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October 25, 2005, 8:32 a.m.

## Arizona Segregation

What's this professor doing on the state payroll?

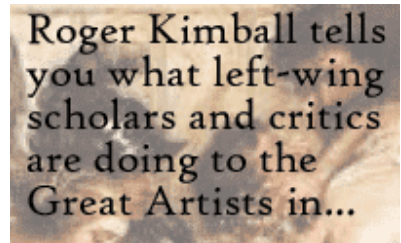
By Mark Goldblatt

**F**reshman Composition is a required course at virtually every liberal arts college in the United States — not only to ensure the grammatical correctness of students' writing. Students are also supposed to practice thesis and support, learn argumentation techniques, and generally hone the logical skills expected by their teachers across the social sciences and humanities.

Such skills are basic to the intellectual life of educated adults, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. So a mini-scandal erupted earlier this month when the [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education \(FIRE\)](#) discovered that

Arizona State University Professor G. Lynn Nelson was restricting enrollment in his Freshman Comp classes to American Indians. After FIRE alerted the school's administration to the restriction, which appeared on Nelson's faculty homepage, Nelson was immediately forced to remove it — though he found it a "mystery" why the controversy had arisen since he'd spent a

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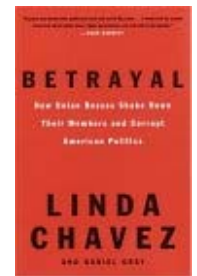
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decade discouraging non-Indians from registering.

The fact that 50 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, a college professor would be mystified by objections to his running a segregated classroom speaks volumes about his own intellectual competence. Even more unnerving is Nelson's statement of his teaching philosophy: "In her book *The Peaceable Classroom*, Mary Rose O'Reilley poses the question, 'Can we teach English in such a way that people stop killing each other?' My primary interest in my life and my teaching is in answering this question with a demonstrable 'Yes.' My classes seek to help people discover within themselves the intertwined power of literacy and peace."

Which raises the question of what he's actually doing in the classroom. Here, in Nelson's words, is a typical assignment: "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 then we will do it again, anew. 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."

Which raises the further question: Is there no professional accountability at Arizona State University? Since we're talking about a state school, Arizona voters ought to ask just that question.

— Mark Goldblatt teaches at the State University of New York's Fashion Institute of Technology. *Africa Speaks*, is a satire of black urban culture.

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