

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**

DEPARTMENT/SCHOOL: DEPT. OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

COLLEGE: CAS

DEPARTMENT CONTACT: DR.S. ROBIN LUCY, HEATHER NEFF,
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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**
 - Arts
 - Humanities
 - Science
 - 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 the literary texts, and oral forms such as folklore and music which have shaped the written tradition, of African Americans. This course will examine what constitutes this tradition as specific writers and literary movements have shaped it through the study of: genre, narrative strategies, themes, metaphors and motifs, the tradition's relationship to the other *literatures* of the United States, and the historical context which this literature both reflects and intervenes in. Students will become conversant with critical terminology and interpretive practices which are historically and culturally sensitive in the reading, discussion, and analysis of African American literature.

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 African American literary texts. 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) Recognize how the humanities cultivate aesthetic appreciation, imagination, and empathic understanding of others.

- A) Literature 160 aims to demonstrate to students how African American writers have often understood the imaginative power of their writing to be inextricably linked to both cultural and political representation, ranging from, for example, the physical act of writing (banned under slavery regimes

and asserted by (ex-)slave narrators) as a symbol and technology of freedom and equality to Toni Morrison's imaginative recuperation of what the slave narrators could not write (because of the need to cultivate Euro-American allies and because some experiences were too painful to "pass on") as well as *Beloved's* allegorical relationship to the contemporary erosion of civil rights in the 1980s. For students in the class, this raises the issues of how writers perceive their audience and develop narrative strategies which both cultivate empathy and, equally important, challenge readers' assumptions about, for example, race, class, gender, and/or education (for example, literacy has also been tool of domination and oral forms are also imaginative and powerful). The exposure to various narrative strategies also give students the opportunity to locate themselves culturally and politically in the present, or to imagine themselves members of reading audiences very different from themselves (in race, gender, historical time, etc.) in approaching these texts. At the same time, this course aims to develop in students an aesthetic appreciation of not only those elements common to all literary study (figurative language, plot, character, etc.) but how writers have drawn on African American (and often African) oral tales and music, religion, dance and visual art (as only some examples) in shaping their writing.

- B) Student understanding of these complex and intersecting roles of the humanities might be assessed through such activities as the classroom discussion of how writers perceived their audience and/or the historical context of a specific text and the aesthetic choices which result, the reading of (or listening to) folklore and music and an exploration of how these are represented in literature, and/or an examination of cultural change or syncretism by, for example, examining how spirituals reflect a complex response to Christianity, African retentions and political and cultural resistance and how their representation in a wide range of literature appropriate these functions in writing. Students might also respond to paper topics that ask them to consider the effect of a particular text on a range of different readers or to examine how elements of African American culture and/or historical experience are represented in a text.

2) Demonstrate basic competency in reading and understanding literary, philosophical, or religious works both in their original historical context and as they inform debate and dialogue today.

- A) Literature 160 asks students to read a number of literary genres (the slave narrative, the novel, short stories, poetry, essays and political treatises, and oral narratives) produced by African Americans from the beginning of their presence in the United States to the present. The cultural position of the author and his or her community, the development of a particular literary form or movement, and the social/cultural issues at stake (for example, the abolition of slavery, the assertion of civil rights, strategies for political change) will also come under discussion. Students will also learn literary terms and their application to the analysis of these texts as well as features of African American culture as a whole. They will also examine how older texts and genres inform contemporary texts and how texts – past and present – shape the cultural development and expression of ideas. For example: we will examine how the slave narrative has shaped fictional neo-slave narratives (*Beloved*, for example); the representation of the male or female hero's quest for knowledge and freedom (Walter Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*); how Ralph Ellison's modernism developed as a response to Richard Wright's naturalism; and how the social issues of the historical construction of race, the abolition of slavery, the constitution of American identity, the struggle for civil rights and debates over strategies for political change (among others) have shaped this literature at specific times and in specific ways and continue to be relevant to our contemporary experience.
- B) Quiz or exam questions may focus specifically on literary terms or historical facts and how these are reflected in various texts and/or the characteristics of African American literary genres. Students will

be asked to demonstrate an inter-textual understanding of the material: how specific writers used and/or revised material and ideas from previous texts in the interpretation of specific passages or in general questions about the development of African American writing. (The two examples at the end of the section above indicate how this could be addressed.) Class discussions which bring in current events or issues, and student participation in campus and/or community events which focus on current social and political issues as extra credit assignments or class activities (MLK Day events, debates on affirmative action, guest artists and speakers, as examples) will also reinforce the connections between literary texts, history, and contemporary discussions and debates.

3) Analyze and write about literary, philosophical, or religious works.

- A) Students will apply their knowledge of literary terms, the development of African American literature and of related elements of African American culture (music, oral tales, etc.) and history to the analysis of African American literature. Throughout the course, the instructor will model -- and students will themselves demonstrate -- how analysis and interpretation (as opposed to summary or description) and their articulation in writing are fundamental skills in the study of literature.
- B) Students will demonstrate this skills in, for example: short essay responses to specific questions on a text which require analysis and the use of textual quotes in making a brief but cogent argument in preparation for class discussion; the identification and interpretation of specific passages from literary texts in exams; the inclusion of subjective questions on exams that require students to engage in an analysis of elements of a specific literary work and/or its relationship to other texts; the writing of analytical essays which make original, as well as historically and culturally sensitive interpretations and arguments.

4) Demonstrate basic knowledge of the history of literary works, or religious or philosophical ideas.

- A) Students will become knowledgeable about the historical development of the African American literary tradition as evidenced by movements and genres including: the slave narrative, post-Reconstruction texts, the Harlem Renaissance, Black Nationalism, the Black Arts Movement, and Womanism.
- B) Questions on exams may focus specifically on literary terms and their application to the analysis and interpretation of specific passages from a text or a text as a whole (for example, what metaphors are applied to the institution of slavery in the slave narrative tradition?) the characteristics of African American literary genres or movements (discuss representations of Africa in specific Harlem Renaissance texts), the relationships between texts in the tradition (how might Womanism be understood as a response to elements of the Black Arts Movement?) and/or how African American literature has shaped, and been shaped by, other American literatures (what defines African American modernism or post-modernism?).

5) Become familiar with the discursive practices particular to the study of the humanities.

- A) Literature 160 teaches the critical vocabulary central to literary studies, as well as the particular historical and cultural contexts necessary to the understanding of African American literature. Students will understand the relationships between texts and movements and be able to read, discuss, and write critically in ways which are specific to the study of African American literature

- B) Writing assignments and/or exam questions will require students to engage critically with the application of the terms and concepts of literary studies and the cultural and historical context of African American writing. Students will develop these critical abilities in the discussion and interpretation of texts.

6) Begin to recognize how society influences humanistic thought and how the humanities transform society.

- A) Literature 160 focuses on the development of African American writing, thought and cultural practices and specifically on the ways in which African American literary texts have both reflected and shaped the aesthetic, cultural and political development of the United States. African American texts have brought into view diverse traditions from the African diaspora (including orature, music, dance, etc.), have engaged in and influenced major literary movements (realism, naturalism, modernism, post-modernism, etc.) and also shaped these in particular ways (the Harlem Renaissance was, for example, a particular and highly-contested form of black modernism). In addition, African American writing – from its earliest beginnings – has intervened in those political and social conditions and practices which have supported slavery, social intolerance, institutionalized racism, ethnocentrism, and exclusion in the United States and our study of literature will foreground the link between cultural and socio-political representation.

- B) A range of assignments can assess student understanding, for example: the identification and interpretation of a portion of text within a larger historical context; analytical papers that ask a student to consider the social commentary or political interventions made by a text, and how these have shaped the form as well as the content of that text; exam or essay questions that ask students to articulate how a particular author has represented or incorporated specific elements of African or African American culture in their written texts (for example, Equiano and dance and storytelling as history, Douglass and the spirituals, Chesnut and African American folktales and vernacular language, Hurston and Morrison and the “spoken” text, etc.); in-class discussion that focus on the contemporary implications of the political and cultural materials and debates these texts express.

7) Become practiced in the interpretation and generation of ideas.

- A) Literature 160 emphasizes the practice of reading African American literary texts critically, and in historically and culturally appropriate ways. Students will learn the methods of interpretation (rather than summary and/or description) in developing their responses to this literature, whether in class discussions, exams, or writing assignments
- B) Students are guided through the process of developing thorough, critical and culturally-appropriate interpretations of texts and other expressive forms through class discussion, writing, the active interpretation of class materials, and the consistent modeling of these skills by the class instructor. The students’ ability to generate their own interpretive responses may be assessed in multiple ways: through the quality of their comments and active listening in classroom discussions; brief, focused, and coherent response papers which prepare students for group work and class discussion: the coherence and originality of arguments produced in papers; exams which measure knowledge of both course content and analytical and interpretive skills; exam and essay questions which ask students to demonstrate how they understand the development of

Eastern Michigan University
Literature 160, African American Literature

Required Textbook: Gates, Henry Louis, ed. The Norton Anthology of African American Literature. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997.

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General Education Rationales

U.S. Diversity

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.

Humanities

Literature 160 introduces students to the study of the literary texts, and oral forms such as folklore and music which have shaped the written tradition, of African Americans. This course will examine what constitutes this tradition as specific writers and literary movements have shaped it through the study of: genre, narrative strategies, themes, metaphors and motifs, the tradition's relationship to the other *literatures* of the United States, and the historical context which this literature both reflects and intervenes in. Students will become conversant with critical terminology and interpretive practices which are historically and culturally sensitive in the reading, discussion, and analysis of African American literature.

Please note that this course can be elected to fulfill the General Education requirement in U.S. Diversity or the Humanities, but cannot serve as both.

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 help students develop critical analyses of and arguments about literary texts and other African American cultural artifacts. In this course student knowledge will be evaluated through the use of short response papers, multiple-choice exams that focus on historical context, literary terms and specific knowledge of assigned texts. 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 offered.

Your grade will be based upon a scale of 100 points, calculated from ten short response papers (2 points each = 20 points), two longer papers (20 points each = 40 points). A midterm and a final examination (20 points each = 40 points).

The midterm and final exam will evaluate your knowledge of literary texts and oral tales and their creators. You will also demonstrate your understanding and application of literary terms and methods of analysis within the cultural and historical context in which we have studied these texts. The final exam will cover the second half of class material but also contain questions which will focus on how you have come to understand the African American literary tradition as a whole.

The response papers are a reflection on specific questions and issues related to class material. They are designed to keep you focused on your reading (or other assignments), to give you ongoing practice formulating a literary analysis and argument, and to clarify your ideas as well as questions for our class discussion.

The longer papers are essay assignments in which you will formulate a sustained and culturally- and historically-specific literary analysis of a chosen text (or texts). In addition, you will be evaluated on argument structure and clarity of writing.

Grading Scale

A = 93-100 A- = 90-92

B+ = 87-89 B = 83-86 B- = 80-82

C+ = 77-79 C = 73-76 C- = 70-72

D+ = 67-69 D = 63-66 D- = 60-62

Classroom Conduct

Students are expected to abide by the Student Conduct Code and to assist in creating an environment that is conducive to learning and protects the rights of all members of the University community. Examples of inappropriate classroom conduct include repeatedly arriving late to class, using a cellular telephone, or talking while others are speaking.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY, INCLUDING ALL FORMS OF CHEATING AND OR PLAGIARISM, WILL NOT BE TOLERATED IN THIS CLASS. PENALTIES FOR AN ACT OF ACADEMIC DISHONESTY MAY RANGE FROM A FAILING GRADE FOR A PARTICULAR TEST TO RECEIVING A FAILING GRADE FOR THE ENTIRE COURSE. IN ADDITION, YOU MAY BE REFERRED TO THE OFFICE OF STUDENT JUDICIAL SERVICES FOR DISCIPLINE THAT CAN RESULT IN EITHER A SUSPENSION OR PERMANENT DISMISSAL.

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Students with special needs will be accommodated with documentation from the Access Services Office (203 King Hall).

CALENDAR (subject to change with advance notice)

Week 1: Introduction: *The Idea of Empire and the Transatlantic Slave Trade*

Week 2: *Africa Before the Transatlantic Slave Trade*

Oludah Equiano, Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 140 – 151).

African folktales, music and the oral tradition (pp. 118 – 126)

Response paper #1

Week 3: *From the Enlightenment to the Great Awakening*

Phillis Wheatley (pp. 164 – 177) and Jupiter Hammon (handout).

Response paper #2

Week 4: *Plantation Slavery*

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (pp. 299 - 369).

Response paper #3

Week 5: *Men and Women in Slavery*

Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl (pp. 207 - 244).

Response paper #4

Week 6: *The Rise of Black Nationalism in America*

David Walker's Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World (pp. 178 - 189).

The Confessions of Nat Turner (electronic reserve)

Response paper #5

Week 7: *Abolitionist Poets and Jim Crow Racism*

Frances Harper (pp. 408 – 422), James Whitfield (pp. 401 – 407).

Film: Marlon Riggs' "Ethnic Notions"

PAPER ONE (4-6 pages)

Week 8: *The Lasting Heritage of Slavery:*

Charles Chestnutt (pp.522 – 552), Paul L. Dunbar (pp. 884 – 905).Ida Wells Barnett (pp. 595 –604).

MIDTERM

Week 9: *Conflict or Compromise: Post-Reconstruction to World War One*

Booker T. Washington, "The Atlanta Exposition Address " (pp.513 – 521),

W. E. B. Du Bois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" (pp. 613 – 620); "Of Booker T. Washington and Others" (pp. 632 – 642).

Marcus Garvey, "The Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World (handout).

Response paper #6

Week 10: *The Harlem Renaissance*

Alain Locke, "The New Negro" (pp.960 – 969),

Langston Hughes, "The Negro Writer and the Racial Mountain" (pp. 1267 –1270),

Zora Neale Hurston, "How it Feels to Be a Colored Me," (1008 – 1010).

Response paper #7

Week 11: *The Harlem Renaissance Poets*

Jean Toomer (pp. 1087 – 1089), Langston Hughes (pp. 1251 – 1267), Claude McKay (pp. 981 – 987),

Countee Cullen (pp. 1303 – 1313), Helene Johnson (pp. 1315 – 1318).

RESPONSE PAPER #8

Week 12: *The Rise of the Civil Rights Movement*

FILM: "EYES ON THE PRIZE"

Richard Wright, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," (pp. 1376 – 1396),

Ralph Ellison, excerpts from Invisible Man (pp. 1515 – 1540).

Response paper #9

Week 13: *The Civil Rights Movement*

Martin Luther King, "Letter From a Birmingham Jail" (pp. 1853 – 1865), Malcolm X (handout).

Response paper #10

Week 14: *The Black Arts Movement*

Amiri Baraka (pp.1877 – 1884), Nikki Giovanni (pp. 1982 – 1984), Sonia Sanchez (pp. 1902 – 1906),

Etheridge Knight (pp. 1866 – 1869), Haki Madhubuti (pp. 1977 – 1981).

PAPER TWO (4-6 pages)

Week 15: *The Womanist Movement*

Alice Walker, “In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens” (pp. 2380 – 2386),
Audre Lorde (pp. 2207 – 2212), June Jordan (pp. 2227 – 2240).

Week 16: *New Directions in African American Literature*

Rita Dove (pp. 2582 – 2587), Walter Mosely (pp. 2594 – 2601), August Wilson (pp. 2409 – 2411).

FINAL EXAMINATION