

AAS 301 Writing for African-American Studies

Fall 2005

Wednesday, 6:00 to 8:40 p.m., 202 Pray-Harrold

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Course Description: AAS 301 teaches students how to construct quality research papers for graduate, scholarly, and professional work and to produce advanced knowledge in the field of African American studies.

Rationale for General Education Writing Intensive Designation: Writing intensive courses are designed to provide students with the opportunity to continue to develop their writing through engagement with disciplinary strategies and conventions. Writing for African American Studies is designed to teach students how to construct quality research papers for graduate, scholarly, and professional work while producing advanced knowledge in the field of African American studies. The course exposes students to a wide array of scholarly journals, databases, and authoritative resources in the field. Students will learn how to identify appropriate sources to use in the research process, and they will learn to synthesize information from numerous and diverse sources. The course guides students through a step-by-step procedure leading to a refined, professional research paper that is theoretically and substantively rooted in the field of African American studies. Moreover, the research product will utilize one of several scholarly conventions used to produce and convey knowledge in the field. The course offers students the opportunity to refine and defend their own work and to constructively critique the work of others.

Students should understand that this course extends beyond what they have experienced as normal procedures and standards for writing research papers. We will pay much closer attention to every phase of the research process. Multiple revisions, close one-on-one attention to detail with the instructor, peer review and critique, and the requirement to defend your work via an oral presentation of the final research product are required. Students must learn and execute a system of data collection and storage that provides for the synthesis of data from an unlimited number of sources. Every phase of the research and writing process will be made transparent and scrutinized, including, but not limited to, constructing the research topic, maintaining a working outline, taking notes from diverse sources, identifying and applying appropriate conventions in documentation, including how, when and what to document. Moreover, given the interdisciplinary

character of African American studies, this course will help students to develop an approach to constructing the research paper that is adaptable to diverse situations. AAS 301 serves to elevate and demystify the process of producing a high-quality research paper so that students can become better self-learners, produce knowledge in the field if they choose to do so, or comfortably adapt their research and writing skills to other professional and/or scholarly endeavors.

Outcomes

- Develop and employ successful, flexible writing and reading strategies that support sustained inquiry in a discipline.

Utilizing a common area of focus, students will carve out specific research topics that are rooted conceptually and theoretically within the foundational concerns of African American studies. Foundational concerns refer to enduring categories of thought that emerge from the contextual elements of the African-American and African-diasporic experiences. For example, the problems of historical discontinuity, omission, and distortion; the problem of double-consciousness; the expropriation and distortion of Black cultural forms; the role of African cultural survivals in African-American cultural formations; the problem of maladaptations to racial-cultural oppression; the challenges of economic dependency and underdevelopment; the significance of revitalization and pluralistic movements; the examination of problems related to the reconstruction of identity and the development of a positive self-image; and so on. Development of the research paper will involve learning strategies to locate relevant authoritative sources and to identify debates, issues, and perspectives germane to the research project. The general focus provided in the attached syllabus, from which students will develop their research topics, is African American expressive culture from 1865 to the 1970s.

Students will engage in the following writing tasks:

1. After preliminary reading and discussion of relevant scholarly articles in the field, students will construct topics for their research that will be refined over the course of the semester. Periodically, this process will become the focus of in-class discussion and revision.
2. Students will construct an annotated bibliography of a minimum of twenty-five sources (primary and secondary) relevant to their selected topics. The annotated bibliography will become the foundation for data collection. Students will have the opportunity to revise this document as they gain greater clarity regarding the focus of their research and their informational needs. Students may add or subtract sources for their papers at a later date and are not limited by the bibliographic assignment, which is intended as a heuristic aid. The annotated bibliography will facilitate in-class discussion around locating and identifying relevant, authoritative sources. It will help students to learn and pay attention to various conventions in documentation, formatting, and mechanics related to punctuation and grammar. The annotations will require students to capture the core utility of each data source and to convey this in a succinct and straightforward manner. Sharing and revising these materials in class will help students to learn to pay attention to detail and to form strategies for refining their writing.
3. Students will construct working outlines that will become the basis for periodic class discussion. Students will save the various stages of their outlines so that they can see how the central themes and key points of their outlines mature and gain greater clarity

over time. The major points of the outline will become the basis by which students organize their notes in preparation for the various phases of writing the research paper. These outlines will become periodically the focus of in-class revision and critique.

4. Students will learn to construct bibliography and note cards, which will become the periodic object of in-class activity and critique throughout the course of the semester. This activity will help students to develop a systematic approach to data collection that can accommodate an unlimited number of sources and to learn conventions for recording bibliographic material from varied materials. In-class dialogue and one-on-one feedback from the instructor will help students to develop an efficient and effective note-taking process. Students will learn to integrate this process with their working outlines in order to produce drafts of the research paper.
5. Students will review and critically assess a major text pertinent to the general research theme of the course. This assignment will help the instructor to determine the writing proficiency of individuals in the class. It will further serve as the basis to address such issues as topic sentences, sentence and paragraph construction, style and voice, development of ideas, organization, description, analysis, and so on. Review and discussion of the text will serve to ground students in an important body of knowledge that can inform their individual projects. Moreover, in their reviews and in in-class discussions, students will be asked to identify key areas of concern that might constitute foundational issues in African American studies. Consequently, students will learn the importance of theory development in relationship to the research process and epistemological elements underlying the production of knowledge in the field.

The text selected for student review, given the current thematic focus of the course, is *Black Manhattan* by James Weldon Johnson. Scholars in the field understand that this is one of the most important non-fictional works to emerge from the Harlem Renaissance. All works that examine the evolution of a Black theatrical workforce; the history of Black traditions in theater, musical comedy, and popular songwriting; the development of the community of Harlem; the emergence of the Harlem Renaissance; and more, must draw upon this seminal work. James Weldon Johnson, a lawyer, was the first African American to serve as secretary of the NAACP. A prominent and highly respected poet and novelist, Johnson also produced groundbreaking collections of African American poetry and spirituals. Johnson's novel, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, was central to a smaller cultural flowering among African Americans that predated the Harlem Renaissance. With his brother, J. Rosamond Johnson, a noted songwriter, James Weldon Johnson wrote "Lift Every Voice and Sing," widely recognized as the African American national anthem.

6. Students will produce multiple drafts of the research paper. This process will be monitored by one-on-one interaction with the instructor, in-class discussion and revision, and peer review. Systematic examination and refinement of sentence

structure, formatting, description, analysis, organization, documentation, and the like will emerge from this activity. Students will learn to move from their note cards to draft construction. When, how, and what to document, as well as plagiarism, will become paramount issues. Students will learn how to appropriately integrate applicable information from extensive and diverse sources into their narratives and to refine the research paper for insight, organization, and clarity.

7. Students will learn to reduce their major research paper to a short oral presentation. Moving from the larger paper to a brief set of notes, students will present the main findings of their work to their peers for critique and evaluation. Students must defend their work. They will be asked to talk about the research and writing process, the relevance and quality of the sources they used, and the basis for their conclusions.

This outcome will be assessed through how well students select and refine a topical area, develop and implement a working outline, construct an annotated bibliography to support the research process, and implement an appropriate system of data collection (the effective utilization of note and bibliography cards) and storage to support an in-depth and detailed research paper.

- Use writing strategies that achieve the purposes for writing and address the expectations of audiences within a disciplinary context.

The course will provide extensive exposure to past and current intellectual traditions in the field and to the critical relevance of various categories of thought to African American studies. This exposure, peer review, review by the instructor, assigned reading, classroom discussion, and multiple opportunities to refine the research product will enhance student understanding of audience expectations within the discipline.

As a field of study, African American studies is heavily focused toward producing, preserving, and conveying knowledge. Orienting our students to write for a scholarly audience best prepares them for these kinds of enterprises. Graduate work leading to research, writing, and teaching in the field and work in such areas as student affairs (cultural centers); museum studies; information science, including special collections and research centers; public policy; legal studies; publishing; theater and other creative arts; radio, TV, and film production; and the like are broadly served by obtaining the skills necessary to write for a scholarly audience. Additionally, the critical thinking skills, attention to detail, high standards for assessing information, research and organizational techniques, and other skills obtained from this approach are readily adaptable to other expressive and professional endeavors.

This outcome will be assessed through student participation in peer review and in-class activities and discussions, including periodic trips to the library to explore diverse data sources (electronic databases; microfilm collections, including relevant newspapers and magazines; scholarly journals; reference sources; government documents; videotape and DVD collections; special collections; etc.) This outcome will also be assessed through how well students are able to focus their drafts to meet the requirements of a scholarly

audience. We will specifically look for how well students develop and convey a clear and concise research problem, connect the problem to some broader theoretical concern, develop a reasoned and well documented argument or analysis, synthesize data from diverse authoritative sources, determine how their work contributes to the existing literature, identify shortcomings in their own work and the work of others, use appropriate conventions in presentation and documentation, and develop a sense of what future research needs to be done.

- Formulate research questions and employ strategies for researching and responding to those questions.

The course is organized around the production and refinement of a major research paper in African American studies. Reading and discussion and analytical reviews will be used to fully develop an understanding of the parameters of the field. The research process will be based on formulating research questions relevant to the foundational, theoretical, and conceptual limits of African American studies. Students will learn how to systematically locate, access, record, store, analyze, and synthesize authoritative information relevant to their research project. Using the tools of a working outline and bibliography and note cards, students will learn to construct research papers from an unlimited number of sources.

A major objective of the course is to help students understand how writing a high-level research paper can be greatly facilitated by learning an executing a step-by-step process that allows for flexible planning, meaningful search strategies, organization of the research and writing process, refinement of ideas, and adaptability in terms of the size and length of the research product.

This outcome will be assessed through an examination of student efforts to produce and refine annotated bibliographies, note taking, and working outlines; to analyze, through a written review, a classic work related to the general research focus of the class; and to organize and integrate data from diverse authoritative sources into the various drafts of the research paper. Assessment involves intense scrutiny and feedback at every phase of the research process.

- Use discipline-specific genres to communicate information.

A major objective of this course is to give students an understanding of what it means to write a truly rigorous research paper so that they can reproduce this process whenever necessary in their student and professional lives.

Among its texts, the course will utilize *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* by Kate L. Turabian. Students will learn forms of documentation that encompass both note (numbering) and parenthetical conventions. Students will learn how to appropriately document diverse data sources. Examples are electronic databases and internet sources, books, articles in journals and magazines, sources with multiple authors, unpublished works, dissertations, edited works, newspapers, interviews, sound

recordings, videorecordings, performances, works of art, published proceedings, sources with no author given, reprint and paperback editions of books, translations, books in a series, materials from special collections, and so on.

This outcome will be assessed by how well students are able to appropriately document diverse authoritative sources in the various drafts of their research papers using the *Kate L. Turabian A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. In-class examination and revision of students' drafts will be an important aspect of assessment.

- Understand conventions for communication, disseminating, and interpreting information within a discipline.

Students will use critical reviews, the research paper, and scholarly oral presentations in the course to disseminate their research findings. This process will be guided by sustained dialogue on the intellectual traditions of African American studies represented by existing academic and scholarly publications in the field. For example, the instructor will periodically disseminate articles from various journals in African American studies to review and discuss conventions in documentation and presentation in the field. Students will bring their drafts to class where their use and understanding of these conventions will be assessed and refined via in-class discussion, peer review, and direction by the instructor.

This outcome will be assessed by the quality of the book reviews, the quality of the final draft of the research paper, and the quality of the oral presentation based on the research paper.

Method of Evaluation:

Our topical focus for this semester will be African-American expressive culture from the 1865 to the 1970s. This includes dance, language, dress or fashion, music, comedy, religion, folklore, visual arts, culinary arts, and the like. You may examine relevant institutions, belief systems, social movements, and so on.

140 points or 10 points per official class meeting. Attendance and class participation. Points are awarded for appropriate preparation, demonstrated knowledge of assigned readings, active participation in discussion and in-class activities, and attendance.

Each written assignment will be graded on a ten-point scale for content and development (or completeness) and a ten-point scale for relevant mechanics (spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, format, etc.) The total points available for the assignment will be multiplied by the average percentage score.

100 points. Book review; 3-5 pages.

100 points. First draft of research paper.

100 points. Annotated bibliography (minimum of 25 sources).

150 points. Working outline, bibliography, and note cards (must use 5 x 8 cards).

200 points. Final draft of the research paper (15-page minimum); the final draft is required to receive credit for the course.

100 points. Oral presentation.

Grading scale for assignments:

A+	=	95-100%*
A	=	91-94%
A-	=	90%
B+	=	89%
B	=	81-84%
B-	=	80%
C+	=	75-79%
C	=	71-74%
C-	=	70%
D+	=	65-69%
D	=	61-64%
D-	=	60%
E	=	59% and below

*A+ is not available for a final grade; A=91% and above for final grade.

The final grade will be based on the percentage achieved by dividing the total points earned for the course divided by the total possible points. However, the student must submit the final draft of the research paper to receive credit for the course. All written work (excluding note cards) must be typed and double-spaced on standard-size typing paper.

Turn off all cell phones and similar electronic equipment while in class. Failure to do so may result in a reduced grade. If your cell phone or similar electronic equipment goes off (including vibrate mode) in class, you may be asked to leave the classroom for the remainder of the class period.

The instructor reserves the right to lower the grade of a late assignment or to not accept it; the student must provide an acceptable explanation for why an assignment is late in order to receive consideration by the instructor to suspend or mitigate a penalty.

The instructor reserves the right to penalize academic dishonesty (for example, plagiarism). Penalties for academic dishonesty can include failing the course. The instructor also reserves the right to refer the offending student for university sanction.

The instructor may alter the syllabus during the course of the semester to enhance instructional effectiveness. It is the student's responsibility to stay abreast of such changes if they occur.

Course Outline:

Each class meeting will be geared toward detailed discussion or strategic activities to improve critical thinking and research writing in African-American studies. We will make periodic trips to Eastern's library to utilize its resources. Students must make sure they know when we will meet in the library or in our regular classroom.

Even though the centerpiece learning activity will be the research paper, each student will write a book review, develop an annotated bibliography that will form the basis for the research process, and make an oral presentation based on his or her research paper.

Weekly Schedule:

September 7 Overview: components of the research paper; the annotated bibliography; writing the book review.

Appropriate use of internet and on-line sources.

Selecting a topic: finding and reading a general article; identifying a foundational issue in the field of African American Studies.

14 Identifying sources in African-American studies.

Discuss topics.

Examine library collection in African-American studies.

Explore relevant on-line databases.

- **Annotated bibliographies are due.**

Discuss bibliographies and relevance to research topics; peer review.

Visit library to refine bibliographies.

28 Refine focus and working outline.

Discuss connection of focus to foundational issue in African American studies.

Share and discuss edited bibliographies; examine relevance to topic

Taking notes.

October 5 Revised bibliography is due. Labeling and organizing notes and revising the

outline.

Discuss progress of work.

Writing the first draft.

6. **Book reviews are due.** Students share and discuss reviews; peer review.

Discuss plagiarism.

Examine use of documentation.

Discuss progress of first draft

8. Discuss edited reviews.

Discuss common problems in writing research papers.

26 **Revised book reviews are due.**

Bring draft of research paper; peer review and discussion.

November 2 **Turn in completed first drafts.** Peer review.

Deconstructing and reorganizing the paper.

Discuss common problems in writing research papers.

9 Distribute and discuss edited drafts.

Review all components of the research paper.

Take another look at plagiarism.

16 Turn in revised drafts; peer review.

30 Discuss edited drafts.

Preparing the paper for oral presentation.

December 8 **Final version of the research paper is due.**

Turn in all note cards, bibliography cards, and working outline.

Oral presentations.

14 Oral presentations.

Texts:

A Manual of Style for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, Sixth Edition,
by Kate L. Turabian.

Black Manhattan by James Weldon Johnson.

Assignment Schedule:

Readings and other activities will be assigned on a class by class basis.

Selected Scholarly Periodicals in African-American Studies:

Journal of Black Studies

Western Journal of Black Studies

Journal of Black Psychology

African American Review (formerly *Black American Literature Forum*)
Black Scholar

Journal of African American History (formerly *Journal of Negro History*)

Negro History Bulletin

Journal of Negro Education

Callaloo

Negro Digest/Black World

Phylon

Journal of African American Studies

International Journal of Africana Studies

The Black Perspective in Music

Various Black newspapers and other relevant periodicals (*Chicago Defender*, *Baltimore Afro-American*, *Pittsburgh Courier*, *Amsterdam News*, *Ebony*, *Jet*, etc.)

FROM THE UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION:

F and J visa students have 10 days to report any:

Changes in your name, residential address, academic status (full or part-time enrollment), program of study or completion date, student level (undergraduate to graduate), or funding source (employment or graduate assistant position).

Intent to transfer to another university.

Probation or disciplinary action due to criminal conviction.

In accordance with new federal regulations, these must be reported to the EMU Office of International Students (OIS), 229 King Hall within 10 days of occurrence; **failure to do so may result in arrest and deportation**. You may not drop or withdraw from a course without OIS approval. If you have questions or concerns, contact OIS at 487-3116, not your instructor.