

14 January 2016

Oklahoma State Department of Education  
2500 N. Lincoln Blvd.  
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

Dear Oklahoma State Department of Education:

It is a pleasure to write in support of the new Oklahoma English Language Arts Standards being submitted to the Oklahoma legislature for approval. I have read the Standards in draft form and have had ample occasion to think about their direction and potential impact. I believe that the new Standards will raise the level of student preparation in the ELA area, and I am pleased to anticipate the enhanced knowledge base and sophistication that will be evident in students coming from Oklahoma high schools to attend The University of Oklahoma and study literature and the arts. I applaud the work of the ELA team at the Oklahoma State Department of Education and have great regard for the work that they have done in creating these Standards. I am eager to see those Standards adopted and believe that everyone in the state will benefit from this work to set higher and more sophisticated Standards for educating tomorrow's young leaders.

I came upon early drafts of the ELA Standards in fall 2015 when, through the Southcentral Comprehensive Center at the University of Oklahoma, I began reading drafts of the Standards. I was impressed with the rigor of what I saw and the way that the new Standards would better prepare students to be citizens, advanced learners, and participants in the work force. I especially noted the way that the new ELA Standards focused on contemporary multi-media texts and the needs of contemporary students to decipher digital and various online texts. The Standards did an amazing job of identifying ELA skills that would enable students to encounter and decipher any number of new texts as well as be prepared to interpret emerging texts arising from various parts of the culture. The Oklahoma Standards are truly trying to create competencies for the twenty-first century and to make sure that students who graduate from Oklahoma high schools will be effective citizens in the world that they will live in.

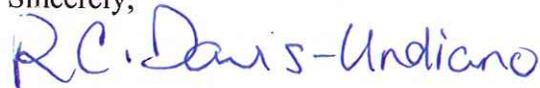
As I came to understand the potential impact of the new ELA Standards, I saw that I could anticipate seeing more sophisticated and culturally aware students in the English courses that I teach at the University of Oklahoma. I could see that students graduating under the new Standards will be knowledgeable about English grammar and rhetoric but also about multi-media texts that are emerging in digital environments and making new demands on those seeking to understand their world. I am excited about being the professor for such students and believe that the quality of common education in our state will be lifted.

One lack that I saw in an early draft of the Standards was relatively little attention being given to developing skills related to research papers and the preparation of formal term and research assignments. I voiced this concern to the Standards Writing Team, as I believe others in the state did, as well. Recently, I had occasion to read the revised ELA Standards that incorporate suggestions and critiques offered in the last several months. I was delighted to see that the development of skills related to doing research and writing research papers was now a central and strong component of the new Standards. To my astonishment, I saw that under the new Standards students will be clarifying research questions as early as the first grade. From that point forward, in every grade, Oklahoma students will be gaining hands-on experience in acquiring various research and writing skills. In the revised Standards, this attention to doing research and writing research papers is a well sequenced and well planned effort.

By the junior and senior years of high school, students will be bringing together various skills acquired throughout their education to write challenging and impressive formal research papers. I could not be more pleased with the way that the writers of the new Standards took into consideration what they heard from teachers and professors in the state and revised the Standards accordingly to give research and the writing of research papers the greatest emphasis ever. The result will be ELA Standards that are particularly, and possibly uniquely, strong in the area of preparing students to develop the research and writing skills that will enable them to be a success in higher education, the work place, and professional life.

As a professor of English and ELA at the University of Oklahoma, I am proud to see the direction that ELA Standards are going in my state. I fully support the efforts of the Oklahoma Academic Standards Writing Team and the Oklahoma State Department of Education in creating exceptional ELA standards. I hope that those Standards can be adopted as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



Robert Con Davis-Undiano  
Executive Director  
Neustadt Professor  
Presidential Professor