

August 18, 2016

Dear Parents and Students:

We are pleased to welcome you back to another exhilarating academic year at AMES. No doubt your student--and maybe you--wondered why he/she is enrolled in a class called Literature and Composition Foundations. As you know, and as we believe, AMES is different and great because of that difference. It is a school that celebrates diversity and that is committed to helping each student be prepared for post-secondary opportunities. From the beginning, AMES has recruited students who are motivated and who want more out of their educational experiences. Being part of this learning community offers both students and teachers great rewards but also requires a willingness to push oneself and to take risks. Your student has been nominated for this class by his/her teachers because he/she fits that model--a motivated student who, if willing to take a risk by taking this class, can become better prepared for success in his/her post-secondary pursuits.

As educators, we take seriously the responsibility that comes from working at a school like AMES. Many of our students will be first generation college-goers and traditionally the odds have been stacked against these students. Working to ensure a diverse student body can have access to and succeed in post-secondary education requires a systematic approach. But it requires more than that. AMES is built on the philosophical pillars of relevance, relationships, and rigor. All three need to be present in the classroom for students to succeed. Over the last five years, the English department has worked to develop and implement a coordinated program to develop college-ready readers and writers. Although by most metrics students leave AMES college ready, there are unfortunately some who do not make much progress in reading and writing--essential college skills. It is still early on in your student's AMES career. We are convinced that the transition from ninth to tenth grade is a crucial time because if your student gets help and practice, then he/she will be able to develop the prerequisite reading and writing skills to more able to fully engage in the AMES experience. This includes being prepared to take U of U writing and other college classes during senior year, a tremendous opportunity to not only become college ready but to be college ready. This preparation ultimately means a huge financial savings to the student and his/her family.

As your student can tell you after today's class, this class is going to be different. This class is a risk for us as teachers and it will be for the students as well. Ultimately, this class is an experiment to see if, by intervening early enough, we can help students more fully participate in and be prepared for all the opportunities that AMES offers. You should know that we don't know if this will work, but you should also know that we were very careful in the selection of students for this class. Your student's teachers believe he/she is capable of great things and will benefit from a class that strives to push and develop specific reading and writing skills through critical thinking around relevant topics. We feel passionately that your student has something unique to offer the class and that the class has something that will benefit your student in his/her educational pursuits.

At AMES the road to college-readiness has always been a balance of rigor, relationships, and relevance. This class will blend all three of these foundational elements by presenting relevant topics from current events and expecting students to examine, read, discuss, and write about diverse perspectives concerning these events. This rigorous format will push your student to continually practice essential reading and writing skills. Student to student as well as student to teacher relationships will be created so that sensitive topics can be discussed and explored in a mature and respectful way. Exposing students to real-world current events and multiple perspectives surrounding these events will give them the opportunity to practice their developing skills in a relevant fashion.

For example, our first unit will cover the challenges of policing in modern society. The relevance of this issue is undeniable and will allow students to enter the conversation from many different angles. During the first weeks of class, students will read, write, and discuss topics like race, media, social media, and the expectations of public servants. These are sensitive topics that will elicit many different emotions. Students will be expected to explore these issues from multiple perspectives and arrive at their own conclusions. Great care will be taken to make sure students are exposed to a variety of events and perspectives. All students are expected to critically read and consider all viewpoints presented both by class materials as well as by other students in the class. While students encounter the varying angles brought forth by current events, they will track the evolution of their thoughts as reading, discussion, and class experiences deepen their understanding. Part of the experiment of this class is to see if a systematic exploration of such issues while focusing on specific writing and reading strategies will improve student outcomes while creating a passion for learning. This class at times will use texts and film that have mature content.

We are excited about taking this journey with you and your student. If you and your student are willing to undertake the opportunities and challenges this class will provide, indicate on the attached paper and provide the requisite communication information. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact us. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Gary Bigelow

Amy Noyce

Yes, \_\_\_\_\_ (printed student name) is committed to Literature and Composition Foundations.

\_\_\_\_\_ (Student Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Parent Name printed)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Parent Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Parent preferred email)