

GRADUATE SEMINAR IN AFRICANA STUDIES (16:014:501)
Course Syllabus/Spring 2023 — Tuesdays, 12:10 - 3:10pm
Professor: Dr. Kim D. Butler
(summary)

This course explores the principal theoretical interventions that define the discipline, as well as its relationship to the humanistic politics of social change. It begins by analyzing how the experiences of peoples of African descent have been understood through the lenses of multiple disciplinary approaches; and how the inclusion of black histories challenges the methodological tools that historically excluded the black experience. It then moves through key themes and debates in the study of people of Africa and the African diaspora. Because this course includes students from a variety of disciplines, its emphasis is on theoretical concepts that can be brought into any disciplinary study of African/African diaspora experience.

Scholarship in Africana Studies is inherently comparative and multidisciplinary, so we will interrogate topics and debates through multiple lenses and perspectives. We will move the center throughout the semester so that we consider the black experience from Africa, Latin America/Caribbean, North America, Europe and the Indian Ocean/Asia, thus better contextualizing the ways we approach Africana subjects within our defined specializations. Thematically, the course will pay particular attention to critical race, gender, diaspora, and politics. Students are encouraged to consider their individual dissertation projects in relation to each week's readings.

Each week, we will read selected principal texts together. Readings will be limited to permit sufficient time for you to develop your seminar paper, so the selected texts should be approached as introductions to bodies of scholarship. All students are encouraged to browse the additional readings most relevant to their thesis/dissertation projects, and to share comments and insights from your supplemental reading. These additional texts will be particularly helpful for topics entirely new to you. (*You're not expected to read everything on the list!*) We will rotate discussion leaders to reflect on the key readings and facilitate our dialogues. You are welcome to include sources not listed that will contribute insight on the theme to your dissertation project. Some classic texts are included to provide students an introduction to these foundational works where necessary (book reviews in peer-reviewed journals will familiarize you with central arguments when time does not permit you to read the entire text).

The course will culminate in a seminar paper. All students will complete an original work of Africana scholarship related to their dissertation project. Following an initial consultation about your topic, there are checkpoints throughout the semester to keep on schedule.

Africana scholarship requires thinking against the grain. The work of making visible the people and issues marginalized by traditional forms of knowledge production requires pushing boundaries and creating new modes of inquiry. Thus, this seminar encourages you to develop your capacity to generate theory and creative methodologies tailored to the particular research questions with which you engage.

Note: Some readings are available on Canvas and are noted with an asterisk (). Please also note that the library restricts simultaneous use of many titles - please download chapter(s) as needed so that the title can be released to other users.*

Assignments:

Class discussions: Weeks 5-13, rotating class facilitators will prepare discussion questions for selected readings to start off that week's discussion. (for circulation by noon on the day before class). Discussion leaders are asked to 1) provide background on the scholar(s), 2) identify and lead discussion of the principal theses and arguments of the assigned readings, and 3) use the specifics from the readings as reference and points of departure for drawing out the larger conceptual interventions as they apply broadly to Africana Studies and Black life in general. Each week features some guiding questions to help frame the discussion. (Please note that class discussions will end 25 minutes before the end of class on days with guest speakers.)

1 short **blog/op-ed piece** connecting your course readings & scholarship to a relevant public discourse. **DUE: 2/7**

Plan a **conference panel** or **special journal issue** featuring your own work in dialogue with currently working scholars. The objective is to bring new insights to your research through scholarship outside your home discipline (one selection can be from your home discipline). *Conference panel:* For your proposed contribution, give a title and a short abstract. For the other scholars, give their professional affiliation, the particular book or article you will use for the dialogue, and a paragraph about its relevance and the ideas it generates for your research. *Special journal issue:* Write a paragraph introducing the theme of the special issue. Select 2-3 published books or articles and give a paragraph introducing each that explains its interventions for your theme. **Due: 2/7**

Draft **conceptual statement** and identification of journal (1-3 pp). A preliminary overview of the key ideas and literatures that anchor your paper, along with the name of a journal currently publishing this type of scholarship. **Due 2/21.**

Final paper (25 pp). Each student will prepare a research paper to be completed at the end of the semester, of a scope and quality equivalent to a journal article. The Seminar paper is a requirement for the Graduate Certificate in Africana Studies. The objective of this paper is to apply Africana Studies epistemology and methodologies to a selected aspect of your proposed dissertation project, with the objective of expanding its theoretical breadth and/or its focus on Africana experience. **PAPER MUST INCORPORATE SOME OF THE THEORY, LITERATURE AND/OR DISCUSSIONS FROM THE CLASS.** The paper should be equivalent to a professional journal article in length (approx. 25 pp) and depth of analysis. Students may also petition the Graduate Certificate Director for approval of other scholarly projects demonstrating the successful incorporation of the interdisciplinary methodologies and scholarship of Africana Studies such as a refereed journal article, an online portfolio, documentary video production, exhibition, etc., to be graded by the course professor. Alternative projects will require a written theoretical/conceptual statement. Grading is based on the quality of scholarship and analytical level reflected in submitted assignments, along with general participation throughout the semester. The preferred citation style for this course is Chicago/Turabian. **DUE: 5/2/23**

There are assignments throughout the semester to assist with progress on this paper. Each student is required to meet with Prof. Butler for an initial planning meeting and an interim progress meeting.

Attendance Policy: Everyone is expected to attend all classes. In cases of extreme emergencies directly requiring your presence, please contact Dr. Butler as early as possible. Please do not schedule other obligations that conflict with our class meetings.

Statement on Academic Integrity:

Students in all units of Rutgers University are expected to adhere to the University's policy on academic integrity. All work submitted for this class must conform to these standards, with special attention to plagiarism and citations. The full text of the policy may be consulted at: academicintegrity.rutgers.edu

Course Units & Assignment Due Dates

Weeks 1-3 are an introduction to the discipline of Africana Studies. Your guiding questions for these weeks are: What are your personal stakes in your respective projects? How does Africana studies help you answer your core questions? What are you advancing in Africana theory & epistemology?

Week 4 will be individual meetings with Dr. Butler to work on paper development.

Weeks 5-13 will explore major themes and case studies in contemporary Africana Studies from a variety of disciplinary and regional perspectives.

Week 14 will be a presentation of semester projects in a professional conference format

- 1/17 History/Development of Field
- 1/24 The Practice of Interdisciplinarity
- Project Assignment: Brief conceptual outline and statement of research question*
- 1/31 Major Disciplinary Debates & Public Discourse
- 2/7 Seminar Paper Development

- 2/14 Race
Blog post reflecting on the public implications of your scholarship or bringing an Africana perspective to bear on a topic of your choice.
Annotated conference panel or special journal issue
- 2/21 Black Geographies
Project Assignment: Draft of your paper's theoretical/conceptual statement and identification of journal for potential publication.
- 2/28 Africa in Global Context
- 3/7 African Diaspora Historiography & Theory
Project Assignment: Bibliography
- 3/14 **Spring Break**
- 3/21 Diasporic Solidarities and Discourses of Ethnicity
- 3/28 Gender & Sexuality
- 4/4 Issues in Black Politics: Black Women's Politics
Project Assignment: Detailed outline & theoretical section
- 4/11 The Mechanisms of Anti-Blackness Today: Environmental Justice
- 4/18 Black Popular Cultures: The Politics of Black Joy
- 4/25 Presentation of Final Projects

May 2, 2023 Seminar Paper Due