

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY  
DIVISION OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

**REQUEST FOR INCLUSION OF A COURSE IN THE  
GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM:  
EDUCATION FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY**

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DEPARTMENT/SCHOOL: ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE COLLEGE: CAS

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**1. SUBJECT CODE, NUMBER, AND TITLE: LITERATURE 160 AFRICAN AMERICAN  
LITERATURE**

**2. CREDIT HOURS: 3**

**3. COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course introduces students to the study of African American literature, thought and cultural practices through an examination of the oral traditions, texts, music, and visual arts of African Americans and other peoples of the African diaspora. Readings will include oral narratives, fiction, poetry, drama, autobiography, political treatises, and essays from 1619 to the present.

**4. This course is (check one):**

- an existing course with no revisions (need not go through the input system)
- an existing course with revisions (attach this form to Request for Course Revision form)
- a new course (attach this form to Request for New Course form)

**5. Check the General Education requirement this course is intended to meet. If the course is to be proposed for more than one requirement, submit a separate form for each one.**

- Effective Communication**
- Quantitative Reasoning (*QR designation*)**
- Writing Intensive (*WI designation*)**
- Perspectives on a Diverse World**
- Global Awareness
- U.S. Diversity
- Knowledge of the Disciplines**

- |                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arts    | <input type="checkbox"/> Humanities     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Science | <input type="checkbox"/> Social Science |

**Learning Beyond the Classroom (*LBC designation*)**

6. Rationale. Provide a concise, clear, jargon-free explanation of why this is a General Education course and how it fits into this specific requirement. This rationale should appear on the general course syllabus provided here and should be included in specific course syllabi given to students.

Literature 160 introduces students to the study of African American literature, thought and cultural practices through an examination of the oral traditions and literary texts of African Americans. Through the study of spoken stories and written texts we will also examine the formation and expression of African American identity in relation to Europeans and other non-white ethnic groups. The class will explore the legacy of slavery in its many forms, including disenfranchisement, racial and economic segregation and the history of violence against African Americans, as well as the struggle of African Americans to be recognized as an integral political and cultural presence within the United States. Through the reading, discussion and analysis of African American literature, we will examine the development of this literary tradition and the histories, philosophies, and sociological and cultural practices of African Americans.

7. Clearly and concisely explain how this course meets each of the General Education outcomes for the requirement checked in number five (all outcomes should be addressed). To do this, (a) list the General Education outcomes for the requirement and explain how the course meets each outcome; and (b) explain, in general terms, the method(s) of evaluation to be used in the course and how these methods assess the degree to which students have met the General Education outcomes for this requirement.

### **Methods of Evaluation**

Methods of evaluation for this course may include different types of assignments, from multiple-choice quizzes to longer analytic papers which are designed to have students develop critical analyses of and arguments about literary texts and other African American cultural artifacts. In any particular section of this course, student knowledge will be evaluated using a range of tools such as the following: reading quizzes; multiple-choice exams that focus on historical context, literary terms and their application in critical analysis, and specific knowledge of assigned texts; exams which require students to focus on the analysis of specific passages; in-class or take-home reflective writing assignments about questions and issues raised by class material; essay assignments in which students develop an in-depth analysis of a literary text or other class material; and oral presentations. Extra credit assignments which extend the knowledge of class material and encourage participation in university and community events related to African American culture may also be included. Active participation in class discussion also constitutes a vital element of many instructors' evaluation of student attainment of course objectives. Further details of how evaluation methods assess students' meeting of General Education objectives is provided below, with multiple examples designed to indicate the range of means by which different instructors may assess each objective.

### **General Education Outcomes**

**1. Examine the complexity of their own cultural identities and how these relate to the cultural identities of others in the U.S.**

A) Students will examine the formation and expression of African American identities in relation to European and other non-white groups by examining the oral traditions, literary genres and artistic movements of African Americans. Students will examine the African diasporic elements of this cultural identity (oral tales, music, dance, religious beliefs, etc.) as well as how these elements were shaped within the context of the United States. That these, in turn, shaped American culture as a diverse whole is also evident in, for example, an examination of how the call and response pattern of much of African music and spoken forms shaped American music -- spirituals, blues, jazz, rock and roll, hip hop -- as well as the form of many African American literary texts or in African American literature's continuous tradition (beginning with the first published African American writer, Phillis Wheatley) of calling for the true realization of American democracy. Students will also examine how "American" identity has often meant the repression of non-European cultural elements which have contributed to its formation and how this, in turn, can be linked to the denial of African American freedom during slavery and its aftermath.

B) Opportunities for students to participate in discussions are an essential component of the classroom experience and promote cross-cultural awareness and communication; evaluation of the active participation and the quality of student comments, engaged and respectful listening, and cooperative group work can constitute a vital element of the instructor's evaluation of student attainment of course objectives. Short response papers or journal entries, which students may elect to share with their peers, also allow students to locate their position in relation to class materials and to prepare for class discussions. In exams or in response to essay assignments, students can demonstrate their understanding of Afrocentric elements of African American culture, their influence on the African American literary tradition (for example, the incorporation of specific musical and oral elements or the conscious appropriation of African deities and religious experience in August Wilson's plays), and how this tradition has also intersected with and contributed to the development of broad literary movements within the United States (how, for example, the Harlem Renaissance reflected and shaped American modernism), all of which attest to the complexity of American cultures.

**2. Explore the causes and consequences of social intolerance in the U.S.**

A) Students will explore the consequences of the ongoing legacy of slavery in its many forms including disenfranchisement, segregation, and ongoing violence. African American literature and culture will be examined as a response to, and intervention into, political and social conditions and practices which have supported social intolerance, institutionalized racism, ethnocentrism, and exclusion in the United States.

B) Objective and qualitative quiz or exam questions may focus specifically on African American history from 1619 to the present including: slavery, the failures of radical Reconstruction, the foundations of individual prejudices and institutionalized racism. These questions will also ask students to address how African American literature and culture has intervened in these conditions and

practices and how literary genres and modes of thought have been shaped in response to these social and political forces.

**3. Examine the differences between social intolerance and institutionalized racism, ethnocentrism, and exclusion in the U.S.**

A) In examining African American literature in its historical context, students will, of necessity, confront the institutionalized racism and exclusion that *was* slavery -- and its legacy, Jim Crow (segregation and economic disenfranchisement) -- through the literary responses of African American writers to these realities. In this context, students will examine how race -- both “whiteness” and “blackness” -- has been historically constructed in the United States. Students will also examine how African American literature has developed aesthetics, theories, and critical tools which, while they can be related to elements of European-American (and other) cultural forms or methods, are also specific and unique and, therefore displace, for example, Eurocentric readings and valuations. Social intolerance will be examined in the representation of racist incidents in literary texts and also in the large body of non-fiction writing by authors who, like Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Martin Luther King, or Malcolm X, document its effects and present strategies for social change.

B) Exam and essay questions will focus on students’ understanding of African American history including slavery and its legacies (e.g. violence, disenfranchisement, segregation and prejudice) as well as the perpetuation of racism in specific legal practices, philosophical and scientific discourses, and popular culture in the United States. In reading, writing, and interpretive practices, students will also demonstrate an understanding of African American thought and culture and the intellectual, social and aesthetic values which define these as a way to understand how ethnocentrism (e.g. Eurocentrism) has often misread or devalued these contributions to the cultures of the United States.

**4. Explore how diversity has affected and continues to affect income distribution, economic mobility, political access, and the democratic process in the U.S.**

A) Students will study African American cultural and political responses to slavery and its legacies, as well as the struggle for voting rights, desegregation, educational opportunities and economic equality. In addition to elements of the above which address this outcome (particularly 3A), this course will examine how such phenomena as the first and second Great Migrations (the largest *voluntary* movement of African Americans) reflected 20<sup>th</sup>-century economic disenfranchisement and restricted mobility in the South (sharecropping and Jim Crow forms of *de facto* slavery). The causes and consequences of these migrations were anticipated (and struggled over) by Washington and Du Bois and led to the literary movement of the Harlem Renaissance. The struggle for civil and voting rights are addressed, for example, in the speeches of King and Malcolm X, and can be tied to the recent renewal of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Overall, students will develop an awareness of how African American oral and literary genres (e.g. folktales, the slave narrative, the political treatise, the blues) and literary and political movements (e.g. Black Nationalism, Black Arts, Womanism) are shaped by the political, social and economic realities described above.

B) In exam and essay questions students will be evaluated on their knowledge of the historical context of specific literary texts and/or movements and how this context has shaped particular types of literary production. Questions will also ask students to consider how the African American literary tradition has reflected similar historical phenomena (slavery and Jim Crow, for example) and how literature itself (beginning with the radical act of acquiring literacy) has always been a significant element in redressing these disparities.

**5. Develop an awareness of alternative values, views, and communication styles in the U.S.**

A) Students will develop an awareness and understanding of Afrocentric thought and cultural practices through an examination and discussion of the oral traditions and literary genres of African Americans. In addition to the goals and examples noted above (particularly 1 A and B and 3A), this will be accomplished by examining how African American literature itself not only asserts the importance of African American culture and history, but presents divergent views on, for example, what constitutes “race,” or how change can take place in the United States (accommodation, protest, revolution) so that students understand the complexity and range of the African American literary and political tradition. Students will also investigate the role of vernacular speech and markers of orality in African American literature, particularly given the long history of the misrepresentation and racist stereotyping of African American dialects in American popular and canonical literature and the minstrel theatre.

C) Exam questions may focus specifically on literary terms and specific knowledge of texts, as well as the history and culture of African Americans; qualitative questions may focus specifically on the development of African American literature and culture (e.g. how oral forms shape writing) and how literature reflects and intervenes in its historical context (e.g. the slave narrative, political treatises, the sermon). Essay questions may also ask students to contribute original and culturally-specific analyses of literary texts which examine a writer’s aesthetic choices and the political/cultural issues at stake in these choices.

**Please submit all materials in electronic form.**

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**Action of the Department/College**

**1. Department**

Vote of department faculty: For \_\_\_\_\_ Against \_\_\_\_\_ Abstentions \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Department Head

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**2. College**

\_\_\_\_\_  
College Dean

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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**Action of General Education Advisory Committee**

Vote of General Education Committee:    For \_\_\_\_\_    Against \_\_\_\_\_    Abstentions \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairperson, General Education Advisory Committee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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**Approval**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Associate Vice-President for Undergraduate Studies and Curriculum

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date