

SYLLABUS

BLST 141 WRITING IN BLACK: THOUGHT AND EXISTENCE
CRN 27061
WINTER 2021
T, R 1015-1145; REMOTE

INSTRUCTOR

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ZOOM OFFICE HOURS T AND R NOON - 1330 & BY APPOINTMENT

Course Overview

Throughout this course, you will engage with a rich tradition of Black-centered essay writing. I have chosen the essays based on the impact they have had and continue to have on how “blackness” is both understood and lived in the United States. More specifically, the pieces work to make sense of the ways in which “blackness” shapes (and shapes our understanding of) existence. For our authors, “writing in black” becomes a means to process the deeply contradictory nature of “race” in the modern world, while thinking and writing how to live with it all.

As you’ll see from the outset, our authors are engaged in truly multi-disciplinary work: philosophical questions of existence form through sociological fieldwork and historical digging; literature and etymology push the bounds of psychoanalysis. Both our discussions and writing assignments will require such disciplinary flexibility.

I will ask you to write 500-word responses every week in order to prepare for our discussions, and to write a more extensive final essay of 2000 words, in drafts and with revision. With all your writing, we will engage it as process and craft. Towards that goal, we’ll analyze our essays not just for content, but also for their remarkable range of genres and styles. *That’s the plan. We’ll see how things go...*

Black Studies Program Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the Minor, students will be able to understand and articulate the following:

How Blackness exists historically as a theoretical site and as lived experience, producing both ruptures to White Supremacist Patriarchy structures as well as a generative site and experience for imagining and enacting freedom dreams.

How knowledge production of Blackness circulates through multiple and overlapping intersections with ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, and other vectors of power and identity.

How historical and contemporary national and transnational migrations of Black communities influence Black cultures and identities as well as political and social institutions across the globe and especially in the United States.

How the traditions of African American and cultural forms from across the Diaspora (including literature, music, oral traditions, visual art, film, and all genres of printed text) are defined by distinct formal and thematic characteristics and how such cultural forms have both recorded histories of racist oppression and radically imagined Black liberation and a more just future.

Black Studies 141 Course Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students will:

Develop a foundational understanding of Blackness as a theoretical site that names and describes power dynamics beginning in the Modern Era under early colonialism and capitalism.

Develop a foundational understanding of Blackness as lived experiences shaped by the intersectional realities of place, culture, ethnicity, gender, sex, sexuality, and religion and spirituality.

Gain a breadth of non-fiction writing centered in the United States where the mode of knowledge production (construction and circulation of Blackness) is critically interrogated and radically re-imagined through the act of writing..

Understand how U.S. political cultures and cultural politics subvert and reproduce dominant cultural narratives of “blackness” especially through the act of writing and the position of "writer."

Develop your own writerly voice within a tradition of Black thought and writing, with particular awareness of how un-critically examined modes of scholarly discourse reproduce and sustain racist and sexist neoliberal discourses.

ASSIGNMENTS

- 500-word **Responses** (*9 responses; 5 points each*). With every week's reading (typically completed on the weekend), you will turn in a 500-word response to my prompt. These responses will be completed prior to the week's discussion in order to develop thoughtful dialogue from all. The response writing helps focus your energy towards critical reading and thinking, and allows you to think through your ideas through the act of writing. The 500-word limit means that you must plan, edit, and draft with precision and care.
- **Discussion** will follow and riff on a traditional seminar format. We will begin by focusing on the written responses to my prompt; y'all will chat in small groups and form positions and questions. We will then open the discussion class-wide. Groups will report out what they discussed. Following the reporting out, we will begin the formal discussion whereby everyone that speaks must first be able to summarize what was said prior and only then respond directly with a response or clarification question. This process ensures we all build deep listening skills while dialoguing with another; digging deeply into our work, and valuing questions (and what we don't know) more than answers (and what we assume we know). This is a slow process, challenging many of us to be good with silence...
- **Final Essay & Presentation** (*Draft 1, 15 points; Draft 2, 25 points; Presentation, 15 points*). Each short piece of writing may ultimately inform and even be included in the extended final essay of 2000 words. You are encouraged to write a final essay based on the over-arching themes examined throughout our readings and will be asked to draft, workshop, and edit your final essay (revision worksheet provided). Y'all are encouraged to play with generic conventions you've witnessed throughout the term. Finally, you will write, practice, and perform a two-minute presentation in class during week 10.

THE WORK (an ideal work plan):

Weekend: **Read** and take notes and re-read strategically

Monday: **Draft** your response

Tuesday: **Re-read and revise**, especially following Tuesday's class

Wednesday: **Prepare for Thursday's discussion** by **reading** at least 5 of your classmates' responses and re-reading key passages from our week's reading.

Thursday: **Seminar-style** discussion. *For the major essay, be prepared to draft and revise daily along with regular office hour visits.*

GRADING RUBRIC

RESPONSES (9 responses, 5 points each; total 45% of final grade)

Requirements and Grading

- Adhere to word count (500 words; 1 pt)
- Two drafts using revision worksheet (1 pt)
- Close-read the prompt and attend to all components (3 pts)*

**Example*

Why is pain a critical site of inquiry for Philipose? Agree or Disagree?

Key words: pain, critical, inquiry

Notice the ask: You'll have to depend on our class's understanding of critical inquiry to order to frame Philipose's inquiry on pain. Then you'll have to weigh in with your position. This is a lot to do in 500 words! Take your time with revisions...

Grading Breakdown:

Responses	45 points
Essay Draft 1	15 points
Essay Draft 2	25 points
Presentation	15 points

PRESENTATION (based on final paper; total 15% of final grade)

Requirements and Grading

- Prepare for a two-minute formal presentation where you will:
 - introduce your topic, question at issue, and position/argument (3 points)
 - give one specific example/component of the essay (4 points)
 - explain why you took up this topic (3 points)
- Write up your presentation (5 points; one-double-spaced page in 12 pt TNR font or similar will take two minutes to read at a reasonable pace)

Formal Requirements

- Adhere to word count (minimum 1500 words; maximum 1750)
- Use MLA [format](#); this means including a heading (left justified; Name / Instructor Tiwari / ENG 104 / Date)
- Include at least 3 sources, at least 5 citations, and a "works cited" page
- An argument derived from a question

MAJOR ESSAY (15 points for draft 1 and 25 points for draft 2 (final draft for this class); 40% final grade)

Formal Requirements, draft 1 (3 points for each bullet point)

- Adhere to word count (minimum 1250 words; maximum 1500)
- Use MLA [format](#); this means including a heading (left justified; Name / Instructor Tiwari / BLST 199 / Date)

- Include at least 3 sources, at least 5 citations, and a “works cited” page
- A clearly-articulated question at issue driving your inquiry
- Attention to paragraph and sentence construction

Formal Requirements, draft 2

- Adhere to word count (minimum 2000 words; maximum 2300)
- Use MLA [format](#); this means including a heading (left justified; Name / Instructor Tiwari / ENG 104 / Date)
- Include at least 6 sources, at least 8 citations, and a “works cited” page
- A clearly-articulated question at issue driving your inquiry as well as clearly-articulated position or argument derived from your inquiry
- Attention to paragraph and sentence construction, as well as overall flow of final draft

Grading Guidelines

- **F**
 - Meets few or none of the formal requirements
 - Regular disruption because of grammar or syntax issues; **n.b., not grading for grammar**
 - No Adherence to basic paragraph structure (*see below*)
 - No attention to the logic of your question and position, particularly problems/challenges
 - No dialogic argumentation structuring presentation of ideas (how well you incorporate outside voices)
- **D**
 - Meets some of the formal requirements
 - Occasional to regular disruption because of grammar or syntax issues; **n.b., not grading for grammar**
 - Some Adherence to basic paragraph structure (*see below*)
 - Some attention to the logic of your question and position, particularly problems/challenges
 - Little to no dialogic argumentation structuring presentation of ideas (how well you incorporate outside voices)
- **C**
 - Meets all formal requirements
 - Occasional disruption because of grammar or syntax issues; **n.b., not grading for grammar**
 - Adherence to basic paragraph structure (*see below*)
 - Some attention to the logic of your question and position, particularly problems/challenges
 - Basic dialogic argumentation structuring presentation of ideas (how well you incorporate outside voices)
- **B**
 - Meets all formal requirements
 - Rare disruption because of grammar or syntax issues; **n.b., not grading for grammar**

- Adherence to basic paragraph structure
- Attention to the logic of your question and argument, particularly problems/challenges
- Strong dialogic argumentation structuring presentation of ideas
- **A**
 - Meets all formal requirements
 - No disruption because of grammar or syntax issues; **n.b., not grading for grammar**
 - Adherence to basic paragraph structure & thoughtful transitions between paragraphs
 - Strong attention to the logic of your question and argument, particularly problems /challenges
 - Creative dialogic argumentation structuring presentation of ideas
 - Strong focus on challenges to one's own reason and unstated assumptions

REVISION

Paragraphs:

- Is it clear to me what each paragraph is doing in relation to my question and position?
- Can I summarize the main point of each paragraph in one simple sentence?
- Have I quoted a *manageable* amount of text? In other words, do I attend to every key word or phrase in the quote, or am I just adding filler to my paragraph?
- If my quote is over 2 lines of text, did I make it into a block quote? Have I cited accordingly?
- Have I thoroughly set up and analyzed the quote?
- Have I weaved the quote into my own syntax?
 - ex., ~~Coates liked art and compared it to a void when he writes that, "The art I was coming to love lived in this void" (50). Coates~~ loved art that "lived" in a kind of "void," in the "not yet knowable," and in the "question" rather than some kind of answer (50).
- Have I tied my analyzation/close-reading back to my question or position?
- Do the beginnings and ends of my paragraphs offer my reader transitions from and to other paragraphs (giving the reader continuity between ideas)?
- Basic Paragraph Structure:
 - transition; paragraph main idea; deeper interrogation of main idea through close-readings/citations/etc.; analysis; reiterate paragraph main idea *in relation* to argument; transition.

Sentences:

- Are my sentences constructed as simply as possible?

- How many ideas are present in each sentence? One idea = one sentence. If you are working with multiple ideas in a sentence, then make sure your construction offers a logical framing such as “if/then” construction or a compare/contrast model, for example. You can also make use of semi-colons and colons to break up complex sentences into easily digestible chunks for your reader.
- Am I consistent with key and important words? For example, a key term for your paper is “whiteness.” Do not simply substitute “white people” for variation when these two terms are not necessarily synonymous.
- If you use a word, you need to know exactly what it means; be specific with your word choices.

Final Steps:

- Is your intro clear as possible? Does your conclusion not only wrap up what you’ve argued, but also pointed to other questions or issues you should address, following your position?
- Have you made it abundantly clear to your reader why it is necessary to ask your question?
- Have you honestly challenged your own logical assumptions and positions?

Formatting:

- Have I included my heading?
- Have I been consistent and accurate with my citations?
- Have I formatted my “works cited” page correctly? Course Policies

Course Policies

Attendance

You are responsible for anything you miss if you are not in class. Given the depth of discussion and connection of in-class work to your assignments, attendance is absolutely necessary and required. While there is no punitive response for missing class, it should be clear to you that your responses and final essay will suffer greatly without committed attendance in this class.

Assignments and Announcements

All assigned work is due when it's due. I will provide very specific instructions for the assignments; if the instructions are unclear, it is your responsibility to contact me with questions if we do not address your concerns in class. All assignments will be electronically submitted and all announcements will flow through Canvas email. Do not use any other email client except your UO email to communicate with me. BACK UP YOUR WORK.

Academic Honesty

The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly documented. Please consult *The Little Duck Handbook* for a definition of plagiarism and information on documentation, and refer to the *Student Conduct Code* on the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards [website](#). In cases where academic misconduct has been clearly established, the award of an F for the final course grade is the standard practice of this University. Please see me if you have any questions about your use of sources.

Access

The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You may also contact the Accessible Education Center in 360 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoac@uoregon.edu and they will coordinate with me to best serve you while in this class.

Workload

Students can expect roughly 4-5 hours of reading per week. Remember, this is not reading for pleasure. You must get in the habit of reading and re-reading, and taking notes while reading. You can also expect roughly 4 hours of writing per week, including revising all that you write. You are responsible for every word you type. Know your words; use your dictionary and be wary of thesauri. In class, I will offer social and historical context before and during our discussions; these are not formal lectures but are necessary for us to have a critically-engaged relationship to the texts and ideas we're interrogating. We will spend no more than 30 minutes in each class on context while the rest of the class, roughly an hour, will be for our small-group and class-wide discussions.

Required Texts

Walter Rodney *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*

Frantz Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth* (translator Philcox or Farrington)

all other readings provided as PDFs

Schedule

Weeks 1 - 3: *What does it mean to be a problem and a problem for thought?*

for R of week 1:

Immanuel Kant, from *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*. (PDF; p. 11-2)

W.E.B. Du Bois. "The Forethought" and Chapter 1. (p. 3-43) from *The Souls of Black Folk*

for T of week 2:

Walter Rodney. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*

Introduction by Vincent Harding (PDF on Canvas; xi - xxiv)

Chapter 2 (p.33 - 70)

for T of week 3:

Walter Rodney. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*

Chapter 3 (p. 73-90)

Lewis Gordon, "Theory in Black: Teleological Suspensions in Philosophy of Culture" (PDF; p. 195-6)

Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* "Of those Systems which make Reason the Principle of Approbation" (PDF; ~6 pages)

Weeks 4 - 6: *Colonization - Violence and Mental Health*

for T of week 4:

Fanon. "On Violence." (p. 1 - 62)

for T of week 5:

Fanon. "Colonial War and Mental Disorder." (p, 181 - 234)

for T of week 6:

Audre Lorde. "Difference and Survival." and
James Baldwin, "The Creative Process" (PDF) (plus supplemental Lorde and Ferguson pdfs)

Weeks 7 - 10: *Writing it all to live with it all, or, other-worldly views*

for T of week 8:

Carol Boyce-Davies's "From Masquerade to *Maskerade*: Caribbean Cultural Resistance and the Dehumanizing Project (an excellent introduction to Sylvia Wynter); Talk on Wynter

for T of week 9:

selections from Cheryl Wall's On Freedom and the Will to Adorn

Visits from Professor Courtney Thorsson (T; Wall and the Sisterhood) and Assistant Vice Provost Kimberly Johnson
(*This is My America* and creative production as activism)

for T of week 9:

selections from Du Bois's The World and Africa