



**“Dear White Student Who Doesn’t  
Want to Talk About Politics in the  
Writing Classroom:” A Love Letter**



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***Dear Professor Manthey,***

***I am writing to tell you that I was very uncomfortable in class this past Thursday. I would appreciate it if we refrain from using class time to discuss politics, especially since not everyone in the class has the same views and opinions. Thank you for your respect and understanding.***

# Draft 1: Fear

***Dear White Student Who Doesn't Want  
to Talk About Politics in the Writing  
Classroom:***

***I am so sorry that you felt  
uncomfortable. I promise not to bring  
up politics again if you promise not  
to file a complaint against me.***

***Sincerely,  
Katie***

**PS**

*I'm serious about the complaint thing. I'm a junior faculty member and that might really hurt my chances at getting tenure—especially since you are a legacy student. Subsequently, if you could make sure to not mention this to your mom and aunt who are on the alumnae board, that would be great. I have office hours Mondays from 2-5 if you want to talk more about this.*

Context

# Draft 2: Anger

***Dear White Student Who Doesn't Want  
to Talk About Politics in the  
Writing Classroom:***

***How incredibly privileged are you  
that the election results don't  
scare you? How can you send me this  
email after you watched one of your  
classmates break down in tears  
because she was worried about her  
family being deported?***



***How can you send me this email when  
your queer and nonbinary Salem  
siblings talked about feeling unsafe  
in America today?***

***How dare you measure your own  
discomfort against the lived  
realities of your peers.***

***Your comfort is a barrier to our learning. Your comfort is a barrier to our collective growth. You and your desire for comfort are the real problem. Apathy is the height of privilege.***

***Your comfort is not more important than the futures of your classmates. Your comfort is not more important than the lives of your classmates.***

***It is critically important that you understand how much power you actually have here. If people like you gave a shit about other people maybe the world wouldn't be so fucked up.***

***I have office hours Monday from 2-5 if you want to stop by and talk about this more.***

***Sincerely,  
Katie***

# Positionalities & Feminist Teaching

# Draft 3: Balance

***Dear White Student Who Doesn't Want  
to Talk About Politics in the  
Writing Classroom:***

***Thanks so much for the email. I  
appreciate the courage it takes to  
speak up, especially when you are  
uncomfortable.***

***I agree that it is important to remember that not everyone has the same political views, and I'm sorry if the conversation seemed to focus on one perspective.***

***My goal with that time during Thursday's class was to give people a chance to talk through anything that might be in the way of them being able to focus on P4.***

*This wasn't meant to close off other kinds of conversation or make people uncomfortable, but rather to point out the importance of community, civil discourse, and being analytical with source material.*

*I see all of these as central to not just the work of our class, but also the larger mission of Salem college.*



***I don't plan to dedicate any more class time to politics, but I do believe that the personal is always political (and vice versa). This means that these conversations might organically arise in ways tangential to class time (in small groups, outside of class, in class discussions).***

***If you would like to talk more  
about this (and tips for engaging  
with them or changing the topic in  
a rhetorically effective way)  
please let me know. I have office  
hours Monday from 2-5.***

***I want to make it very clear that I hear you and respect your discomfort. I will do all that I can to make the classroom a safe space for everyone. Please continue to keep me posted on how you are feeling/how things are going.***

***Thanks again for speaking out.***

***Katie***

# Frustration & Failure

# Draft 4: Love

***Dear White Student Who Doesn't  
Want to Talk About Politics in the  
Writing Classroom:***

***I hear you. I see you. Most  
importantly, as one human to  
another, I love you and I want  
better for you and for the world.  
So let's talk.***

***We are both white cisgender women.  
Here at Salem, that means that we  
have a lot of privilege.***

***While it's my job to make sure  
everyone has a safe space to grow,  
it's your job to investigate things  
that make you uncomfortable.***

***I need you to sit with your feelings of discomfort from Thursday and think about where they come from and where in your body they live.***

***Then look around you: who are you in relation to everyone else? What experiences have you had that shape your worldview? How might these be different from your classmates?***



***While your choice to vote for Trump might not have many effects on your personal day-to-day life, it has real effects on the lived experiences of the humans around you.***

***You have more power than you realize.***

*As a rhetorician, it's my job to teach you first that this power exists, and second how to use it to make the world better.*

*At the end of the day, I'm not trying to change what you think, but I am trying to change how you think. It's my job to call you in, and I need you to be willing to meet me halfway.*

***I have office hours from 2-5 on  
Mondays. I'll bring cupcakes and we  
can talk about how to change the  
world.***

***Because if we don't do it together,  
things will never change.***

***Love,  
Katie***

Thank you