

University of Illinois at Chicago

AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILIES IN THE U.S.

AAST 203/SOC 203

Fall Term 2008

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is an introduction to studies of African American families as revealed in the empirical literature of the social and behavioral sciences. This course will make you aware intellectually, emotionally, and experientially of the social forces that impact Black families in the United States. Teaching and learning in the context of this class will be multidimensional. You will learn how social structure affects family life through lecture, role-play, discussion, data analyses and field exercises. Through these alternative pedagogical strategies, our class will work as a learning community to understand the diversity of African-American family experiences via empirical investigation and to enable you to acquire a sociological perspective for understanding your own experience and that of the social world in which you live.

COURSE GOALS:

By the end of this course students will be able to

1. Describe and differentiate between the major theoretical schools of thought within sociology and use them to explain Black family life in the U.S.
2. Describe how various methodological approaches are used to explore Black families, demonstrate mastery of one research method, and state the strengths and limitations of both qualitative and quantitative approaches.
3. Objectively analyze your existing assumptions about African-American family life by comparing and contrasting them with existing empirical research.
4. Communicate effectively through written and oral presentations.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

To obtain these goals, students will:

1. Review existing studies in three areas of African American family life in the United States (goals #1, 2, & 3).
2. Take daily quizzes that test comprehension of all assigned readings (goals #1).
3. Design and execute a research study that tests a hypothesis involving Black family issues (goals #1, 2, & 3).
4. Synthesize and present research findings for in-class presentations (goal #4).

OFFICE HOURS AND AVAILABILITY:

You are warmly invited to contact me to discuss your questions or concerns about this course via e-mail (rockquem@uic.edu). If you want to meet with me face-to-face, I'm happy to set up a time for us to meet in my office (1209 University Hall).

STUDENTS CAN EXPECT THE PROFESSOR TO:

1. Arrive on time and be prepared for class.
2. Follow the written syllabus and communicate any changes in advance.
3. Take students' interests and experiences into consideration when preparing for class.
4. Respond in a timely fashion and as fully as possible to student work.
5. Be available to students as needed outside of class.
6. Evaluate student's work fairly according to clearly communicated expectations.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS AND MATERIALS:

There are four required books for this course. They may be purchased at the UIC bookstore. The books are:

- Anderson, Elijah. 2000. *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and Moral Life of the Inner City*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Russell, Kathy, Midge Wilson, and Ronald Hall. 1993. *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans*. New York: Anchor.
- Kozol, Jonathan. 1992. *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*. New York: Crown.
- McIntyre, Lisa J. 2006. *The Practical Sceptic: Core Concepts in Sociology (3rd Edition)*. Boston, MA: McGraw Hill.

In addition to the required books you will need to purchase a **3-RING BINDER** to keep all of your course materials together. The binder should include 4 dividers labeled: 1) "quizzes," 2) "participation activities," 3) "option project," and 4) "miscellaneous." You may also want to purchase a portable three-hole punch to add items to your binder as they are returned in class. **AT THE END OF THE COURSE, ALL STUDENTS MUST TURN IN THE BINDER AS A PORTFOLIO OF THE WORK THEY HAVE DONE OVER THE SEMESTER** (you will receive a participation grade for this).

Finally, all students are encouraged (although not required) to secure a daily subscription to the New York Times. I will frequently make mention of current events that overlap with our course material and I am operating on the assumption that you know about major news events that occur in the world around you. For those unable to incur the expense of an NYT subscription, the paper is available for free in the library and online at www.nyt.com.

EVALUATION AND GRADING:

This course is based on a system of contract grading. Each student will select one of the available options for mastering the course material. This agreement will be put in writing and signed by both the student and the professor. Read it thoroughly, as it will serve as the basis of a contractual obligation.

To obtain a grade of "C" in the class, students must successfully complete ALL of the following requirements:

REQUIREMENT 1: STUDENTS MUST ATTEND CLASS

All students are **REQUIRED** to come to class prepared to discuss the assigned material and participate in class activities. This course is based on a model of active learning so your careful preparation and active participation are absolutely critical. Regular attendance makes possible the kind of continuing give-and-take on the issues that enhances the experience for everyone in the course. For this reason alone, you should want to come and take part in the discussion.

All students are allowed three absences for whatever reasons (i.e., the professor does not differentiate between "excused" vs. "unexcused" absences). It is **NOT** necessary to notify the professor of the reason for your absence. Any time you miss class, you may obtain the missed material via the course website or from other students in the class. Do not expect to attend office hours after an absence to

receive a "condensed version" of the missed class. This is simply impossible because the course is based on a model of active learning. **IF YOU MISS MORE THAN THREE CLASSES, YOU WILL BE ADVISED TO DROP THE COURSE IN ORDER TO AVOID A FAILING GRADE.** If you think you will miss more than three classes, kindly do not take this course. Students will not be allowed to join the class after the third class meeting.

I will keep track of your attendance and participation on a daily basis. If you are not in class when attendance is taken, you are not in attendance for that class period. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class period so be on time!

Note: Regardless of whether you actually attend class meetings or not, you are responsible for all announcements made, policies set, and materials covered during class meetings.

REQUIREMENT 2: STUDENTS MUST BE PREPARED FOR CLASS

I assume that you will spend **three hours** of preparation for each hour of in-class time. If you feel this assumption is "ridiculous," "impossible," or "unfair," kindly do not take this course.

AAST 203 is 3 credits X 3 hours p/credit = 9 hours p/week in prep time.

You should divide your preparation time in the following way:

- 3 hours p/week reading the required articles and books
- 3 hours p/week *studying* the material by outlining, taking notes on the readings, reviewing lecture notes, and/or studying for the daily quizzes
- 3 hours p/week on your option project

Your preparedness will be measured by your performance on short quizzes that will be given each and every day at the beginning of class. If you are not in class when the quiz is given, you will not be allowed to make up the quiz. Therefore, you should make every possible effort to be on time to class. All students must maintain an average of 80% or above to fulfill this requirement. This requirement is graded on a pass/fail basis. If your average is 80% or better, you pass the requirement. If your average is 79.9% or below, you fail the requirement. There will be absolutely no make-up quizzes offered for any reason.

REQUIREMENT 3: STUDENTS MUST PARTICIPE IN CLASS IN A MEANINGFUL AND POSITIVE WAY

Participation refers to your mental, attitudinal, AND physical behavior. Your participation grade will be determined by the instructor based upon your in-class behavior, attentiveness, and understanding of the material. On lecture days, the instructor may give a quiz at the end of the class to measure your comprehension of the lecture materials. On activity days, your groups may have a collective project to hand in for evaluation or you may turn in an individual in-class writing assignment.

The professor reserves the right to dismiss any student from the class whose behavior is disruptive or grossly disrespectful towards the professor, the teaching assistants, or other students in the class, as defined by the professor. Students will receive one warning, in writing, if their behavior is unacceptable and then they will be dismissed from the class. In general, students should avoid excessively rude behavior, as it will have a negative impact on their daily participation grade. Students must maintain an average of 80% or higher to fulfill the participation requirement. This requirement is graded on a pass/fail basis. If your average is 80% or better, you pass. If your average is 79.9% or below, you fail the requirement.

I value your participation in class discussions and group exercises. Below are some guidelines that may help you to participate in a meaningful and appropriate manner:

- Bring the assigned reading to class.
- If you have not read the assignment and have not prepared for class, do not participate in class discussion. This will have a negative impact on your grade so mentally plan to be prepared for class every day.
- Limit your comments and discussion to the materials at hand.
- Present coherent, rational explanations backed up by relevant evidence from the text. Always be ready to be challenged to support your views with specific empirical evidence. Be advised that personal experiences, while interesting, do NOT constitute empirical evidence.
- Try to develop an intellectual willingness to entertain explanations that you may intuitively find disagreeable.
- Uphold your responsibilities in small groups.
- Be courteous.
 - Do not bring or consume food in class.
 - Do not come to class late.
 - Do not read the newspaper or do homework for other classes during class.
 - Do not pass notes or talk while others are speaking in class.
 - Do not answer your cellular phone in class.
 - Do not work on your laptop computer during class.
 - Do not glare or roll your eyes at others.
 - Do not put your feet up on the furniture or on other people.

Do not leave the room to use the restroom during class (adults know how to "hold it").

Do not pack up your belongings five minutes before class ends.

Do not ever, under any circumstances, fall asleep during class.

- Consciously cultivate a positive attitude toward your learning experience. Come to class with questions, be open to the answers, and try to make connections between the material you are learning at every stage of the course.

IF A STUDENT WISHES TO OBTAIN A GRADE OF "A" OR "B" IN THE COURSE, IN ADDITION TO FULFILLING THE PREVIOUSLY STATED REQUIREMENTS, THEY MUST CONTRACT FOR ONE OF THE FOLLOWING OPTIONS:

OPTION A: INTELLECTUAL CIRCLES

Students who select this option will meet in small groups outside of regularly scheduled class time. The purpose of the intellectual circles is to allow students to delve more deeply into the substantive issues discussed in the class and apply them to your individual relationships and families. The groups will meet five times during the semester on a weekday evening for 1.5 hours. Group members will be assigned sections of the book *African American Relationships, Marriages, and Families* for each group meeting. See Appendix C for detailed guidelines. Each meeting will consist of engaging and lively conversations of the reading material and exercises. Students will receive a grade for the written exercises and their participation in the group meetings.

OPTION B: RESEARCH PROJECT

Students choosing this option will be required to conduct an original research project and write up their results in a 15-20 page empirical paper. The projects require students to review existing empirical studies on their topic, collect data and perform either quantitative or qualitative data analysis. Students are required to turn in: 1) a research plan and bibliography, 2) a literature review, 3) a rough draft of the final paper, 4) a final paper, and 5) present their findings to the class in an oral presentation. The various components of the project each contribute to the final grade and each will have a separate due date throughout the term (see Appendix D for due dates and more detailed guidelines). Students choosing this option must work in groups (no more than three members).

OPTION C: SERVICE-LEARNING

Students who select this option will work in a non-profit social service agency in Chicago that serves African American Families. They will be required to spend a minimum of five hours per week at the agency for ten weeks of the course. Students will keep an ongoing journal of their experiences and write a 10-page integration paper (see Appendix E for the assignment guidelines). All materials will be combined in the course portfolio due at the end of the semester. Students

who choose this option will work directly with the course instructor to negotiate the terms and location of their field site.

OPTION D: COMMUNITY ACTION PROJECTS

Students who are oriented towards the resolution of social problems may select a pressing problem that impacts African American families as their central project for the semester. This is a more customized option for the course, but each student choosing this option will: 1) select a social problem, 2) document the extent and causes of the problem, 3) evaluate current solutions, and 4) propose alternatives. The community action projects are VISUAL projects, so the end product that will be graded will be a documentary, interactive website, photography exhibit, or some other visual representation. Students may work on these projects individually or in pairs and should submit a one-paragraph (computer generated) description of the project, timeline, reading list, and evaluation mechanism (i.e., tell me how you want to be graded) along with the course contract.

OPTION E: MAKE YOUR OWN PROJECT

Some students have great ideas for a course project that are not listed here. In the past students have documented their family history, created audio documentaries, and initiated campus-based student movements. Therefore, students may propose an alternative project for the semester by submitting a one-paragraph summary, timeline, reading list, and evaluation mechanism (i.e., tell me how you want to be graded) along with the course contract. Use Appendix D as a guideline for outlining each component of your proposed project.

Note: To get a grade of "A" or "B" in the course, your grade on any of the listed options must be an "A" or "B"!!!! Do NOT choose one of these options if you are unwilling to invest the effort to obtain an "A" or "B" on the project. Getting a "C" on any of the option projects is the functional equivalent of not doing any project at all.

What is the purpose of this???

This menu of options is intended to allow you to chart your own learning path through the substantive material of this course. Students are not all the same. You have many different learning styles, interests and passions, so choose an option that best suits the way you learn. Appendix A of the syllabus contains a GRADING CONTRACT that you must sign and turn in to the professor no later than Wednesday, September 3rd (due at the end of class). Choose

carefully! This is a CONTRACT between you and the professor. That implies that there will be no amendments or changes after it is submitted. **IF YOU FAIL TO MEET ANY OF THE CORE REQUIREMENTS OF YOUR CONTRACT, YOUR GRADE WILL BE DROPPED ONE FULL LETTER FOR EACH REQUIREMENT YOU FAIL TO MEET.**

For example, if you contract for a grade of “A” via Option A (The Intellectual Circles) and average a “A” on the option requirements, but fail to pass the participation, preparedness, and attendance requirements – you will receive a grade of “D” in the course. Note that the core requirements (attendance, participation and preparedness) are recorded on a Pass/Fail basis, so you either pass the requirements or fail the requirement. The only numerical grades recorded for your final grade are for the “A/B” Options (Intellectual Circles, Independent Research Projects, Service Learning, or Make Your Own Option).

IF YOU FAIL TO TURN IN A GRADE CONTRACT, I WILL ASSUME THAT YOU WANT A "C" IN THE COURSE. CONTRACTS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED AFTER THE END OF CLASS ON SEPTEMBER 3rd FOR ANY REASON.

GENERAL COURSE POLICIES:

EXTRA CREDIT:

No extra credit will be offered in this course.

POLICY ON ACADEMIC HONESTY:

The University of Illinois considers academic dishonesty to be a serious offense. Each student in this course will be held to the University Policy on academic dishonesty. Students choosing to violate the policy can expect to receive a failing grade in the course and have the incident reported to the Dean’s Office.

DISABILITY STATEMENT:

Students with disabilities must inform the instructor of the need for accommodations. Those who require accommodations for access and participation in this course must be registered with the Disability Resource Center. Please contact ODS at 312-413-2183 (voice) or 312-413-0123 (TTY).

Appendix B:

**AAST 203/SOC 203
AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILIES IN THE U.S.**

STUDENT - INSTRUCTOR AGREEMENT

STUDENTS:

I _____ acknowledge that I have read the entire course syllabus and fully understand the expectations for myself as a student in the course.

I understand that I must attend class, prepared to intelligently and respectfully discuss the required reading material, and participate in a meaningful and positive way (mentally and physically) in order to obtain a grade of "C." I understand that each of these three requirements (attendance, preparedness, and participation) will be measured and graded on a pass/fail basis and I understand that I must pass each of these requirements to earn a grade of "C". I understand that in order to earn a grade of "A" or "B" for the course, I must earn an "A" or "B" on one of the following option projects: 1) intellectual circles, 2) independent research project, 3) service learning, 4) community action project or 5) make my own option.

I fully understand **why** attendance for the course is mandatory and that if I miss more than three classes, I will be advised to drop the course to avoid a failing grade. If I decide for any reason to drop the class during the course of the semester, I agree to notify the professor of my decision (in writing or by phone), although I am in no way obligated to disclose the reason for the drop. If I fail to drop the course before the official drop date and cease attending the course, I understand that I will receive a failing grade for the course.

I have read and understand the college's policy on academic dishonesty. I understand that any instance of cheating including, but not limited to, those specified in the policy, will result in automatic failure of the course. I also understand that if my behavior is grossly inappropriate, as defined by my professor, I will be dropped from the course after a written warning detailing such behavior.

I agree to participate in the course as outlined and wish to become a member of this learning community.

Name

Date

INSTRUCTOR:

I agree to try to make learning relevant and exciting for students, to take their interests and needs into consideration when preparing class materials, to follow the written syllabus and communicate any changes in advance, to be available to students outside of class, and to create a learning environment which makes students want to come to class and learn.

Professor

Date

Appendix C:
**INTELLECTUAL CIRCLES OPTION
ASSIGNMENTS AND GUIDELINES**

WHAT BOOK DO I NEED TO PURCHASE?

Dixon, Patricia. 2006. *African American Relationships, Marriages and Families*. New York: Brunner-Routledge.

WHERE MAY I OBTAIN THESE BOOKS?

You may either purchase the book online, or I will be happy to put in an order for the book at the UIC Bookstore. Please indicate on your course contract how you will obtain the book.

WHEN WILL WE MEET?

The meeting times, dates, and locations will be determined by your group members. However, the meeting must take place during the weeks outlined below.

Meeting 1	Week of September 15 th	[Chapters 1, 2, and 3]
Meeting 2	Week of September 29 th	[Chapters 4 and 5]
Meeting 3	Week of October 13 th	[Chapters 6 and 7]
Meeting 4	Week of October 27 th	[Chapters 8 and 9]
Meeting 5	Week of November 10 th	[Chapters 10, 11, or 12]

WHAT ARE THE WRITTEN EXERCISES AND WHY MUST WE PREPARE THEM?

For each assigned chapter, you must complete the written exercises at the end of the chapter. This should be a thoughtful written reflection on the reading material and how it applies to your life experience. The purpose of this activity is to guarantee that you have prepared adequately for group meetings and to focus your discussion. I assume that you have completed the required reading, studied the content, and thought deeply about the substantive issues raised. The intellectual circle meetings will NOT consist of a lecture reviewing the required reading. Instead, the readings will serve as the point of departure. Therefore, it is simply unacceptable for students to attend any intellectual circle without completing the reading assignments and preparing thorough written comments.

Your written exercises must be computer generated, single-spaced, using 1-inch margins and Times New Roman (11 or 12 point) font. Put the following information in the top right corner of each essay:

Intellectual Circle Assignment
Your Home Group Name
Your UIN# (NOT your name)
AAST 203/SOC 203
The title of the reading assignment(s)

Written exercises are due at the beginning of each meeting on the due date. The group leader will collect them and submit them to the instructor. **LATE ASSIGNMENTS, INCLUDING THOSE SUBMITTED AFTER THE MEETING ENDS, WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED FOR ANY REASON.**

WHO WILL FACILITATE THE INTELLECTUAL CIRCLES?

You! Each student in the circle will take a turn being the *Facilitator* for a session. The facilitator's tasks are as follows:

1. Circulate an attendance sheet for your group
2. Come to the circle meeting with a list of questions to stimulate discussion
3. Encourage equal participation from all students
4. Collect all student's assignments at the end of the session
5. Distribute and collect all student evaluation forms

HOW WILL I BE GRADED?

You will be graded in the following manner:

Meeting 1: Participation (10) + Written Assignment (10) = 20 points

Meeting 2: Participation (10) + Written Assignment (10) = 20 points

Meeting 3: Participation (10) + Written Assignment (10) = 20 points

Meeting 4: Participation (10) + Written Assignment (10) = 20 points

Meeting 5: Participation (10) + Written Assignment (10) = 20 points

Total = 100 points

Appendix D:
**INDEPENDENT RESEARCH PROJECT OPTION
ASSIGNMENTS AND GUIDELINES**

EVALUATION CRITERIA:

You will be graded in the following manner:

ASSIGNMENT	DUE DATE	GRADE
Research Proposal	9/15/08	10 points
Literature Review	9/24/08	10 points
Rough Draft	10/29/08	20 points
Final Draft	12/1/08	30 points
Oral Presentation	TBA	30 points
TOTAL		100 points

RESEARCH PLAN AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

This assignment is worth 10% of your total option grade and it is due at the beginning of class on 9/15/08. Each group must submit a 3-page proposal that precisely describes your group's research question, literature review, hypothesis, methodology, and analyses. For each step of the research process you should describe what you plan to do throughout the semester. You must attach a bibliography to the research plan (APA or ASA format) documenting the empirical studies your group intends to read and review.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This assignment is worth 10% of your total option grade and it is due at the beginning of the class on 9/24/08. One of the first things that all researchers must do is read other people's studies on their topic of interest. This is to ensure that you understand what has previously been done, how it has been done, and that you are asking a unique question. The first two weeks of your project should, therefore, be spent "reviewing the literature." For this assignment you will summarize the findings of the studies you have reviewed (3-5 pages).

ROUGH DRAFT

This assignment is worth 20% of your total option grade and is due at the beginning of the class on 10/29/08. The rough draft should be a *complete draft* of your 20-page final paper. Your group may want to schedule a meeting with me prior to the due date in order to discuss the direction of your rough draft before submitting it.

FINAL PAPER

This assignment is worth 30% of your total option grade and is due at the beginning of class on 12/1/08. By this time, I will have given you detailed and specific comments about the changes and revisions you need to make on your final paper. Revise, revise, and revise some more! This is the most difficult part of the writing process. If your group needs more guidance, please make an appointment to see me.

PRESENTATION/MINI CONFERENCE

In addition to turning in your final paper, each group will orally present their research findings to the class during our final two weeks of the semester. This assignment is worth 30% of your final grade.

Presentations will occur during an in-class mini-conference (during the last two weeks of class). When social scientists have finished their research, they attend professional meetings to present the findings to their colleagues. Conference presentations typically allow a specified period of time for the researcher to present his/her findings, followed by a question and answer session. Our “mini-conference” will have the same format. Therefore, each group should prepare a 20-minute oral presentation of their research project and should be prepared to field questions afterwards. Below are some ideas as to how you may want to structure your time.

Research Question: Spend 4 minutes getting the crowd excited about your research question. Why is it interesting? Why should they care? Why is it important to students at UIC? What studies have been done on this topic? What have they found? What have been their limitations?

Hypothesis: If your group had a hypothesis, state it briefly (less than 2 minutes).

Methods: Spend 6 minutes explaining your methodology. Describe your sample, your instrument, and the limitations of your study. If you used existing data (such as the GSS or the Census) you may want to spend less time on this section in you collected your own data.

Findings: This is the most important part of the presentation! Spend 6 minutes describing how your research question was answered by your analysis. What important and interesting patterns did you find? If you did interviews, you may want to quote from the material to support your points. If you did statistical analysis, you may want to present the tables. If you did content analysis, you may want to ring examples that illustrate your findings.

Conclusion: You may conclude in a variety of ways depending on your topic and findings (but wrap it up in 2 minutes). Some people like to conclude by making policy-oriented suggestions that generate from their data. Others conclude by suggesting how their findings may affect the people in the room. Another option is to discuss the questions that aware raised during the research process and suggesting avenues for future research.

Tips for a good presentation:

Practice, Practice, Practice!

Make sure that you practice your presentation and time it. I will give you a 2-minute warning and cut you off when your time has expired (as is customary at professional meetings).

If you plan to use visual aides, do not overdo!

Use no more than 8 power-point slides during a 20-minute presentation.
Use your best judgment and always remember that the audience may be learning about your topic for the first time.

Dress professionally.

Practice making eye contact.

Do not read the entire presentation verbatim.

There is nothing more boring than listening to someone read for 20 minutes. If you must write down your presentation, know it well enough that you may just glance at it occasionally.

Ask me if you want a sample presentation.

Appendix E:
**SERVICE LEARNING OPTION
ASSIGNMENTS AND GUIDELINES**

Your requirements for completing the Service Learning Option are as follows:

1. Work Journal

Due Date: 12/1/08

Your work journal should include one entry for each day you work at your field site.

Each entry should include: a) a description of your activities that day, b) any significant experiences or interactions you had, and c) at least one reflection on how your work connects with the required reading for the course.

2. Integration paper

Due Date: 12/1/08

Write a 10-12 page Agency Analysis (double space, 1-inch margins). This paper should summarize and analyze the social problem that your community service agency is designed to remedy and assess their effectiveness. Specifically, your paper should address each of the following areas:

- clearly defining the social problem your agency addresses
- describe what your agency perceives as the cause of that problem
- identifying the stakeholders within organization
- describe the programming designed to solve your organization's social problem
- evaluate the success of your agency's programming

In constructing the paper, you must incorporate content from the books we have read in class, as well as the experiences from your work journal. All papers should be thoroughly spell-checked, grammar-checked, and proof-read.

On **December 1st**, you should turn in your course portfolio with one section designated as your "Option Project". That section must include:

1. Your work journal entries (50% of your option grade)
2. Your 10-12 page integration paper (50% of your option grade)

In addition, you may include any of the following OPTIONAL material:

- Pictures of your agency, the people you worked with, and/or the clients you served.
- Literature published by the agency to describe their purpose and agenda.
- Documents you drafted, wrote, or significantly contributed to preparing during the semester.
- Finished projects (i.e., videotapes, graphics, charts, spreadsheets, training programs, photos, marketing plans, research results, executive summaries of project reports) you participated in creating.
- Written evaluations of your work (i.e., performance appraisals, project assessments, critical reviews, letters of commendation or recommendation).
- Lists of projects completed, presentations made, training completed, all supported by date, location, and organization.