished, investigated, or made the basis for retaliatory action by SUA. SUA's faculty handbook explicitly states that “[a]s members of their community, professors have the rights and obligations of other citizens,” which include First Amendment rights, and that “[a]s citizens engaged in a profession that depends upon freedom for its health and integrity, professors have a particular obligation to promote conditions of free inquiry and to further public understanding of academic freedom.”<sup>42</sup>

Rallin's criticisms of SUA's approach to supporting BIPOC students implicate issues of race, class, and education that are among the most critical social issues of our time.<sup>43</sup> Any attempt to speak out on these matters of public concern is entitled to the protection of SUA's free expression promises. That Rallin and their co-authors conclude SUA is not meeting its obligations in this respect is of no moment to whether the speech is protected. It is, and SUA may not retaliate against Rallin for these wholly protected criticisms.

### **III. Conclusion**

Rallin's pedagogical choices are clearly protected by tenets of academic freedom and free expression. While some SUA students allegedly complained that Professor Rallin's interrogation of certain bodily experiences—particularly the experiences of those in black, brown, and queer bodies—upset them, these subjective interpretations bear no relevance on the objective legal analysis: In a course on “Writing the Body,” works and discussions related to the subject are germane to the course material and may not be proscribed by students or administrators.

To the extent that SUA's hasty investigation into Rallin—based on vague, unwritten policies—was or even *appears* predicated on retaliatory animus for journal article critical of SUA, SUA

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<sup>40</sup> *Levin v. Harleston*, 966 F.2d 85, 89 (2d Cir. 1992).

<sup>41</sup> *Mobilizing BIPOC Student Power against Liberalism at Soka University of America: A Collection of Voices*, *supra* note 2.

<sup>42</sup> Principles of Faculty Conduct: Community Relations, Undergraduate Faculty Handbook, SOKA UNIV. OF AM. (on file with author).

<sup>43</sup> *Levin*, F.3d 671 at 683.

must take steps to publicly recommit to its academic freedom and expressive promises, so other faculty are not chilled from speaking freely on campus.

Due to the urgent nature of this issue, we request a substantive response to this letter no later than close of business on May 16, 2022, confirming that SUA will cease its investigation of Rallin and recommit to following the university's expression-related policies.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alex Morey', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Alex Morey  
Director, Individual Rights Defense Program

Cc: Michael Weiner PhD, VP for Academic Affairs, Interim Dean of Faculty

Encl.

## Authorization and Waiver for Release of Personal Information

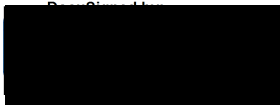
I, Aneil Rallin, do hereby authorize Soka University of America (the "Institution") to release to the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education ("FIRE") any and all information concerning my employment, status, or relationship with the Institution. This authorization and waiver extends to the release of any personnel files, investigative records, disciplinary history, or other records that would otherwise be protected by privacy rights of any source, including those arising from contract, statute, or regulation. I also authorize the Institution to engage FIRE and its staff members in a full discussion of all information pertaining to my employment and performance, and, in so doing, to disclose to FIRE all relevant information and documentation.

This authorization and waiver does not extend to or authorize the release of any information or records to any entity or person other than the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, and I understand that I may withdraw this authorization in writing at any time. I further understand that my execution of this waiver and release does not, on its own or in connection with any other communications or activity, serve to establish an attorney-client relationship with FIRE.

If the Institution is located in the State of California, I request access to and a copy of all documents defined as my "personnel records" under Cal. Ed. Code § 87031 or Cal. Lab. Code § 1198.5, including without limitation: (1) a complete copy of any files kept in my name in any and all Institution or District offices; (2) any emails, notes, memoranda, video, audio, or other material maintained by any school employee in which I am personally identifiable; and (3) any and all phone, medical or other records in which I am personally identifiable.

This authorization and waiver does not extend to or authorize the release of any information or records to any entity or person other than the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, and I understand that I may withdraw this authorization in writing at any time. I further understand that my execution of this waiver and release does not, on its own or in connection with any other communications or activity, serve to establish an attorney-client relationship with FIRE.

I also hereby consent that FIRE may disclose information obtained as a result of this authorization and waiver, but only the information that I authorize.



5/10/2022

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Date

Soka University of America, situated on the homelands of the Acjachemen peoples  
Fall 2021  
WRIT 305: Advanced Communication Skills  
**WRITING THE BODY (DRAFT of a syllabus, subject to ongoing revision)**  
MW, Ikeda 411

Aneil Rallin (they/them/their)  
Office: Ikeda 408  
Office Hours: by appointment  
Telephone: +1 949.480.4055  
E-mail: [arallin@soka.edu](mailto:arallin@soka.edu) (best way to get in touch with me)



—Barbara Kruger

“What kind of writing is possible in a time of crisis?”

“That is a question that people have been answering with their bodies all over the world for a very long time. But here we are. Let’s see what unfolds. What is a page for? What is a sentence for? Right now, I don’t know.”

—Bhanu Kapil

“A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born of necessity.”

—Cherríe Moraga

“Body and soul, Black America reveals the extreme questions of contemporary life, questions of freedom and identity: How can I be who I am?”

—June Jordan

“To write ‘my body’ plunges me into lived experience, particularity.”

—Adrienne Rich

“Writing is not just a form of reporting what we learn in our work, but is itself a way of knowing. Writing is a way of being in relation: to ourselves, to our communities, to lands and waters, to the past and future, and sometimes, to readers we will never otherwise know.”

—Eve Tuck

## Course Description

This writing seminar in the midst of a continuing global pandemic that is exacerbating all sorts of inequities and putting deep divides into stark relief and ongoing Black Lives Matter protests/struggles around the world starts from the premise that “Higher Education” was never just academic—and shouldn’t be—and is cognizant of Rinaldo Walcott’s words of caution: “We should not be aiming to make [this year] feel anything like ‘normal.’ This year teaching and learning should be awkward as hell. It should be the staging ground for imagining a different kind of university, not the production of a new ‘normal.’” Expect missteps, hurdles, detours as we muddle our way through the semester examining/interrogating bodies as sites of meaning, modes of representation, political signifiers, and lived experiences—of central concern to work across the disciplines.

Taking as its purview the production, regulation, and circulation of bodies in the context of racial capitalism and globalism, this writing seminar aims to consider how bodies are politically, socially, sexually, racially, culturally, metaphorically, and historically constituted, as well as to promote the invention of insurgent forms for

reading and writing bodies that do not reinscribe the body in narrative myths and dualistic structures that dominate conventional understandings of bodies.

Our particular writing/composing, research, reading, viewing, and discussions will thus center on the politics and performances of the body as social product, matrix, and mediation. We will consider a variety of texts from across disciplines, genres, and media; interrogate the ideas/questions these texts raise; and think carefully about the implications of these texts for our own composition practices. As socially and ethically responsible citizens/scholars/thinkers/activists, you'll intervene in these textual conversations by producing your own multimodal critical/creative analyses/meditations/compositions that contribute to discussions about the body. My hope is you will produce work that matters toward your own dreams and desires and imagination for what our world could be.

Following Catherine Savini, “diverse languages and dialects are welcome in this...[class]. As we communicate with one another, keep in mind that the reader/listener should work as hard as the writer/speaker in the communication process. This means that we will listen patiently, work to understand one another, seek out clarification when necessary and avoid finishing each other's sentences or correcting ‘grammatical errors’ unless invited to do so.”

Emphasizing composing as a process, the seminar is organized around whole-class workshops. You will have the opportunity to have one of your assignment drafts workshopped. These workshops will give us all a chance to articulate and negotiate our criteria for effective compositions, and to discuss and practice a variety of rhetorical strategies in the context of specific texts—as well as to practice student-centered pedagogy.

I expect you to participate in the many workshops and discussions around which this course is organized. We all teach and learn in this course—I do not believe in a one-way transmission of “knowledge” from instructor to students. I don't have all the answers, and I look forward to learning as much as teaching in this course. You should direct your questions and comments to your colleagues as much as to me. My goal is to stimulate conversations about what we read/watch, with all the diversions, pauses, questions, and repetitions that dialogue usually entails.

Of course, you should expect to do a lot of composing/writing in this course. We will do a good amount of reading and some viewing as well.

**In the interest of keeping our communities safer, especially those of us who may be immunocompromised, I ask that you wear a face covering in class at all times. If you need to eat or drink, feel free to step out of class to do so.**



Please bring your laptop to every class meeting. If you have a mobile phone, remember to turn it off before coming to class.

I hope you find the work of our writing seminar to be personally and intellectually energizing and enriching, and that we will work together to generate a caring, committed, and supportive discourse community. Welcome.

### Learning Outcomes

You will develop

- an understanding of the collaborative and social aspects of the composing process
- an understanding of the ways in which texts (re)produce and/or contest particular social constructions and power relations
- an understanding of the relationships among audience, purpose, and text, and how language and purpose interact
- advanced skills in practicing several essential components of the composing process and in oral communication
- an understanding of rhetorical conventions

### Required Texts

Jhally, Sut, dir. *Edward Said "On Orientalism."*

Kanae, Lisa Linn. *Sista Tongue*.

Lopez, Alan Palaez. *Intergalactic Travels: Poems from A Fugitive Alien*.

Moraga, Cherríe, and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. (selections)

Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen: An American Lyric*.

Materials placed on Brightspace.

### Supplementary Resources (an eclectic list)

Abu-Jamal, Mumia. *Have Black Lives Ever Mattered?*

Alcoff, Linda. *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza*.

Biss, Eula. *Having and Being Had*.

Boggs, Grace Lee. *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First Century*.

Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*.

Bornstein, Kate, and S. Bear Bergman, eds. *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation*.

- Bouly, Jenny. *The Body: An Essay*.
- Boylorn, Robin M. *Sweetwater: Black Women and Narratives of Resilience*.
- Boylorn, Robin M. and Mark P. Orbe, eds. *Critical Autoethnography: Intersecting Cultural Methods in Everyday Life*.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*.
- Carson, Anne. *Autobiography of Red*.
- Chu, Andrea Long. *Females*.
- Cixous, Hélène. *"Coming to Writing" and Other Essays*.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*.
- Coupland, Justine, and Richard Gwyn, eds. *Discourse, the Body, and Identity*.
- Dangarembga, Tsitsi. *This Mournable Body*.
- Das, Kamala. *My Story*.
- Davis, Angela. *Freedom Is A Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*.
- Delany, Samuel. *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*.
- DiAngelo. *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*.
- Driskill, Qwo-Li, Daniel Heath Justice, Deborah Miranda, and Lisa Tatonetti, eds. *Sovereign Erotics: A Collection of Two-Spirit Literature*.
- Edut, Ophira, ed. *Body Outlaws: Rewriting the Rules of Beauty and Body Image*.
- El Saadawi, Nawal. *The Hidden Face of Eve*.
- Fanon, Franz. *Black Skin, White Masks*.
- Fausto-Sterling, Anne. *Sexing the Body*.
- Feinberg, Leslie. *Transgender Warriors*.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*.
- Gay, Roxane. *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body*.
- Gladman, Renee. *Calamities*.
- Girshick, Lori B. *Transgender Voices: Beyond Men and Women*.
- Glover, David, and Cora Kaplan. *Genders*.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies*.
- Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity*.
- Hammad, Suheir. *Born Palestinian, Born Black & The Gaza Suite*.
- Hartman, Saidiya. *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*.
- Hong, Cathy Park. *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*.
- hooks, bell. *Where We Stand: Class Matters*.
- Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One*.
- Jackson, Ronald. *Scripting the Black Masculine Body*.
- Jones, Saeed. *How We Fight For Our Lives*.
- Jordan, June. *Some of Us Did Not Die: New and Selected Essays*.
- Kafer, Alison. *Feminist, Queer, Crip*.
- Kapil, Bhanu. *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers*.
- Khaled, Leila. *My People Shall Live: The Autobiography of a Revolutionary as told to George Hajjar*.



- Kleege, Georgina. *Sight Unseen*.
- Kosut, Mary, and Lisa Jean Moore, eds. *The Body Reader: Essential Social and Cultural Readings*.
- Lalami, Laila. *Conditional Citizens*.
- Lancaster, Roger, and Micaela di Leonardo, eds. *The Gender Sexuality Reader*.
- Laymon, Kiese. *Heavy: An American Memoir*.
- Levins Morales, Aurora. *Kindling: Writings on the Body*.
- Lord, Catherine. *The Summer of Her Baldness: A Cancer Improvisation*.
- Lorde, Audre. *The Cancer Journals*.
- Lorde, Audre. *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*.
- Mairs, Nancy. *Waist-High in the World: A Life Among the Nondisabled*.
- Monet, Aja. *My Mother Was A Freedom Fighter*.
- Moraga, Cherríe. *Loving in the War Years: Lo Que Nunca Paso por Sus Labios*.
- Nanda, Serena. *Gender Diversity: Crosscultural Variations*.
- Nestle, Joan, Clare Howell, and Riki Wilchins, eds. *GenderQueer: Voices from Beyond the Sexual Binary*.
- Ozeki, Ruth. *The Face: A Time Code*.
- Puar, Jasbir. *The Right to Main: Debility, Capacity, Disability*.
- Reddy, Gayatri. *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India*.
- Rich, Adrienne. *Blood, Bread, and Poetry*.
- Rose, Tricia. *Longing to Tell: Black Women Talk about Sexuality and Intimacy*.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*.
- Salamon, Gayle. *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality*.
- Sappington, Rodney, and Tyler Sappington, eds. *Uncontrollable Bodies: Testimonies of Identity and Culture*.
- Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*.
- Shakur, Assata. *Assata: An Autobiography*.
- Shange, Ntozake. *For Colored Girls who have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow is Enuf*.
- Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*.
- Shilling, Chris. *The Body: A Very Short Introduction*.
- Stryker, Susan, and Stephen White, eds. *The Transgender Studies Reader*.
- Tobia, Jacob. *Sissy: A Coming of Gender Story*.
- Vaid-Menon, Alok. *Beyond the Gender Binary*.
- Valentine, David. *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*.
- Vuong, Ocean. *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous: A Novel*.
- Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*.
- Washuta, Elissa. *My Body Is a Book of Rules*.
- West, Cornel. *Race Matters*.
- Wilchins, Riki Anne. *Read My Lips: Sexual Subversion and the End of Gender*.
- Wintersen, Jeanette. *Written on the Body*.
- Wittig, Monique. *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*.
- Wojnarowicz, David. *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration*.
- Wong, Alice, ed. *Disability Visibility: First-Person Stories from the Twenty-First*

*Century.*

## Course Requirements and Grades

You are expected to

- complete and submit all writing exercises on Brightspace
- submit a draft for a whole class workshop by the due date on Brightspace
- respond (orally and in writing) to your colleagues' whole-class workshop drafts
- facilitate a colleague's whole-class workshop
- submit assignments by the due dates (unless you have procured an extension in advance) on Brightspace
- submit a complete portfolio by the due date on Brightspace

Your final course grade will be based on your successful completion of the requirements listed above.

The grading method I will employ in this course is a version of what is known as **contract grading**. Briefly, the contract grading method entails an agreement between students and teachers about the work necessary to achieve a minimal guaranteed final grade.

I would like you to concentrate on your work for this seminar without worrying constantly about how it will be evaluated or judged. I would like to encourage you to plunge into all the assignments without fear and to experiment—truly experiment. Therefore, if you complete all the assignments listed above, and participate fully in the list of activities and behaviors that follow, you'll receive a final grade of a B+ or better. In other words, to receive a B+ you will be assessed on the completeness of your work/participation and the labor you put in. This means that you will receive a B+ as long as you meet the outlined basic set of conditions, which in turn, I believe, will ensure that you grow significantly as a thinker/writer over the course of the semester.

You are guaranteed a B+ if you

- complete the readings and assignments (listed above) on time
- participate regularly and thoughtfully in course activities
- approach each assignment seriously and give it your best
- engage with the texts assigned and consider them critically

If you don't fulfill any requirements of the above contract you will receive a grade lower than a B+ in accordance with the number of requirements you don't satisfy.

I expect and hope that many of you will achieve an A in the course. In order to receive an A, you must not only satisfy all the requirements of the contract, but your work must also be consistently exemplary and go beyond the requirements of earning a B+.

Do not worry about not getting any feedback on your writing. You will get feedback on your writing and other work during the semester from your colleagues and me. Use this feedback to rethink ideas and improve your writing and practices. Always know that I will read everything, but you will not receive grades from me. Much of the time, I may not even comment directly on your work. I want you not only to rely on your colleagues and yourself for assessment and revision advice, but to also build strategies of self-assessment that function apart from a teacher's approval, to take risks, to allow yourself to fail at a piece of writing (if you fail) and learn from that failing.

Therefore, the default grade for the course is a "B+." In a nutshell, if you do all that is asked of you in the manner and spirit it is asked, if you work through the processes we establish and the work assigned during the semester, if you do all the work asked of you, then you'll get a "B+" course grade. If you do not participate fully, turn in assignments late, forget to do assignments, or do less work than what is expected of you, etc., you will get a lower grade as a course grade.

You are welcome to discuss your work/progress with me by appointment at any point during the semester.

## **All Assignments**

### **Major Assignments**

You will work on two major assignments over the duration of the semester. You must turn in assignment 1 by the due date on Brightspace. I will return your assignment 1 to you in a timely manner with comments and revision suggestions. If you turn in your assignment late without making prior arrangements with me, your final course grade will be lowered. An incomplete assignment will count as a late assignment. Assignment 2 must be included in the portfolio that you turn in on Brightspace at the end of the semester.

You may work collaboratively with a colleague from our seminar on assignments 1 and/or 2.

## Other Assignments

These include writing exercises and response to writing exercises, your workshop draft, your responses to your colleagues' workshop drafts—and must be turned in by the due dates (the due dates for assignments are listed on the syllabus under “Tentative Schedule”).

When it is your turn to have a workshop, you must post your workshop draft on Brightspace by the due date. Ensure that your draft is complete.

## Portfolio

Your portfolio should include the following items (not necessarily in the following order):

- a table of contents
- a preface
- (revised) assignment 1 and assignment 2
- unaltered responses to your colleagues' whole-class workshop drafts
- unaltered writing exercises

**Do not share, cite, record, photograph, or circulate work produced by the writers in this writing seminar without their permission.**

## Gender-Neutral and Inclusive Language

Follow professional guidelines for gender-neutral and inclusive language. Additional information about these professional guidelines is available at

<http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/genderfairuseoflang>

<https://www.teenvogue.com/story/how-to-use-gender-neutral-words>

## The Writing Center

The Writing Center provides support to writers of all levels at the university. I recommend that you familiarize yourself with and make use of this tremendous free resource that provides assistance in writing, editing, and critical thinking.

## Additional Writing Resources

For additional writing resources, check out the Purdue Online Writing Lab at <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

For generating a list of Works Cited, check out NoodleTools' "free tools" at <https://www.noodletools.com/free/>

### **Library Research/Reference**

For assistance with library research and/or reference questions, consult with our research librarian.

### **Disability Accommodations**

Please email me early in the semester if you have a disability, so that we may discuss what (if anything) I can do to help you succeed in this class.

### **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to Ian Barnard, Jessica Shumake, Asao Inoue, Anu Aneja, Véronica Quezada, and Trixie Smith for words, ideas, and suggestions.

**Tentative Schedule** (subject to revision)

- M 13 September      Brief discussion of the course aims and syllabus  
Brief introductions  
In-class reading: Driskill and Chrystos (Brightspace)  
In-class writing exercise
- W 15 September      Reading due: syllabus / Jordan / CCCC This Ain't Another  
Statement! This is a DEMAND for Black Linguistic  
Justice (Brightspace)  
Discuss reading  
In-class writing exercise
- M 20 September      Reading due: Kanae / Trask (Brightspace)  
Discuss reading  
In-class writing exercise  
Pick whole-class workshop date  
Introduce Claudia Rankine and *Citizen*
- W 22 September      Reading due: *Citizen* pages 5-79 (Brightspace)  
Discuss reading  
In-class writing exercise  
See whole-class workshop schedule (Brightspace) and make  
note of your workshop and facilitation dates (randomly  
generated)
- M 27 September      Reading due: Reading due: *Citizen* pages 82-168 (Brightspace)  
Writing due: post writing exercise on Brightspace before class  
Discuss reading  
Discuss assignment 1 guidelines
- W 29 September      Writing due: post writing exercise on Brightspace before class  
Watch and discuss Lucas shorts (Brightspace)  
Discuss ideas for assignment 1  
Work on assignment 1
- M 4 October            Work on assignment 1
- W 6 October            Writing due: post assignment 1 draft on Brightspace before  
class if your workshop is on M 11 October  
Reading due: guidelines for responding to workshop drafts /  
sample workshop draft responses (Brightspace)  
Discuss guidelines for responding to workshop drafts

- Work on your responses to workshop drafts
- M 11 October Writing due: post responses to workshop drafts on Brightspace before class  
Post assignment 1 draft on Brightspace before class if your workshop is on W 13 October  
Workshops
- W 13 October Writing due: post responses to workshop drafts on Brightspace before class  
Post assignment 1 draft on Brightspace before class if your workshop is on M 18 October  
Workshops
- M 18 October Writing due: post responses to workshop drafts on Brightspace before class  
Workshops
- W 20 October Writing due: post assignment 1 on Brightspace before class (if you had a workshop on assignment 1, post your revision that engages your colleagues' comments on your workshop draft)  
Brief introduction to *This Bridge Called my Back*  
Look at and discuss Forewords and Prefaces of *This Bridge Called My Back* (Brightspace)
- M 25 October Reading due: selections from *This Bridge Called My Back* (Brightspace)  
Writing due: post writing exercise on Brightspace before class  
Discuss reading  
In-class writing exercise
- W 27 October Reading due: Vuong / Kapil (Brightspace) (Brightspace)  
Discuss reading  
In-class writing exercise
- M 1 November Reading due: *Intergalactic Travels* (Brightspace)  
Discuss reading  
In-class writing exercise
- W 3 November Viewing due: Watch *Edward Said On Orientalism*, 41 minutes (Brightspace)  
Discuss video

	In-class writing exercise Discuss guidelines for assignment 2
M 8 November	Reading due: Mairs / Gay / Jarrar / Rich (Brightspace) Discuss reading In-class writing exercise
W 10 November	Reading due: Delany / Jarrar (Brightspace) Discuss reading Work on assignment 2
M 15 November	Work on assignment 2
W 17 November	Writing due: post assignment 2 draft on Brightspace before class if your workshop is on M 22 November Work on your responses to workshop drafts
M 22 November	Writing due: post responses to workshop drafts on Brightspace before class Workshops
W 24 November	No class Writing due: post assignment 2 draft on Brightspace before class if your workshop is on M 29 November
M 29 November	Writing due: post responses to workshop drafts on Brightspace before class Post assignment 2 draft on Brightspace before class if your workshop is on W 1 December Workshops
W 1 December	Writing due: post responses to workshop drafts on Brightspace before class Post assignment 2 draft on Brightspace before class if your workshop is on M 6 December Workshops
M 6 December	Writing due: post responses to workshop drafts on Brightspace before class Workshop In-class reading: Williams (Brightspace) In-class writing exercise Do course evaluations



W 8 December	Work on portfolio
Exam time	Assignment due: post portfolio on Brightspace by end of exam time

## Assignment 1

New discourse forms are developing because they enable kinds of rigorous academic work that simply cannot be done within the traditional discourse.  
—Patricia Bizzell, *Alt Dis: Alternative Discourses and the Academy*

Andrea A. Lunsford and Marvin Diogenes define writing as a technology for creating conceptual frameworks and creating, sustaining, and performing lines of thought within those frameworks, drawing from and expanding on existing conventions and genres, utilizing signs and symbols, incorporating materials drawn from multiple sources, and taking advantage of the resources of a full range of media.

The sense of writing their definition evokes is writing as epistemic, performative, multivocal, multimodal, and multimediated.

Keeping their definition of writing above in mind, choose one of the following—

A) Create a critical and/or creative response to Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen: An American Lyric* or June Jordan’s “Nobody Mean More to Me than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan” or Lisa Linn Kanae’s *Sista Tongue* or Haunani-Kay Trask’s “Politics in the Pacific Islands: Imperialism and Native Self-Determination” in any form, genre, or medium. Don’t be general or impressionistic—your critical/creative response should engage with and/or expand and/or jump off a specific aspect or specific aspects of the text you select (e.g., one idea in the text, one section of the text, one technique the text uses).

B) Using *Citizen: An American Lyric* and/or *Sista Tongue* as a model, compose your own meditations that mediate into the production, circulation, and regulation of bodies.

C) Write a screenplay for a short film or a portion of a screenplay for a longer film based on part or all of *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Select an idea or section from *Citizen: An American Lyric* that you can imagine cinematically or visualize as a short/film. Your screenplay or screenplay portion should be written in script format and include an introductory paragraph explaining the context of the idea/section from *Citizen: An American Lyric* that you are adapting. Consult the screenplay for *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Brightspace) as a guide for how to write your screenplay.

D) “Translate” and render into digital medium an idea, a section, or an image from *Citizen: An American Lyric* or “Nobody Mean More to Me than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan” or *Sista Tongue* or “Politics in the Pacific Islands: Imperialism and Native Self-Determination.” Ensure that you effectively use the “language” of your chosen digital medium to convey your rendition of the written text (e.g., having

a voice-over narrator read a written text is not necessarily an effective way of using the language of film).

Cite sources appropriate to the genre/format of your work, if applicable.

Regardless of which option you select, your project should be equivalent in time, effort, and substance to a written text of 1250-1750 words (about 5 to 7 pages if you use regular size font and margins). Your assignment does not have to be in the form of a written text (as writing is conventionally understood).

## Assignment 2

We should all be sure that we don't fall into the unthinking habit of using a genre because it is customary, because we have had success with it, because we think someone else expects it or because it is what we wrote the last time we wrote. We should use genre—the entire range of genres—to help us explore our subject.

—Donald Murray, *A Writer Teaches Writing*

Choose one of the following—

A) Write or compose your body. Your critical/creative composition (account/narrative/reflection/meditation/analysis) should be inspired/informed by the texts/ideas you have encountered in this course and/or be motivated by these times in which we find ourselves and should not be just an uncritical examination of your body. You may produce your piece in any form or genre or medium.

B) Informed by the texts/ideas you have encountered in this course and/or motivated by these times in which we find ourselves, research a theme related to the body that interests you and compose a critical/creative project in any form or genre. Your aim should be to develop complex understandings of and/or reflections/meditations on/about the body rather than to offer simplistic platitudes.

C) Inspired and/or agitated by *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, write your own piece in the form and style of one of the pieces in *This Bridge Called My Back*, updated for our particular times.

D) Write your own formally experimental piece about a/the body and/or bodies that utilizes some of the experimental strategies and techniques that Alan Pelaez Lopez employs in *Intergalactic Travels: Poems From A Fugitive Alien*.

E) Select a quotation from any other course text and explore the issues raised in the quotation you've selected. Organize your essay around a direct quotation of one or more contiguous sentences or a section/phrase from your chosen text that strikes you as incisive, important, compelling, difficult, dense, problematic, messy, or a summation of ideas in the reading. Use this quotation as a point of entry into the reading. Explicate and engage with the quotation and draw out/develop the significance of the idea/s in the quotation to the issues we've been discussing in our seminar and/or to larger issues that interest you around the theme of the course (the production, regulation, and circulation of bodies). You may also use the quotation as a springboard to ask questions about the quotation itself, the text as a whole, and the issues you see it raising. Your essay should not consist of a random collection of points about your chosen quotation—it should have some organizing principle. Imagine your readers as interested readers familiar with some of the

discussions around the topic you are considering. The purpose of this essay is to explore a quotation from one of the course texts and to discuss/unpack that quotation in light of the following questions: What are the larger implications of the quotation you've selected to work with? What do you have to say about the idea/s in this quotation? How have your own experiences or observations influenced your thinking around the idea/s in your quotation? Your essay should use these questions to probe and deepen your own understanding of the idea/s in your quotation.

You aren't required to use additional sources, but you may do so if you wish. Cite and list all sources following an appropriate style manual and appropriate to the genre/format of your work (if applicable). You may use whatever citation format you prefer, but do so consistently and include full references. For some explanations of how to use different style manuals, see <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/> or refer to a writing handbook. Check out the free tools at [NoodleTools](#) to generate citations and a Works Cited list.

Your assignment 2 may be in any form (writing, video, audio, podcast, graphic text, performance piece, etc.) or be multi-genre, multimedia, multimodal.

Your assignment 2 may be an extension of a writing exercise or assignment 1.

1750-2500 words, if "written"; if not, project should be equivalent in time, effort, and substance, and include some "writing."

## Preface

Compose a preface to your portfolio in which you introduce the work in your portfolio—a “why I write” of sorts.

Think of your preface as a framing for the work in your portfolio.

Reflect on the work in your portfolio and consider how your portfolio exemplifies (or does not exemplify) your ideas about the themes of this course.

Support your points with specific references to and examples from the work in your portfolio.

Caveats:

- your preface should read as a cohesive whole, not as a collection of unrelated points about your portfolio
- the preface is your opportunity to reflect on and discuss your work; it should not read as an evaluation of the course or of me

Form open.

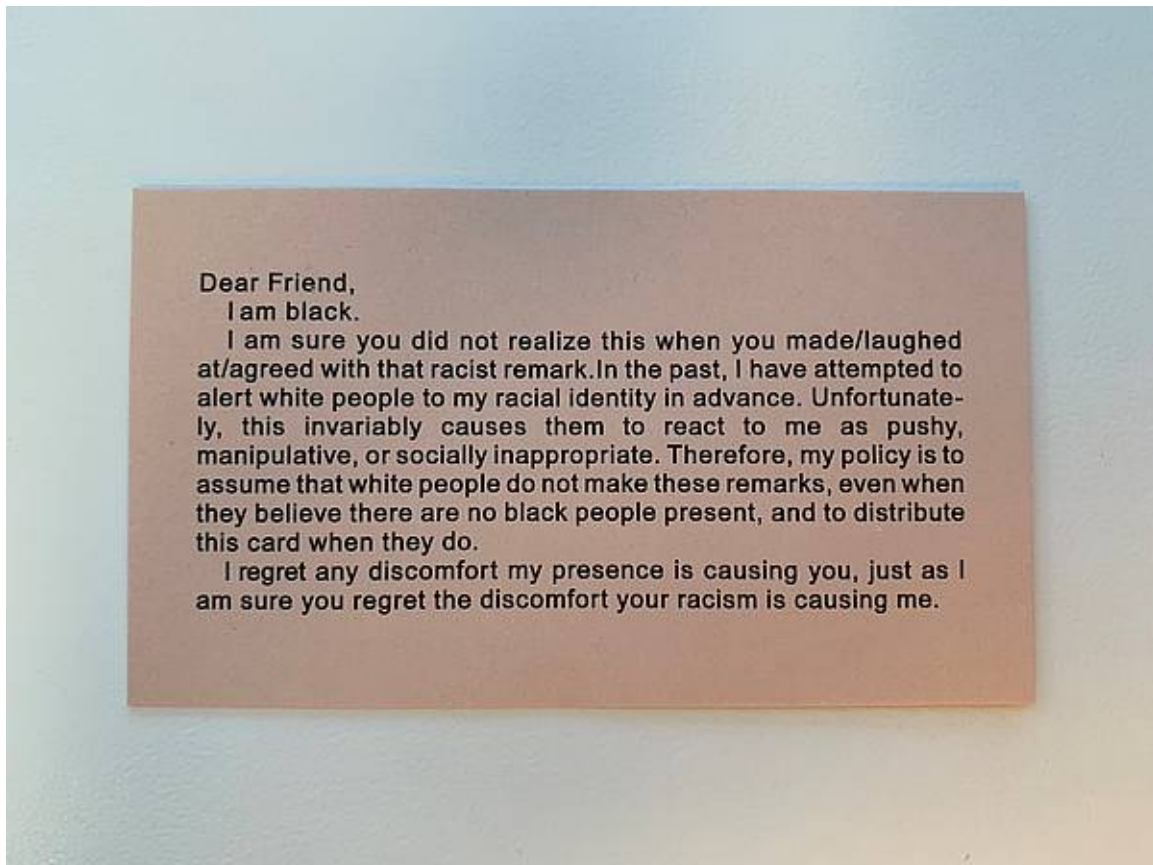
500–750 words, if written.

## Writing Exercises

Writing exercises are quick writes, informal explorations often in response to course readings. They are meant to generate a response (your response), to give you room to explore issues/ideas, trace/track your thoughts, allow your mind to wander/wonder. Writing exercises are not expected to be “finished prose.”

## Responses to Workshop Drafts (form open)

- Each response should be at least 250 words long.
- Make your comments and suggestions specific; support your assertions with examples from the workshop draft you are responding to, and give concrete revision suggestions.
- Be sure to discuss each workshop draft’s strengths and weaknesses.
- Use the list of evaluation criteria for compositions on Brightspace as a guide (you obviously cannot cover everything; decide which points you want to focus on).
- Use whatever form feels right to you.
- Do not assume that a workshop draft is effective because it is “easy” to understand—or that it is ineffective because it is not easy to understand.



—Adrian Piper, My Calling Card #1, 1986-1990



# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Mobilizing BIPOC Student Power against Liberalism at Soka University of America: A Collection of Voices

by Victoria M. Huynh, Kristen Michala Storms, Jordyn Solidum-Saito, Professor X, and Aneil Rallin



PHOTO CREDITS: SAANIKA JOSHI, CASEY CHAFFIN, AND ART BECK

**W**e write as a collective of BIPOC undergraduate student organizers and professors dedicated to Black, Third World, and Indigenous liberation through feminist analysis at Soka University of America (SUA). We contend that SUA prominently epitomizes liberalism in its most counterrevolutionary form today. We highlight through a brief chronology of our communal, epistemic, and physical struggles against hegemonic power exercised by our Small Liberal Arts College (SLAC) the ways in which liberalism acts as counterrevolutionary ideology. We offer critical reflections/interventions on our struggles against white supremacy at our SLAC, as well as on how our university administration utilizes liberalism as a technology of imperialism. We come together to resist the imperial university from where we stand. We believe in the pedagogical possibilities of resistance and in working toward liberation. We share our communion as a gesture of solidarity and in anticipation of forging solidarities.

## The SUA Masquerade or the Pristine Façade

SUA is a 20-year old private SLAC, uniquely founded on “the Buddhist principles of peace, human rights, and the sanctity of life.” Soka is “a Japanese term meaning to create value.” SUA’s mission is “to foster a steady stream of global citizens committed to living a contributive life.” SUA boasts an almost 2 billion dollar endowment for a small student body of around 400. “Its primary source of funding is Soka Gakkai, a member-supported lay Buddhist organization founded in Japan” (Soka). Students come from all over the US and world, many lured by what they perceive to be the promise of SUA, the chance to dream up and work toward liberatory futures, and/or its substantial financial aid program. Nearly 50% of SUA students come from outside the US, making it the liberal arts college with the most number of “international” students (“Most”). The overwhelming majority are traditional-age students. As a rule, all students are required to live on campus, a grand resort-like gated community overlooking canyons on three sides in suburban Orange County in California, in order to engage in dialogue with each other and learn how to get along. But on whose/what terms? Toward what ends?

Through a case study of sorts of the fight for Critical Global Ethnic Studies (CGES) at SUA, we note the specific ways liberalism as counterrevolutionary ideology plays out at our new but already very highly-ranked private SLAC that boasts a utopian mission premised on global citizenship. Global citizenship in SUA terms is achieved by its “diverse” multicultural almost 50 percent international student body and a marketed commitment to peace and human rights. In fact, there are few Black students (constituting less than three percent of the student body) and virtually no full-time Black faculty trained in critical Black studies on our campus or representation of African Studies in the curriculum. Incredibly, SUA’s almost two billion dollar endowment is the second largest endowment per student in the US (“Endowments”). Given its proclaimed commitments and mission and endowment, we ask why it is that when BIPOC working-class students ask for the fulfillment of their needs, interests, dreams, desires,

demands, well-being, our incredibly wealthy university is always unable to find resources for working-class and/or BIPOC students. Since its founding, there have been and continue to be no resources specific to working-class and/or BIPOC students, whose needs and demands are viewed as “special-interest,” with suspicion, as threatening, as too divisive, met with derision, and continually dismissed, ignored, rejected. Resources though are readily available for plays that supposedly have a bearing on advancing SUA’s standing in the *US News and World Report* education rankings, such as the stellar performing arts center that opened on campus in 2011 amid much fanfare at a cost of \$73 million.

We work at SUA in cluster areas called concentrations rather than conventional departments/programs. SUA recently spent an extraordinary amount of money erecting a new concentration in the Life Sciences with its own new multimillion dollar building. However, when students and professors came together to ask for an additional concentration in Critical Global Ethnic Studies (CGES), a modest proposal that didn’t involve the construction of an extravagant new building, to address/engage what consistently gets erased at SUA, our BIPOC lives, we were consistently rebuffed. Even though decisions at SUA are typically made hierarchically by the president and the dean often in disregard of faculty expertise or conviction, we were told the university’s hands are tied; it has limited resources; it can’t move forward without faculty support (despite considerable faculty support); it can’t move forward without expansive faculty approval (read: the same faculty who teach imperialist frameworks must approve of our pedagogies of resistance); Life Sciences is “a totally different beast”; concentrations must have broad appeal despite broad student support; etc., etc. Since its founding, there has been no concerted effort by our SLAC to question its reproduction of whiteness. Apparently, the university’s human rights mission does not extend to the lives and needs of BIPOC students.

A student petition for a proposed Critical Global Ethnic Studies concentration along with the establishing of a center dedicated to Critical Global Ethnic Studies yielding over 1000 signatories receives no response from university administrators. Then, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, after most students have been unceremoniously sent away from campus into the uncertainties of their own communities (if students are fortunate to have communities to return to), the university announces the founding of a Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Human Rights. Five months after students circulate a petition and present a detailed proposal to faculty and administrators for the creation on our campus of CGES, an administrators’ center is mysteriously born.

While SUA public relations campaigns have long maintained a pristine facade of no conflict at our university, there is a long history of important student movements swept under the rug (“We want”). The demand for Africana Studies dates back ten years at least. As recently as 2016, students mobilized around the plight of “undocumented students,” brought to light when applicants were routinely denied admission to our SLAC committed to human rights on the grounds that they would not be able to “study

abroad”—a requirement for graduation. These and other student movements were derailed and silenced or quickly co-opted, students and professors who invested time and energy in the advancement of student care as well as critical pedagogy attentive to the needs and dreams of BIPOC and/or working class students punished, as they/we have always been punished.

## Contexts/Discontents or A Chronology of the Movement for Critical Global Ethnic Studies at SUA

The “televised” struggle begins where much radical academic change has erupted: with the Black students. In spring 2018, the thirty-odd SUA Black students decided to do what so many before attempted to do: create a Black Student Union (BSU). The BSU would be a safe, exclusive space for Black students to build community and help each other survive the university. The proposed BSU is instantly rejected by the university on the grounds the group is too exclusive. Without institutional recognition, the BSU is consequently barred from receiving funding and other resources. Translation: The majority white and Japanese student population might view an all-Black student space as an affront to the centrally-held SUA belief of “dialogue” in order to “better understand” those from different backgrounds—solution to all problems. For the Black students, exclusivity is the only way to avoid becoming a racial zoo with free general admission.

Despite not receiving university recognition, the Black students move forward and establish the BSU to create networks and find resources for themselves. The founding of the BSU paves the way for other so-called exclusive, identity-based student groups. The sharp increase in identity groups and demands spearheaded by the formation of the BSU force the university's hand to create a new caste of student clubs known as “affinity” groups. This new status includes meager funding and limited support, revealing the obvious reluctance of SUA to support BIPOC student communities. A subsequent interest in Ethnic Studies (anti-imperialist) in opposition to Area Studies (imperialist) arises from Asian diasporic students as a scholar/professor arrives on campus, appointed in a one-year post-doctoral position to teach Ethnic Studies classes (likely the first classes expressly designated as such at our university) during the 2018-19 academic year. This culminates with the (re)formation of the Students of Color Coalition (SOCC) that, along with the BSU, begins actively organizing for African and Ethnic Studies and agitating for a number of other initiatives to address the white supremacist campus culture both in and outside the classroom at SUA (Inema).

In the fall of 2019, while the BSU and SOCC are vigorously continuing their efforts for critical pedagogy and transformation of our campus culture, a recently arrived in the US non-Black SUA student shares a post with the n-word on social media. This moment unearths yet again the hardly buried racist SUA student culture. It serves as trigger and catalyst for a series of public events on campus (Malabuyoc). In November, the BSU organize a month-long town hall series in an attempt to articulate their Black

humanity and traumas. Black students put their traumas on display via teach-ins on crucial topics such as microaggressions, tokenism, and cultural appropriation. The initial reaction among a number of students, faculty, and administrators is to frame BSU members as being angry, overly sensitive, as fear-mongers and terrorists. There is much work that needs to be done at our SLAC. BIPOC students organize protests at well-attended student-recruitment university events for potential students and their guardians (“Students protest”) and student festivals. This is the beginning of the BIPOC-crafted infrastructure intended to disassemble white supremacy. University administrators subsequently wake up, cancel classes, hire and fly out a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion specialist, and put Black and Brown students on the main stage in the performing arts center for a town hall meeting, including the student authors of this piece. Classes are canceled and all members of the campus community (students, staff, faculty) are encouraged to attend. The moderator, the DEI specialist, asks only one question: “What happened?” This question is all it takes for BIPOC students to fall apart. BIPOC students recount traumas and convey grievances that result from attending SUA. Upper-level administrators claim they are listening and learning, shake BIPOC students’ hands, apologize to BIPOC students’ faces, promise they will make changes.

In December 2019, Victoria M. Huynh and Kristen Michala Storms co-write and present the first proposal for Critical Global Ethnic Studies (CGES). It outlines three central tenets: student self-determination, lived experiences, and a critical global praxis. These tenets are meant to equip BIPOC students with the opportunity to learn about their erased histories and engage their material realities in order to ground themselves in the communities they hail from, as well as to center activism and praxis in academic spaces with the aim of dismantling global imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (following bell hooks) and its long standing hegemonic impacts. Unabated, the BIPOC-student led movement continues to organize for BIPOC student needs actively outside of the university, most poignantly in the form of the February 2020 1st Annual Students of Color Conference: Building a World without Empires (“This is”) that brings together a gathering of community leaders, organizers, scholars, activists, student activists, professors to offer workshops, panel discussions, and keynote events for SUA and off-campus communities. The conference, with over 200 attendees at our university of 400 students, is a student-crafted, deinstitutionalized space for BIPOC students to reclaim their communities’ lived experiences as sources of learning, build community, disrupt institutional norms, and teach themselves to be critical of institutional power. Student power creates the means to learn from students’ lived experiences, for students to learn from each other and to speak in direct resistance to white supremacy at SUA.

For over a year at this point in time, BIPOC students have made significant intellectual and infrastructural contributions to campus. BIPOC students have created meaningful programs often working with off-campus communities; organized complex teach-ins far exceeding

the expectations of any DEI trainer; seen through a successful conference; created a working proposal for a new CGES concentration; successfully defended the necessity and rigor of the concentration. The impact this movement has on campus is undeniable and seeps into every aspect of student and overall campus life. Even SUA faculty who were initially not supportive of the BIPOC student demands alter or shift their curricula in response to the growing student desires for CGES. Students and faculty allies demand that university administrators respond to this pressing need by seriously working to implement the concentration via a cluster hire of six faculty members. This demand brings BIPOC students to present their ideas for a new CGES concentration at a meeting for all faculty, where BIPOC student presenters are simultaneously commended and attacked.

Finally, students take matters into their own hands on February 28th, 2020 by demanding actions from the SUA board of trustees ("1, 2, 3, 4"). BIPOC students communicate how serious SUA's neglect has been of BIPOC students and the dire necessity of a CGES concentration through a series of actions: "trespassing" in the boardroom during a meeting, making a presentation to the trustees, staging a die-in, blocking a road. Despite every effort from BIPOC students to convey the severity of the crisis at our SLAC, the board of trustees evade, cower, refuse to engage with students, treat the students with alarming disrespect, and, along with the university president, ridicule and ignore student demands for CGES and additional infrastructures/resources. University administrators go so far as to punish students by having students cited for actions students did not commit.

In the summer of 2020, amidst the prevalent COVID-19 (dis)handlings by the United States, ongoing anti-Black state violence, and the relentless repression of BIPOC student demands, the former SUA president retires from office and the then vice president is speedily promoted to the presidency. On the one hand publishing messages of solidarity with the national movement for Black Lives while on the other abandoning contact with BIPOC student leaders, the newly appointed president announces he has established a Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Human Rights and assembled a council on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion with no consultation with or guidance from the BIPOC student leaders.

This newly established Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Human Rights turns out to be a hollow emulation of the students' vision. It is established ostensibly to showcase our university's dedication to diversity, but without the involvement, let alone leadership, of the students and professors engaged in the struggle for CGES who understand that the push for Critical Global Ethnic Studies as concentration and center must not be a mere theoretical showcase but must be grounded in lived experience and community praxis, redistributing university resources to build sustainable and anti-imperialist presents/futures. It is divorced from long-standing commitments to working with and developing relationships with working-class Chicax and Southeast Asian community organizations to create support networks for undocumented people and students within and outside the university, mobilizing on multiple

issues and fronts, including the contribution of labor in support of the Acjachemen Nation, the Indigenous peoples whose land SUA sits on. The administrators' center does not seek to undertake this kind of work: developing solidarities, relationships, and networks of working-class communities of color in Orange County and beyond. The administrators' center functions in effect to undermine and derail BIPOC students' CGES initiative—self-determination for BIPOC student education and s liberatory objectives.

In short, the president has co-opted BIPOC student labors and ideas, appropriating and domesticating the notion of a center directly from the students' CGES proposal. This thus illegitimate center, born out of co-optation, not only denies student self-determination but also offers no tangible changes in meeting the concrete needs of working-class, first-generation BIPOC students. It forecloses any possibility of student-led roles in key decision-making processes (read: BIPOC student self-determination) at SUA. The president's maneuver (typical increasingly even at supposedly progressive SLACs in the US?) exposes the violence liberalism poses to students and academics committed to Black, Indigenous, and Third-Worlded liberation. By making representational concessions on the outside and leaving out student voices behind closed doors, the maneuver cloaks its violence with optical progress.

Since BIPOC student leaders have rejected all of the president's unilateral initiatives taking over and reframing BIPOC students' work/ideas in service of the university's liberal agendas, university administrators have made no contact with student leaders and faculty allies as they host talks on race relations and meetings with its council—without the involvement of any of the student movement leaders, siloing and marginalizing the professors in support of the movement.

This is the point at which we find ourselves now, still in struggle, still in communion, still in solidarity, still in resistance, still, to invoke Gloria Anzaldúa, "making face, making soul." In the sections that follow, we offer our individual reflections on the struggles at SUA, emphasizing in these fractals of our communion our unwavering commitment to one another and/or the communities we hail from, to solidarity and liberation.

## I am Power

### Kristen Michala Storms

*I am not difficult. I'm exacting. Precise.*

—bell hooks

I hold to Angela Davis's definition of radicalism: "grasping things at the root." Radicalism serves as [one such] avenue to disrupt power and to create confrontational spaces for counter[ authors: is there something missing after "counter"? ] . As a young Black woman student activist at a SLAC, I have been positioned as a change agent by virtue of my existence, which I liken to a sort of latent power. My work has been the recognition, coaxing, and utilization of all that I am. SUA (and many other liberal arts

schools like it) are masters of domestication and “inclusion.” “Diversity,” “liberalism,” “multi-culturalism,” and other similarly coded rhetoric espoused by such institutions are a coalesced dog whistle politic that maneuvers BIPOC students into a passive, receiving status in the scheme of our education. Talks of “inclusion” amount to the disappearance of our [BIPOC student] radicalism into the dominant university power structure. This domestication renders us “safe” enough to be patched onto the university’s prized diversity quilt and restricts us to “food festivals” and “diversity fairs” in which “dialogue” can occur on our sanitized histories. If we are good Black and Brown children, the schools will add us to the campus culture but will do everything in their power to stop us from *changing* it. This has been my fight, my struggle for over half of my undergraduate career. Equipping myself with the knowledge of my people and peers to provide *myself* with the education that SUA would never give me: critical pedagogy.

Hence, I am the co-creator of CGES pedagogy. I have dedicated myself to such a radical academic pursuit in the face of the racist and powerful institutions instilled in liberal arts universities because *I* am powerful. My power cannot be conceptualized by the traditional language used to define “power.” Power is directional. It is not restricted to one direction (top-down) but comes from *all* directions. My directional power is comprised of the love and pain of my ancestors in me incarnate. It resides in the countless hours spent late at night organizing protests, demonstrations, and teach-ins to speak with the voices we were given at birth. It is imbued in the tears shed in hallways after verbal assaults from administrators and university presidents. I cobble my power because I believe all students should be able to hold their power with their own hands, uncompromised by the institution. CGES became an opportune project that is providing students with the language and frameworks that centralize and honor our BIPOC lived experiences as *knowledge* that has been simultaneously taken from and restricted to our communities. Such BIPOC student-dictated curriculum challenges the entire SUA community and most pointedly scared faculty, staff, and administrators. We did not wait to be given “approval” to implement and teach CGES. CGES strives to endow students with the self-means to confront and dismantle the structures which substantiate the reason why radical pedagogy is even needed. SUA believes itself to be a non-combatant in the inherent hegemonic university structures of power. SUA believes their flaccid notion of “peace” and “global citizenship” instead somehow absolves them of all responsibility to change the world. The *ideas* behind SUA are, is, and will only be a billion-dollar shoddy facade to direct attention away from what lies beneath the fringed peace without tangible, decolonial action. SUA’s values are used as a means to avoid *naming* the world in favor of romanticism and idealism that possess no praxis to lead this philosophy into reality. The single most pointed danger to SUA’s fringed peace is me. The students who mobilize their self-power to *name* and *name* over and over again. To grasp at the roots of our dreams and to *pull, pull, pull*

## Disciplining Diversity / Refusing Discipline

Aneil Rallin

*History shows us that the modern Western university was erected as an institution fundamentally antagonistic to every-day people in general and people of color in particular. In a way, then, you and I are the children of this institutional inheritance, the beneficiaries of a history that—as far as this place is concerned—has always presumed the inferiority of various constituencies of “the people,” constituencies based on differences of ability, class, race, gender, and sexuality. And so we find ourselves in institutions that—for the most part—have never cared to fully imagine us.*

—Roderick Ferguson

A world in despair, poor marginalized BIPOC communities disproportionately affected by the pandemic in this settler-colonial nation-state that I call “home,” a global vaccine apartheid unfolding, pervasive anti-Blackness on the rise even as the Black Lives Matter movement continues to galvanize, the resurgence of anti-Asian racisms and xenophobias, a university machinery that has never cared to fully imagine us and churns on. I am writing in the ruins of the grim futures before us to reflect on the ongoing student resistance and rebellion calling for the demolishing of imperialist capitalist white supremacist heteronormative patriarchy at our SLAC that prides itself on its “peace and human rights” mission and on “fostering a steady stream of global citizens committed to living a contributive life.” I find myself thinking of Roderick Ferguson’s *We Demand: The University and Student Protests*. In his introduction Ferguson notes: “I wrote this book because it is time we begin to see student protests not simply as disruptions to the normal order of things or as inconveniences to everyday life at universities. Student protests are intellectual and political moments in their own right, expanding our definitions of what issues are socially and politically relevant, broadening our appreciation of those questions and ideas that should capture our intellectual interests: issues concerning state violence, environmental devastation, racism, transphobia, rape, and settler colonialism” (10).

When students rise up to upend systems of oppression/disenfranchisement and decolonize education, we professors committed to liberation must rise up with students. We must unravel how universities function as institutions of imperial power and have adapted and continue to adapt “to the challenges of student activists with the discourse of diversity” and “promote the ideology of diversity as a way to construct student protests as the antithesis of diversity and tolerance rather than as calls for meaningful social transformation” (Ferguson 10). We must contest how discourses of diversity “have allowed the university to establish not only diversity initiatives designed to protect the campus against the ostensible disorders produced by activists but also police forces [‘public safety officers’ at our university] that will supposedly do the same” (Ferguson 10-11). We professors must refuse the lure of university schemes and banquets and felicitations and

rewards designed to control us, to constrain us from working in solidarity with engaged activist students against the university as imperial project and from allying with students striving to lead us into dismantling university structures that sustain global capitalist white supremacist heteronormative patriarchy and its yearnings.

My SLAC has a documented history of persevering anti-Black and other racisms and promoting white supremacy. BIPOC students at my SLAC finally catch our campus administrators' attention when they carry out a direct action in November 2019, a silent protest during a recruitment event for high school seniors and juniors, an anguished cry expressing the suffocation BIPOC students experience on our campus and calling for immediate revolution ("Students protest"). The university shuts down for an afternoon of soul-searching. My skepticism about such predictable gestures prevents me from attending the soul-searching. Upper-level administrators shed tears, vow to do better, pledge to listen to the students. These empty gestures turn out to mean asking BIPOC students to repeatedly explain/relive the causes of their anguish and justify their demands for curricular and other reforms. The students organize potent presentations and consciousness-raising sessions, direct actions and protests, an unforgettable students of color coalition conference, linking these particular struggles with the long history of liberation struggles across the world, inviting professors to join their struggles. A number of us professors join forces with the students only to have BIPOC student demands and labors categorically dismissed and/or co-opted by administrators and more than a few faculty colleagues.

Telltale signal of how our supposedly progressive SLAC seeks to maintain the liberal white supremacist imperial project comes courtesy of the announcement of a new Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Human Rights on our campus. This Center is established top-down quickly by the newly ordained president in response to the student uprising on our campus, but without consultation with (actually with hostile disregard of) the BIPOC students or professors working in solidarity with the students. The university conspires with some faculty to co-opt BIPOC students' demands/labors and domesticate BIPOC students' radical agendas under the pretext of promoting diversity through the form of this Center. The president appoints two co-chairs of the Center—a white male faculty member with a reputation for faithfully backing the president's wishes and the university's neoliberal mission (platitudes around human rights and global citizenship) and a newly hired (without an open search) Black male administrator (installed also as "vice president for mission integration") with as far as one can discern no prior work-related history on critical issues around race.

Statements issued by the co-chairs tell us everything we need to know about the Center's domesticated agendas: "race has been a problem in every single country, but people don't know about it...we have the opportunity to remind those who wouldn't have any idea...when you talk about things as entrenched as racism or sexism, the way to start to turn the tide the other way is to create institutions that live on and educate people regardless of their background" ("Soka's Center"). *Really?* Ah, yes, the benign

promotion of any and all education as liberation rather than liberation as political project—intellectual and material. The revolution that BIPOC students are demanding and deserve—that we all deserve—gets transformed into the palatable form of a Center that will, the university president proclaims, "carry out dialogue." It will function (like most such centers) largely as a programming body, a mechanism that conjures up change while keeping intact the university's white supremacist structural underpinnings.

The BIPOC student activism on our campus have laid bare the lies of liberalism and our SLAC—how it preserves the status quo through its embrace of global racial capitalist interests under the guise of global citizenship and via the white imagination of university stakeholders, including many of my shameful faculty colleagues. "The pressing task," Denise Ferreira da Silva reminds us, "is to engage the racial as a modern political strategy" (xxxv) that seeks to regulate BIPOC lives. As our BIPOC student leaders are teaching us, we have to completely reorganize the world, and that means reorganizing our university. We who are committed to this work may be beaten and weary but we will not succumb to the machinations of our SLAC that strives to discipline our BIPOC minds/bodies/lives into submission, sustain empire, regulate and defang our demands for transformative structural change.

## Anti-Imperialist Praxis through Communion

### Jordyn Solidum-Saito

*Despite the edge, there is still joy and laughing. There are always children running around—always laughing. Always talking. We are connecting and speaking as family. It is this which sustains us. Part of this occupation is the refusal to believe they will win, a refusal to let this place be anything, but joyful*

- From my journal dated July 17th 2018, at Pu'u'honua o Pu'u'huluhulu, Mauna Wākea, the day 17 kupuna, Native Hawaiian elders, were arrested by the State of Hawai'i for protecting Mauna A Wākea from desecration.

I return to SUA in the fall of 2018, feeling like a shell of a person. The prior school semester, the university space felt almost promising. I forged deep political bonds, something I had never known on campus, which gave way to a pulse. This new sense of possibility worked contradictory to the dominant feeling of alienation. Having spent the summer organizing in deep communion with the masses of where I come from—Hawai'i—I feel an acute rage for the university's stringent investment in imperialism, settler-colonialism, patriarchy, and white supremacy. This is a familiar feeling to most students who come to elite schools carrying the chasm of class difference between their shoulder blades.

*For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity.*

— Frantz Fanon

The summer of 2018 commanded me to view the world within its formulaic contexts. It was spent organizing, a labor that is deeply devalued in the academy as it contradicts the values of individualism and threatens the organization of power. My mentor and I immersed ourselves in the lives of the most marginalized women in our community. We visited prisons, remote domestic violence sanctuaries, and outer islands to learn and center their needs within the metropole. This work was heavy and intense, although it was only the beginning. On July 16th I found myself in a pickup truck on my way to Mauna A Wākea. I traveled out to deliver a dear friend of mine thermal clothing as she was one of the first to travel to the sovereign Pu'uhonua o Pu'uhuluhulu, where Native Hawaiians had set up a community to block the construction of a 30 meter telescope which would desecrate a sacred sight and destroy an entire ecosystem. The days I was present marked the largest police operation in the history of Hawai'i (Inouye). I was there to witness the mass arrest of beloved elders and present when an entire community was threatened with the use of an LRAD, a military grade weapon capable of breaking eardrums. Witnessing this violence solidified within me what I only knew intellectually: *that the interest of two classes will ultimately result in violent struggle, and that the ruling class will spare none in their quest to monopolize power.*

*The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it.*

—Karl Marx

My mentors from home always reminded me that while academics can “spit theory all day,” if they cannot use their theory to change the terrain of struggle, they are not revolutionaries. My work grounded in Hawai'i lay bare the truth of our movement at university: that nothing we wanted would be given to us and every point of contention would be met with conflict and standoff. The logics of liberalism will always obscure class relations. These logics tell us that if we ask politely, say the magic word, and beg the ruling class might spare us our lives. Liberalism both obscures and deeply entrenches us into social systems, convincing us that one day we will be granted freedom by our oppressors. If you speak to organizers in the community, those who are most marginalized, those who have little left to lose, they will tell you that these theatrics mean nothing.

Grounded in this reality, it is our responsibility as student organizers to create economies of care and intellectualism (grounded in those who came before us) as we ourselves would never be legitimized by the apparatus which wanted us lifeless. And that is what we did. Every available opportunity, including the majority of our meals and evenings, was spent in communion with one another. This sometimes meant planning, analyzing, and principled debate. Praxis demands we bring our people in. It is a laborious intelligence that requires trust in one another. We work to include every student and all of our people into this intelligence. Our tenacity was visible by the huge risks we took: occupying the board of trustees room,

blocking a room, and other forms of direct action. Yet the vast majority of our labor was unseen. Despite the further marginalization of this work, we knew that in the midst of an economic and ecological collapse, when the university sent students home back into communities ravaged by empire's necropolitics, the knowledge of how to build a resistance premised on an economy of care were the skills students needed. The reality of a bloodthirsty empire demands we be ruthless with our survival, and by extension our communion.

## Activism and Participatory Activism

### Professor X

The demands raised by our students targeted and exposed one of the sites of power of the university administration—decision making. Our university's mission and programs encourage students to voice their opinions, to “express themselves,” to become “global citizens,” but the administration has systematically kept students from key decision bodies. Such stonewalling reads as hypocrisy at best, and as a concerted effort to disempower students at worst. We have seen students heralded as agents of change until they question the foundations of our failing empire and its institutions. Faculty allies firmly believe that educational institutions should provide the necessary spaces for participatory decision-making in order to support each individual's right to political expression and/or their demands for change. The scholarship and documentation of the Civil Rights Movements (often celebrated on paper by neoliberal administrators) should serve as guiding principles in classrooms to craft strategies to fight against injustice and systemic racism. The writings of Black and Latinx activists have always given teachers the necessary historical grounding to advocate for social change, for economic justice, and for the end of white supremacy. By repressing this legacy, or by commodifying it, the neoliberal university hinders students who might strive to conceive of alternatives to the dire reality that condemns millions to poverty.

Students' activism has challenged, and continues to challenge, the positionality of faculty, who do not represent students' diverse histories in their classrooms, nor their aspirations and urgency to change the world. Students are often not treated as scholars, researchers, peers, or members of a collective, seeking to find urgent answers to the needs and demands of their communities. On the contrary, more than once during the protests on our campus, students were reminded in meetings with faculty and administration, of their “responsibility” to conform to often nebulous definitions of “appropriate behavior”: in other words, a student who listens and learns but does not question or challenge; a student who celebrates the institution's accomplishments but does not demand curricular changes nor question allocations of resources; a student who respects (uncritically) an instructor's “expertise” to the subordination of their own.

During the last two years, as a group of students worked tirelessly to build a Critical Global Ethnic Studies concentration, they were made painfully aware that

university programs are not shaped by the needs and desires of a new generation but by the structures of power which uphold a vision of the university according to financial interests and public reputation. As David Harvey reminded us, neoliberalism is only interested in granting rights or freedoms to those “whose income, leisure and security need no enhancing” (38). Neoliberalism represses solidarity movements by championing the fear-based discourse that there is no alternative, that there is no other way of doing things. The neoliberal university is committed to domesticating a new generation of scholars, many of whom come from communities who have experienced the violent occupation of their lands by colonial or imperial forces, who are angered by the strategic inaction (or cultural and material appropriation) of administrators and faculty who profit from backroom negotiations, corrupt promotion proceedings, and unilateral decision making.

The neoliberal university undermines its students’ academic and personal growth by not letting them devise new strategies for survival. As the university was beginning to plan the twenty-year celebration of its founding, students mobilized because they wanted to be part of a much-needed transformation, one that could prepare the institution to respond to an ongoing crisis of inequality, poverty, and racism facing all but the most wealthy in the US. Their demands and hope, voiced insistently and with all the weight of their historical precision, were given lip service but, ultimately, the response was received by student activists as timid, insufficient, and disingenuous.

What’s more, the marginalization of and disciplinary threats against activist students, when their activities intensified, were deployed on our campus. Administrators used hurtful and traumatizing language to discourage students from publicly restating their demands, attempting to break up the often frail solidarity that characterizes social movements. Ploys to recruit supporters to defend the “status quo” were also utilized, and those loyal were rewarded to the detriment of the university’s social justice mission. Students have stated that: “We know and have re(lived) the reality that our liberation will not be found with the neoliberal university.” They are right! The historical validity of this affirmation is undeniable. It appears that students will only be able to conceive of worlds in which large portions of the population have a voice only outside of the neoliberal university. Cornel West has sharply described the dangers of corporate management in all facets of life, including academia: “Corporate power—with its plutocratic, patriarchal, and pigmentocratic realities—lessens the abilities of citizens and workers to have a meaningful voice in shaping their destiny” (viii).

## Choosing to Inherit Our Foremothers' Internationalism through Third World Studies

Victoria M. Huynh

*To arrive at proletarian class positions, the class instinct of proletarians only needs to be educated; the class instinct of the petty bourgeoisie, and hence of intellectuals, has, on the contrary, to be revolutionized.*

—Louis Althusser

When daughters of Third-Worlded peoples enter higher education, they must confront their role in US academia, the largest think tank for manufacturing consent for US aggression on their people. On one hand, to be *given* (un)freedom at the university, they must disavow the revolutions their people fought for and assimilate. On the other hand, the daughter who chooses internationalist struggle as her teacher, inherits an (im)possible task (Boggs 148). Dubbed the “guerilla intellectual” by Walter Rodney or the “new intellectual” by Antonio Gramsci, they must face the contradiction that is education for liberation or liberal reformism.

I am one of those daughters, and in our time co-leading this movement, my peers and I chose education for liberation. A daughter of the US war in Viet Nam and Cambodia, I searched for the work of revolutionaries amongst my people, who taught me that “there can be no revolution without revolutionary theory.” That we should not allow US academia to antagonize us from theoretical study—which is not confined to the university setting but is inseparable from struggle amongst the people—which centralizes struggle for concrete transformation outside of the university. Instead, I learned about the ways internationalist women before me repurposed education to create classrooms in every pocket of society for struggle. In particular, Viet, Cambodian, and Lao women studied political economy through underground workers-led classrooms, literacy campaigns for the youth, and political agricultural programs, all as the safekeepers of revolution from the home, hidden from the US-backed compradors. The Viet victory, in alignment with China, Korea, Cuba, and the anti-imperialist Global South over the American imperialists is the (feminist) internationalist legacy I chose to inherit.

### **Lesson #1: Student Movements Must Confront US Imperialism.**

My quest for knowledge was not one for individualist class ascension as the university would have it; it was the study of how to get each other free. In an Asian American Studies course, our first (and only) Ethnic Studies professor asked us to interrogate our placehood as diaspora-settlers of the US *empire* (and not the US as a nation). I learned that when Black, brown, and indigenous students before me dealt with this same reality in the 1960s, they articulated an internationalist response, calling for students to fight for self-determination in the internal colonies of the US and abroad. Rather than study to reify our belongingness to US empire, to the US university, we should study to challenge US imperialism altogether. It was not enough to live these experiences; we had to actively organize against the conditions that forced Americanness onto us in the first place. As a result, together my peers and I created deinstitutionalized underground spaces, finding political haven in cross-campus conferences and



community organizing meetings. We spent time building community with imperialized, communities of color organizers in Orange County and more. So that when our own student leadership of Black and Third-Worlded women converged, we made explicit that the push for Africana and Ethnic Studies needed to yield self-determination. We heeded Okiihiro's call for Third World Studies, not for "identity politics, multiculturalism, or intellectual affirmative action. Third World studies is not a gift of white liberals to benighted colored folk to right past wrongs; Third World studies is not a minor note in a grand symphony of US history" (1). Our Third World Studies would seek to redistribute resources to the communities and utilize knowledge to grow the power of the people, rather than build up individuals for class ascension.

### **Lesson #2: Student Movements Must Confront US Liberalism.**

But coming face to face with an institution practiced in its ability to strategically resolve what they reduced to "conflict" between administration and students, we watched the liberal SLAC dilute and gradually **(dis)recognize** our demands for CGES, Critical Black Studies faculty, and material BIPOC resources. I borrow from what Elizabeth Rubio calls liberal (mis)recognition, which describes how liberalism cannot make sense of organizing that exposes the violence of itself as the foundational ideology of capitalism, in which it reifies racialized, gendered categorization of people to dominate them. As the US did post-World War II to preserve the image of the benevolent US empire, the shift towards multiculturalism domestically also defines SUA's relations. While the liberal SLAC may recognize student demands for inclusion, equity, and representation, anything that challenges the violence of liberalism in itself, particularly when they are embodied by racialized, gendered actors, is (dis)recognized and diffused. Hence, to delegitimize our demands for a self-determined CGES concentration and center, they employed the violent caricaturization of the Black women in our leadership. In meeting rooms and in public announcements, they obligated leadership to empathize and tend to the administration and their "shortcomings," to help them "understand." Staff, faculty, and administration reassured us that they "appreciated" our labor. But our "inability" to pacify and *liberalize* ourselves to predetermined, domesticated liberal subject-caricatures of the "nonviolent" Mammy; the assimilated, docile Model Minority; and more... in turn, reeled in criticisms of our leadership's "violence," "terrorism," "overdramaticism," "irrationality." It reached the point that when the president announced his "new" initiatives in the summer, those around us encouraged us to celebrate... the violent appropriation and exploitation of our racialized, feminized labor without question or protest.

### **Lesson #3: US Imperialism is Not Safe from Femme-led Student Movements**

As principled self-criticism requires, there are endless ways we could have done differently. We confronted liberalism and watched it visibilize us for its needs—until we had strayed too far away from their offer for paradigmatic liberal belonging. But because we approximated the rejection of the settler university—identifying it for its roots in stolen land, imperialist knowledge production to sanctify war, the militarization of our communities, and more—we positioned ourselves as new intellectuals, as guerilla intellectuals. We came to understand that our fight for people's liberation can never be won within the university. Because we chose our foremothers' struggle against imperialism and its manifestations in this space, we most importantly—and unforgivingly—chose love for our people. There is a stronger front that has yet to [dialectically] emerge, as we did from the anti-imperialist pre-consciousness we inherited.

And time and time again: we would still choose liberation.

### **Grounding Movement in Community, Generating Power**

The tranquil and placid publicities of Soka University of America obfuscate a terrain of revolutionary struggle against a reactionary hegemony. In the current world order, where liberal multiculturalism and "non-confrontational" notions of peace are hailed as the penultimate markers of progress, our struggle, the struggle against a capitalist-racist-imperialist-heteropatriarchal university/empire, is that of the world's people. Although the specificities of our material conditions (a newly-built 20-year old already highly-ranked private SLAC with the second largest endowment per student in the US and a uniquely almost 50% "international" student demographic) may be distinctive, our struggles and experiences may nonetheless stimulate pedagogies of resistance under any number of conditions.

Although our ultimate goal of creating the Critical Global Ethnic Studies concentration at our SLAC was not realized, we were able to accomplish a great deal with our pedagogies of resistance. Our revolutionary power can be concretely measured by the changes we made in our university and the ways in which we forced our university to respond to demands. Our coordinated efforts garnered broad-based student and faculty support. Our student-organized conference had a turnout of over half the SUA student population; students' direct action shut down classes for a week and caused broad anxiety, especially among administrators and faculty; students were presented as intellectual authorities in front of the campus/administration/faculty on multiple occasions; our work resulted in the reorganization of student affairs, the hiring of a "manager for diversity initiatives and community building," a change in hiring protocols, and mandatory

implicit bias training. Even the erection of the illegitimate administrators' Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Human Rights is evidence of the threat of our revolutionary power.

Our highest valued returns however are non-material. Reviewing our institution as a stable entity rather than dialectically, or in constant flux between liberatory and reactionary forces, might give the illusion of an unmovable subjugation. Yet this could not be further from the truth. While the administrators' center is an effort to divert liberatory praxis (as are the moves to mandate implicit bias training and hire a diversity manager, discredited increasingly as superficial tools that improve optics rather than effect necessary revolutionary change), our ability to generate power can never be surrendered. The exercise and generation of power is one that took practice but amalgamated over time. First, in the exercising of our self-determination and the expression of our subjectivity as colonized subjects. Second, in the intentional building of networks and coalitions which linked struggles amongst students of multiple oppressions and backgrounds as well as faculty of different standings. Third, in the grounded praxis inspired by the love for our people—within and without the university. At each level, we risked our standing with the university. For many of us who attach our livelihood to the university, retaliation meant pushing the boundaries of our disposability. Still, we students and faculty chose solidarity and liberation. We made choices rooted in our own dignity as colonized subjects and in honor of our peoples. We forged practices grounded in our political ethical commitments and the love of our peoples. Our generation of community is neither bound to the university that has never cared to fully imagine us, nor does it end here.

## Acknowledgment

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