

“Charge of Bias Erupts Over a Course at Arizona State”

(New York Sun, October 7, 2005)

Full article is below these activities.

Reading Comprehension Questions:

1) From the title, what do you think this article will be about?

2) Please read paragraph 1 and 2, and answer the following questions:

a) What is the main idea of these paragraphs?

b) Give two examples that the writer uses in these paragraphs to support the main idea.

(Purpose of the exercise: to create awareness of paragraph organization and its relationship to the content conveyed)

3) Two organizations are mentioned in the text: ASU and FIRE. What do these acronyms stand for? What is the purpose of FIRE?

(Purpose: pay attention to the “participants” in a text and views they represent)

4) What does the word ‘this’ in the first sentence of paragraph 3 refer to?

(Purpose: to show the importance of reference words for the understanding of a text)

5) What was ASU’s response to FIRE’s demand?

6) What is the main idea that the example in paragraph 6 about a student’s complaint about a racial restriction illustrates?

(Purpose: create awareness to paragraph organization)

7) What does Prof. Nelson mean when he says in paragraph 10 that “his course is for a good cause”?

In what way, according to Prof. Nelson, can this course help “reverse hundreds of years of discrimination and repression against minority group” (para. 10)?

8) Which of the examples in the first two paragraphs becomes the focus of the discussion (=topic) of the whole text?

Journal Activities:

- 1) Construct a chart in which you will
 - a) Quote three utterances that you most relate to (i.e., that particularly caught your attention and that you found interesting)
 - b) Write these quotes in your own words
 - c) Explain why you chose them (i.e., how you feel about them, do you agree or disagree with them etc.)

Quotation	Paraphrase	Response/analysis
1.		
2.		
3.		

- 2) In paragraph three we are told that FIRE wrote to the president of ASU, Michael Crow, in demand to lift the restriction on the registration to Prof. Nelson's course. You are a member of FIRE. Please write this letter. Make sure to include a clear thesis statement in the introduction as well as reasons, in the body paragraphs, why the restriction should be lifted.

- 3) Please summarize briefly FIRE's, ASU's and Prof. Nelson's views regarding the issue discussed in the text.
- 4) Do you think that discrimination against a minority should be rectified or reversed by discriminating against the group that was responsible for the original injustice? Explain.
- 5) How would you suggest "to reverse years of discrimination and repression against a minority group" (para. 10)? Please write your answer in the form of a well-organized paragraph containing a main idea, examples and a concluding sentence.

Charge of Bias Erupts Over a Course at Arizona State

By Jacob Gershman

For years, G .Lynn Nelson has taught his freshman composition course the only way he knows how. Instead of sitting in rows, students gather in a "feather circle." Instead of sitting through lectures, students pass around a feather and share personal stories.

And instead of allowing just any student to register for the course, the associate professor of English at Arizona State University explicitly restricted enrollment to Native American students. "For Native Americans only" read a description of his composition course on his faculty home page.

A leading civil liberties group, Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, brought to light his long standing policy of excluding students of the other races from his composition course. The group announced on Wednesday that it had written to the president of ASU, Michael Crow, demanding that the university lift the racial barrier, but said he had not received any response from the administration.

"I can't think of any possible way that they would be allowed to do this by law," the director of legal and public advocacy for FIRE, Greg Lukianoff, said. "We got rid of racial segregation for a reason."

A spokesman for ASU, Virgil Renzulli, told The New York Sun that Mr. Nelson's course is "open to everybody" and that, until it received FIRE's letter late last month, the university was not aware that the professor had made explicit to students that only Native Americans were welcome. He said the university immediately ordered Mr. Nelson to remove the "for Native Americans only" notice on his Web page and allow all students to register.

"There may have been some misunderstanding" between the university and the professor, Mr. Renzulli said.

It was the second time in three years that FIRE has alerted the university that one of its courses was racially restricted. In 2002, it contacted the school after hearing a complaint from a student about a first-year seminar course on Navajo history that was listed in a university catalog as “limited to Native American students,” according to FIRE officials. The course was taught by another professor. The university immediately lifted the restriction, the group said.

Mr. Nelson told the Sun that he has discouraged non-Native Americans from registering for his course for more than a decade and said it was a “mystery” to him why the university was now asking him to change his policy. His exclusion of students of other races was not strictly enforced, he said. If a non-Native American student wanted to register, he would let them in “with the understanding that the assignments were Native American themed.”

Mr. Nelson often teaches two or three sections of English 101 and 102, which are required for freshman and are available to students in a regular format in many sections. He typically teaches about 20 students in each section.

ASU has 1,271 Native American undergraduates, many of whom come from Navajo, Hopi, and Apache reservations. Like other universities with large Native American populations, ASU has been struggling to curb dropout rates. Less than a quarter of Native American students at ASU graduate within six years, university officials said.

Mr. Nelson said his course is designed for Native American students who would “easily get discouraged” in larger lecture courses, where they would be asked to write about “largely Anglo-Saxon topics.” His course, he said, “is for a good cause” and is his small effort to reverse hundreds of years of discrimination and repression against a minority group.

“We’re turning around what’s been done historically for 400 years, he said.

In his writings, Mr. Nelson describes himself as a force for peace because he encourages his students to share personal stories in writing assignments that he believes relieve tension and encourage social harmony. Untold stories, he argues, translate themselves into violent acts.

His experiences with his students have turned him against traditional forms of writing. “I must confess, I have come to care little for the kind of writing-critical, left-brained, technical writing- that I was primarily trained to teach and to produce,” he wrote in an essay titled “Writing From the Feather Circle.”

He includes in his essay a sample writing assignment for his composition courses:

“Tell me a story- and then tell me another- and I will tell you mine- and we will sit in the feather circle and listen carefully to each other. And then we will write thank-you notes to each other for gifts given in these stories. And we will continue doing this- until we heal ourselves, until everything begins to become properly precious, until we stop killing each other and destroying the Earth, until we care for it all so much that we ache, until we and the world are changed.”