Research Methods in African American Studies
AAS 525 ~~ Wednesday 3:45-6:30, Sims 219 ~~ Fall 2014
Office Hours: Mon. 10:00-12:30; Tues. 10:00-1:30; Wed. noon-1; other days & times by appointment

DESCRIPTION: The purpose of this seminar is to foster the development of conceptual and technical skills for research in the interdisciplinary field of African American Studies. It addresses methodological, ethical, and political dimensions of humanities and social science research projects. Participants gain experience in formulating viable research questions; identifying and locating relevant primary and secondary sources; critically engaging existing scholarship; interpreting primary sources; developing survey instruments; conducting interviews; organizing data; writing research proposals; and presenting analyses and research findings.

REQUIREMENTS: I evaluate course work based on accuracy, comprehensiveness, conceptual and stylistic clarity, and the degree to which students develop and substantiate their ideas. I am available to discuss questions and drafts. Seek assistance before work is due. Late assignments will receive a penalty of one letter grade per weekday; work submitted more than four days late will automatically receive a failing grade.

The following factors determine course grades:

- Participation: (15%) Course participation entails regular attendance, completion of assigned reading according to schedule, and informed engagement in discussions and exercises. Missed class exercises cannot be made up. Students who are absent from more than one class without a valid documented excuse may have their course grade reduced by half of a letter grade. You must complete and submit all assignments in order to pass this course.

- Unannounced Quizzes & Homework: (15%) You may not take a quiz if you are absent when I distribute it.

- Treasure Hunt: (10%) I will distribute the assignment. Due: September 24

- Oral History Interview Assessment and Practice: (5%) I will provide guidelines. Due: October 15

- Document Editing & Analysis: (20%) Each student must locate, transcribe, (if needed), research, annotate, and analyze one primary source related to people of African descent in SU’s Special Collections Research Center. All students will make public presentations of their research. I will provide guidelines. Due: Nov. 19

- Literature Review: (10%) Use the attached guide to review four scholarly sources related to your research proposal topic. A preliminary bibliography is due with your topic summary on September 17. Literature reviews are due on Friday, October 10.

- Research Proposal: (25%) Each student must prepare a research proposal on a topic in African American Studies. Everyone must meet with me to finalize research topics. A topic summary and bibliography of four sources are due by September 17. Proposals are due on December 5. Guidelines are attached.

The Fine Print:

1. If you have a disability documented at Syracuse University’s Office of Disability Services (ODS) and need reasonable accommodations in this course, give me a copy of your Accommodation Authorization immediately. If you need accommodations, but you have not documented your needs at SU, discuss your situation with ODS immediately. ODS is located at 804 University Avenue, Room 309. The phone number is 315.443.4498. Learn basic information at http://disabilitieservices.syr.edu. Typically, ODS does not grant requests for accommodations retroactively. I cannot make accommodations without written ODS authorization.

2. All work for individual assignments in this course must be solely your own. You must acknowledge all ideas and words obtained from other people using complete and accurate citations. Failure to cite material from other people’s work constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism and all other instances of academic dishonesty are grounds for failing this course. I will also report such acts as violations of Syracuse University’s Academic Integrity Policy. All students are responsible for understanding the standards and procedures outlined in the policy. You can review it at http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/academic-integrity-policy/

3. Students will be excused from class for religious observances and allowed to make up work due during such absences if they notify me of the observances by the end of Week 2 using MySlice. See the Religious Observance policy: http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/reigious_observance.htm
4. In accordance with the provisions of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), I may use academic work you produce in this course for educational purposes. By completing assignments as a student enrolled in this course, you grant permission for such use in this course this semester. In order to use your academic work for educational purposes after this course has ended, I must obtain your written permission or render your work anonymous. Thus, if I want to make ongoing use of your work for educational purposes, I will ask you to sign a consent form that authorizes me to use specific material for such purposes and to identify you as the creator of the material. If you do not authorize me to identify you in ongoing use of your work, I will remove your name from the work and indicate that its creator prefers to remain anonymous. Your decisions about my use of your work for educational purposes will have no bearing on your grade. See the SU policy on using student work at [http://coursecatalog.syr.edu/2010/rules/undergraduate/242_i_policies_sec10-30](http://coursecatalog.syr.edu/2010/rules/undergraduate/242_i_policies_sec10-30) (1.1 Student Academic Work)

5. You will earn a failing participation grade for any day that I observe you in class doing any of the following: text messaging, emailing, sleeping, web surfing, wearing earphones, talking on a phone, or engaging in any activity unrelated to the class.


**SCHEDULE OF TOPICS & ASSIGNMENTS** ([B] denotes items on Blackboard. I may revise the schedule as needed.)

**Week 1:** Aug. 27
- **Reception & Introductions:** What is the point of research? What does it entail?
  - Discussion: What are your research interests? Why do you want to explore particular issues? Is there a “Black” research paradigm or methodology? Should there be one?

**Week 2:** Sept. 3
- **Research Goals and “documenting the obvious”** (14)

**Group Homework: Design a Study!** (Guidelines distributed in class)

**Week 3:** Sept. 10
- **Research Conception, Design, and Operationalization**
  - Joseph Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design*, Chapters 3 and 4

**DUE:** Design a Study!

**Week 4:** Sept. 17
- **Finding and Using Existing Data Sets and Electronic Resources**
  - Melanie Arthur, *SPSS Companion for Research Methods* (SPSS Workbook) [B]
  - Guest Lecture: Prof. Kishi Animashaun Ducre, *Location TBD*
  - **DUE:** Treasure Hunt

- **Banned Books Week - Black & Banned [Books] Read-out: Time & Place TBD**

**Week 5:** Sept. 24
- **Measuring Statistical Relationships - SPSS**
  - Melanie Arthur, *SPSS Companion for Research Methods* (SPSS Workbook) [B]
  - Guest Lecture: Prof. Kishi Animashaun Ducre, *Location TBD*
  - **DUE:** Treasure Hunt

**Week 6:** Oct. 1
- **The Art and Science of Implementation**
  - Joseph Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design*, Chapters 5 and 7

**DUE:** Questions and Methods Matrix, Exercise 5.2, Maxwell, pp. 119-120 (old edition, pp. 102-103)
Week 7: Oct. 8
Research Planning Session
- Special Collections Research Center, Bird Library (3:45-5)/Discuss document analysis & research topics (5:15)

** Homework:** Visit SCRC independently to select source to analyze.

** Literature Review Due Friday, 10.10.14 @ noon **

Week 8: Oct. 15
Oral History Interviews - Doing them & Using Them
- Portelli, “Research as an Experiment in Equality” in The Death of Luigi Trastulli, pp. 29-44 [B]
- Suggested: Tracy E. K'Meyer, and A. Glenn Crothers, "If I See Some of This in Writing, I'm Going to Shoot You": Reluctant Narrators, Taboo Topics, and Ethical Dilemmas of the Oral Historian,” Oral History Review 34:1 (2007):71-93 [B]

** DUE:** Select one transcript, audio file, or video recording of an oral history interview on any topic related to people of African descent. Type a one-page assessment of the interview’s strengths and limitations as a lens for understanding the issues it addresses.

Week 9: Oct. 22
Research Ethics and the IRB
- Joan Sieber, Planning Ethically Responsible Research, Chapters 2-5 [B]
- Research ethics in the news [B]
- Review Office of Research Integrity & Protections web site: http://orip.syr.edu/human-research/human-research-irb.html

** DUE:** Researcher certification quiz: http://orip.syr.edu/human-research/training-list/Education%20and%20Training.html

Week 10: Oct. 29
Student Presentations of Research Proposals
- Bring 2 copies of Research Proposal to class

Week 11: Nov. 5
Race, Blackness, and Research Bias
- Joseph Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design, Chapter 6
- Stephen Jay Gould, The Mismeasure of Man, Chapter 2 [B]

Week 12: Nov. 12
Individual Consultations on Forum Presentations & Research Proposals

Week 13: Nov. 19
Student Research Forum: Presentations of SCRC Documents

Week 14: Nov. 27
No Class – Thanksgiving Break

Week 15: Dec. 3
Debriefing and Conclusions

*** Revised Research Proposals Due: Friday, December 5 @ noon ***
Use the questions below to analyze four academic journal articles related to your research topic. Submit a separate analysis for each article. Each analysis should provide single-spaced responses to the questions. Avoid using quotations as part of your analysis.

What fundamental question does the author attempt to answer?

What is the author’s central research focus or unit of analysis?

Explain the thesis the author presents to answer to his or her central question(s). What related arguments does she or he make?

To what extent does the article rely on a particular ideological framework or theory? (such as Afro-centrism, feminism, Marxism, political conservatism, post-structuralism, etc.)

Summarize the author’s methods.

- What evidence does the author present to support his or her thesis? How did she or he obtain relevant evidence or data?

- To what extent does the article use qualitative and/or quantitative analysis? What variables does the author consider? How does she or he define and measure the variables?

What are the strengths and limitations of the author’s evidence? Does it represent broad trends, or is it exceptional? Could the evidence support conclusions that contradict the author’s thesis?

What assumptions shape the author’s analysis? What biases are evident?

What factors would strengthen the analysis and the conclusions?

How is the source relevant to your research project? (Is it a potential source of information? Does it offer a useful conceptual framework? Do you expect to challenge its assumptions, evidence, methods, or conclusions?)
Format for Research Proposals
Research Methods – AAS 525
J. Bryant - Sims 208, jobryant@syr.edu
Proposals are due in my AAS mail bin (Sims 200) by NOON on Friday, December 5.

I. TITLE: Formulate a title that conveys a clear sense of the issues you will explore.
- Be concrete and creative. Avoid such general titles as "Black Nationalism" and “Fanon’s Thought.”

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS: Explain what you want to know or understand.
- Report the questions that guide your research. Explain why you are interested in the questions.

III. PROJECT FOCUS: Explain what you intend to analyze in order to answer your research questions.
- What is your unit of analysis? Answer this question by describing the issue, idea, activity, group, cultural form, individual, movement, text, and/or event that you are investigating.
- Explain the context of the phenomenon you are studying. What is the significance of its time period, location, scale, profession, and/or genre?
- Describe the final product that will or could result from your research (e.g. thesis, scholarly article or paper, documentary or performance script, policy paper, exhibit, article for a general audience, etc.)

IV. RATIONALE & STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM: Explain the need for your research.
- Explain the contributions the project will make to existing knowledge and/or interpretations.
- How does the project compare with related work on the topic? Does it refine, expand, replicate, supplement, challenge, or fill a gap in existing research? Address these queries in a narrative that reviews relevant secondary literature. Use the literature review assignment as the basis for developing your narrative. Do NOT simply insert the literature review assignment.
- How does the project advance the broad field of African and African American Studies?
- Describe your target audience. Who will appreciate your research? Who will benefit from it?
- What are the broader implications of your inquiry? How do you think it can affect future research on the topic? What is the project’s significance or usefulness beyond academic circles?

V. PROJECT METHODOLOGY: Explain how you will carry out your research project.
- What disciplinary, theoretical, or philosophical approaches inform your project?
- Describe your research methods. How will you obtain data or sources for your analysis? (e.g. undertaking research in specific archival collections; searching existing data sets; conducting ethnological observations, surveys, structured interviews, or oral histories, etc.)
  -- If you are collecting data using surveys, interviews, focus groups, or oral histories, explain how you will recruit subjects and what you expect to obtain from them. You must attach all survey and interview questions, discussion topics, and informed consent documents that you will use.
  -- If you are collecting sources through archival, library, and/or Internet research, you must attach analyses of three primary sources. Use the attached Primary Source Analysis Guidelines.

VI. CRITICAL ASSESSMENT: Describe the project’s limitations and your personal expectations.
- What pertinent questions will your project leave unanswered? Identify unavoidable shortcomings in your research design and methodology.
- Offer brief reflections on how this research undertaking will contribute to your intellectual development.

VII. ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY: Attach a bibliography of four secondary sources and three primary sources related to your project. Cite at least one book and one scholarly article. Also consider news accounts, images, laws, music lyrics, fiction, speeches, ephemera, and poetry. Encyclopedias, anonymous and commercial web sites, Wiki sites, and planned interviews are invalid sources for this section. Each annotation must summarize the central argument or idea in the source and explain how it relates to your research. Use accurate and complete citations. Cite only those sources that you have obtained.
Primary Source Analysis Guidelines
AAS 525 - Fall 2014
J. Bryant

Primary sources are raw materials that scholars use to explain and interpret the past and present phenomena. Such sources include written and non-textual materials produced during the period under investigation by people who participated in or observed an event. Diaries, letters, artwork, speeches, poems, autobiographies, oral histories, photographs, maps, wills, census data, and music are common examples of primary sources.

INSTRUCTIONS: Use these guidelines to analyze primary sources for research proposals. Type comprehensive single-spaced responses to all of the queries below. Feel free to explore additional questions about the source after you have addressed these issues.

QUERIES

1. In what context did the document originate? Who produced it? Did it originate from a participant in a given event or from an observer?

2. What is the purpose of the document? Who was its intended audience? How do you think the intended audience shaped the source?

3. What does the source reveal about the context in which it originated? What is its central idea or argument? What issues does it address? What specific questions does it enable you to answer?

4. What biases are evident in the source?

5. How does the source compare to related sources on the topic? Explain its similarities and differences.

6. If this were your only source related to your topic, what conclusions would you draw? How valid would your conclusions be? (In other words, does the source represent a broader phenomenon, or is it exceptional?)