HONR 3300.303

Honors Seminar: Contemporary African American Literature

Keith Mitchell

T/TH 11:00-12:15, Coburn 210, South Campus

Fulfills Outside of English Elective OR Literature Elective AND English Diverse Literary Traditions Requirement (Speak to Advisor!)

Course Description/Objectives: We will read and dissect fiction, poetry, drama, and criticism published from the middle of the twentieth century to the present. Our exploration will focus on the emergence of a distinctly black modernist and post-modernist literary discourse, often in response to and in conversation with contemporaneous Anglo-American literary movements and trends. We will investigate some of the following: African American writers’ engagement with the “Richard Wright School of Social Protest”; the evolution of the Black Arts/Black Aesthetic Movements of the 1960s and 1970s; the emergence of black feminist and womanist literature, criticism, and theory in the 1970s and 1980s; and the so-called “third renaissance” of the 1990s and 2000s. We will also examine these literary movements contemporary protest movements such as the Black Lives Matter movement. In addition to introducing you to African American literature and/or enhancing an existing knowledge of it, the class will concentrate primarily on strengthening your critical thinking and writing skills. In addition, students will be grouped in order to present Brainshark projects on a particular author, genre, theme, literary movement, or theoretical perspective at the end of the semester.

Requirements:

1. Come to class regularly and punctually. (Absences will adversely affect your grade. If you are absent more than 3 TIMES AFTER YOU USE UP YOUR 3 EXCUSED/UNEXCUSED ABSENCES YOU WILL FAIL THE COURSE.
2. Read all the assigned material before coming to class. (Since interpretation and literary analysis are an integral part of the course, class participation is highly encouraged and may even affect the final grade.)
3. Write 1 of 2 short essay assignments of between 8 and 10 pages. The papers must be double-spaced (with proper margins and Works Cited page). The paper should develop out of our readings and discussions and will explore and analyze significant aspects of the issues and themes raised in the course. Or it can explore a genre or another work by an author we have studied. It should not, however, merely rehash what we have already studied and discussed.
*** [DO NOT UPLOAD ANY OF YOUR ASSIGNMENTS TO BLACKBOARD AS PDFS. UPLOAD YOUR ASSIGNMENTS AS REGULAR WORD DOCUMENTS: DOC, OR DOCX, OR RTF.]

• Quizzes: WE WILL TENTATIVELY HAVE IN-CLASS QUIZZES PRACTICALLY EVERYDAY. THEREFORE, YOU MUST BE PREPARED BY DOING ALL OF THE REQUIRED READING. Quizzes may be given on any reading material that has been assigned or any concept(s) that have been covered in class. The points will be calculated at the end of the semester. They are not averaged together. YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO MAKE UP QUIZZES OR EXAMS.

NOTE: Using the exact words of another writer or paraphrasing another writer’s words without proper quotations and/or citations is plagiarism. Plagiarism will result in a grade of F for the assignment.

If you are unfamiliar with using the MLA style guide for writing English papers, please consult: Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab Website: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/

Other Important Observances:
a. All electronic devices are to be turned off and put away upon entering class. No texting in class!!
b. Tardiness to class will not be tolerated and will be dealt with appropriately.
c. Eating in class is not permitted.
d. Beverages in class are permitted.
e. When I announce that “class will begin/start,” ALL TALKING WILL IMMEDIATELY CEASE!!
f. If you have any type of learning disability, you need to immediately apprise me of this so that we can make the appropriate arrangements for you to do as well as you possibly can in this course.

You are responsible for checking your UML Email every day. Not checking your UML Email is NO EXCUSE for not knowing about announcements or changes in the syllabus. Most of the class handouts will also be posted on the class Blackboard page.

Participation:
Participation is critical in the evaluation and determination of your progress in this class. Participation includes the expression of your ideas based on your intellectual work in class discussions and in group work. The percentage attributed to your participation in class may be the difference between your passing or failing the course. I expect positive contributions to our class discussions through your insights into the materials and discussions, as well as your making connections or by asking questions.

Grading and Evaluation: Students are evaluated and graded by a combination of the following:

1. 1 of 2 short papers: 8-10 pages in length = 20%
2. 1-1.5 page daily Response Papers = 30%

4. Daily attendance, quizzes (contingent), class participation, and homework: 20%

The total is 100%.

Final Grades will be calculated as a percentage. Ex. 90-100% =A range, 80-89%=B range, and so on.

Attendance:
Attendance, participation, and preparation for class are expected for each of you; in my long teaching experience I have found many direct correlations between what students learn (and the grades they get) with their coming to class and participating. Because I think attendance is important, I allot 30% of the entire course grade to attendance, quizzes, and participation. I will hand around an attendance sheet each day; sign it even if you are too late to take a quiz that might be given.

**Absences: You are given a total of 3 absences (excused and unexcused) for this class before you final grade will be adversely affected. This total includes both excused and non-excused absences. Once you have reached 3 absences, your final grade will drop by half of a letter grade based on each subsequent absence. For example, if after the 3 absences you miss another class and you have an “A” as a final grade, your final grade will not be higher than an A- because of the absence. Each subsequent absence will result in a half a letter grade reduction of your final grade. Once you have missed 3 classes, I will inform you via UML email of your status. A total of 3 three times being late will count as 1 absence. For example, if you are late 6 times, this will count as 2 absences.

***If you are an athlete, you must bring me your exemption form and your away-tournament schedule in order to be excused from class. Regardless, you are still responsible for completing the reading and any homework that is due.

Response Papers:

Grading Criteria
1. Daily 1-1.5 page Response Papers (double-spaced, regular margins and font) for which you will receive credit. There are potentially a total of 28 daily response papers for this class. During the semester, however, you may miss turning in 2 of the daily response papers without penalty. The daily response papers will be worth a total of 30% of your final grade. RESPONSE PAPERS ARE DUE IN CLASS ON THE DAY OF DISCUSSION. I will not accept any late response papers. No exceptions.

3. You will complete 1 out of 2 assigned short essays worth 20%. These papers will be a maximum of 8-10 pages, double-spaced. Do not go under 8 pages and do not go over 10.5
pages. If you write less than 8 pages or more than 10.5 pages, you will receive a zero for assignment. Total percentage = 20%

4. Brainshark Group Projects = 30% [20% for the final group project and presentation and 10% for the Brainshark Reflection Paper.]

5. In-class activities, participation, and attendance = 30%

Total = 100%

***Your First Response Paper Be Due In Class on Thursday January 26, 2017. Read over the handout “How to Write a Meaningful Response Paper.”

NOTE: This is a 3-credit course, as defined by federal regulation. You should expect to complete 6 hours of out-of-class work each week for approximately 15 weeks, for a total of 90 hours of outside-of-class work.

Academic Integrity:

The integrity of the academic enterprise of any institution of higher education requires honesty in all aspects of its endeavor. Maintaining academic integrity is therefore the responsibility of all faculty, staff, and students at the University of Massachusetts Lowell.

Academic dishonesty is prohibited in all programs of the University. Sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty.

Definitions of Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to:

Cheating - use, or attempted use, of trickery, artifice, deception, breach of confidence, fraud, or misrepresentation of one’s academic work. Submission of the same work in its entirety for credit in two courses without obtaining the permission of the instructors constitutes cheating. Collaborating with others when not explicitly allowed by the instructor constitutes cheating.

Fabrication - falsification or invention of any information or citation in any academic exercise.

Plagiarism - representing, whether intentionally or unintentionally, the words or ideas of another as one's own work in any academic exercise.

Facilitating dishonesty - helping or attempting to help another commit an act of academic dishonesty, including substituting for another in an examination, misrepresenting oneself, or allowing others to represent as their own one's papers, reports, or academic works.
Federal Credit Hour Requirement Policy:

“Federal regulation defines a credit hour as an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement that is an institutional established equivalence that reasonably approximates not less than-

(1) One hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours out of class student work each week for approximately 15 weeks for one semester or trimester hour of credit, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or

(2) At least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph (1) for other activities as established by the institution including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours” (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, Policy on Credits and Degrees, Effective July 1, 2011).

Relationship of Course to General Education Requirements:
All undergraduate students in the University, depending on the date of enrollment, are required to satisfy General Education requirements This course, 40/42.364.201, has been approved as an AH/D course for the GenEd 2000 program. This course meets the Essential Learning Outcome of Diversity & Cultural Awareness (DCA) and Social Responsibility and Ethics (SRE) as defined under the Core Curriculum requirements for students entering Fall 2015 and after.


TH 1/19: Discussion of Kennedy’s essay “Passing,” Ex-Colored Man, “Introduction” and “Preface,” and Ex-Colored Man, Chapters I-III. Quiz. HW: Read the two handouts on the Bildungsroman, and read Johnson’s Ex-Colored Man, Chapters IV-VII.

T 1/24: Discussion of the two handouts on the Bildungsroman and Ex-Colored Man, Chapters IV-VII. HW: Read Johnson’s Ex-Colored Man, Chapters VIII-IX. [Johnson Response Paper #1 is due in class on Thursday].

TH 1/26: Discussion of Ex-Colored Man, Chapters VIII-IX. HW: Read Johnson’s Ex-Colored Man, Chapters X-XI.
T 1/31: Discussion of Ex-Colored Man, Chapters X-XI. HW: **Google and bring in biographical information on Percival Everett.** Read Everett’s “Signing to the Blind,” pp. 1-4, and read Percival Everett’s *Erasure*, Chapters 1-6.

TH 2/2: Discussion of **biographical information on Percival Everett**, Everett’s “Signing to the Blind,” and *Erasure*, Chapters 1-6. **HW:** Read “My Pafology” in *Erasure* (pp. 63-131) and read *Erasure*, Chapters 7-8.

[“Contemporary African American Literature and Cultural Terms” are due to be uploaded to Blackboard by Sunday February 5 at Midnight.]

T 2/7: Discussion of “My Pafology” in *Erasure* (pp. 63-131) and read *Erasure*, Chapters 7-8. **HW:** Read *Erasure* Chapters 9-13. [**Hand out Introduction to Brainshark Assignment Sheets**]

TH 2/9: Discussion of *Erasure* Chapters 9-13. **HW:** **Google and bring in biographical information on both Richard Bruce Nugent and John Keene.** Read Richard Bruce Nugent’s “Smoke, Lilies and Jade” and John Keene’s “Blues” [Handouts/ Please, read Nugent’s story first].

[Paper #1 is due to be uploaded to Blackboard on Sunday February 26 at Midnight.]

T 2/14: Discussion of biographical information on Richard Bruce Nugent, Nugent’s “Smoke, Lilies and Jade” and John Keene’s “Blues.” **HW:** **Google and bring in biographical information on Zora Neale Hurston.** Read Alice Walker’s “Looking for Zora” [Handout]. Read Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Chapters 1-4. [From 1.5-3 minute Brainshark Introductions need to be uploaded the class Brainshark cite by midnight tonight.]

TH 2/16 Discussion of biographical information on Zora Neale Hurston, Walker’s “Looking for Zora,” and *Their Eyes*, Chapters 1-4. **HW:** Read *Their Eyes*, Chapters 5-9.

**T 2/21: MONDAY SCHEDULE**


[Paper #1 is due to be uploaded to Blackboard on Sunday February 26 by Midnight.]

T 2/28: Discussion of *Their Eyes*, Chapters 10-14. **HW:** Read Their Eyes, Chapters 15-17. **We will spend 15-20 minutes of the class discussing your Group Brainshark Projects. I will also allow you time to decide upon a group coordinator and to exchange information.**

TH 3/2: Discussion of *Their Eyes*, Chapters 15-17. **HW:** Read *Their Eyes*, Chapters 18-20.

T 3/7: Discussion of *Their Eyes*, Chapters 18-20. **HW:** **Google and bring in biographical information on Alice Walker.** Read Alice Walker’s The Color Purple, pp. 1-50.

TH 3/9 Discussion of *The Color Purple*, pp. 1-50. **HW:** **Over Spring Break, read The Color Purple, pp. 50-150.**
3/13-3/19: Spring Break


TH 3/23 Discussion of *The Color Purple*, pp. 151-194. **HW:** Read *The Color Purple*, pp. 195-251. [Begin working on your Group Brainshark Projects. You Must Work with Library Staff in the Media Center and use the libguide to help you find sources. You may need to consult a Senior Librarian]

T 3/28: Discussion of *The Color Purple*, pp. 195-251. **HW:** Google and bring in biographical information on Natasha Trethewey. Read selected poems from Natasha Trethewey’s *Native Guard*.

TH 3/30: Discussion of biographical information on Natasha Trethewey and selected poems from Trethewey’s *Native Guard*. **HW:** Google and bring in biographical information on Nikky Finney. Read the “Introduction” to Nikky Finney’s *The World Is Round* and read selected poems from Nikki Finney’s *The World Is Round*.

T 4/4: Discussion of biographical information on Nikky Finney, the “Introduction” to Nikky Finney’s *The World Is Round* and selected poems from Nikki Finney’s *The World Is Round*. **HW:** Google and bring in biographical information on Toni Morrison. Read Toni Morrison’s *Home*, Chapters 1-5.

TH 4/6: Discussion of biographical information on Toni Morrison and *Home*, Chapters 1-5. **HW:** Read Morrison’s *Home*, Chapters, 6-10.

T 4/11: Discussion of *Home*, Chapters 6-10. **HW:** Read Morrison’s *Home*, Chapters 11-17. [Group I Brainshark Project Is Due.]

TH 4/13 Discussion of *Home*, Chapters, 11-17. **HW:** Google and bring in biographical information on Suzan-Lori Parks. Read Suzan-Lori Parks’ *Father Comes Home from the War, Part I*. [Group II Brainshark Project Is Due.]

T 4/18: Discussion of biographical information on Suzan-Lori Parks and Suzan-Lori Parks’ *Father Comes Home from the War, Part I*. **HW:** Read Parks’ *Father Comes Home from the War, Part II*. [Group III Brainshark Project Is Due.]

TH 4/20: Discussion of *Father Comes Home from the War, Part II*. **HW:** Read *Father Comes Home from the War, Part III*. [Group IV Brainshark Project Is Due.]

T 4/25: Discussion of *Father Comes Home from the War, Part III*. **HW:** Read Walter Mosley’s “Equal Opportunity” [Handout].


**Final Papers (Paper #2) and Reflection Papers will be due on the day of the Final Exam by Midnight. You will need to upload your final paper and/or your Reflection Paper to Blackboard. Please remember to only upload papers as Word Documents (doc, docx, or rtf [rich text format]).**