

Black Psychology
Psych 461 (010)/ Psych 592 (004) / Afam 390 (006) / WMST 450 (004) / WMST 550 (004)
Course Syllabus - Spring 2018

INSTRUCTOR Leah M. Adams, Ph.D.
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Phone: (703) 993-4118

MEETINGS Thurs 4:30pm – 7:10 pm (Robinson A349)

OFFICE HOURS Thurs 11:00am – 12:00pm (or by appointment)

DEADLINES January 29 is the last day to add/drop this class with no tuition penalty
February 12 is the last day to drop this class with 33% tuition penalty
February 23 is the last day to drop this class with 67% tuition penalty

* Official Communications via GMU E-mail: Mason uses electronic mail to provide official information to students. Examples include communications from course instructors, notices from the library, notices about academic standing, financial aid information, class materials, assignments, questions, and instructor feedback. Students are responsible for the content of university communication sent to their Mason e-mail account and are required to activate that account and check it regularly.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides a broad exploration of the experiences of people of African descent in the United States, relevant theoretical perspectives, and empirical research by black scholars. The course incorporates historical and conceptual foundations, social psychological and social justice issues, individual and group developmental processes, and physical and mental health issues. This is an interactive class – you will have the opportunity to participate in class discussions and exercises. In order to do well in this course, you are encouraged to think like a *clinical scientist* – be open-minded, while also maintaining a healthy dose of skepticism. A diversity of viewpoints is welcomed and encouraged throughout the semester. Topics we discuss will be, at times, controversial and sensitive. As you make comments and ask questions, please be mindful of the diversity of opinions and experiences that may be reflected in the room.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Describe and understand the breadth, scope, and development of the field of black psychology
- Describe the historical foundations and core tenets of the black psychology research paradigm
- Describe African-centered and Afrocentric theories of development, with an emphasis on comparing them to Western-centered theories
- Identify central issues, tensions, or controversies in black psychology
- Critically examine theoretical and research questions in this field
- Discuss how black psychology as a field of inquiry can be used to advance black health and well-being

COURSE FORMAT

The format of this class is mixed, and includes lecture, small-group discussion, in-class exercises, and media. Graduate students will have the opportunity to give a formal presentation in class.

REQUIRED TEXT

There is no required textbook, but there are readings! Required readings can be found on Blackboard in the Course Content tab.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS & POLICIES

Attendance & Participation: Your involvement is key to the success of this class! Although I won't be taking formal attendance, you should realize that failure to attend class usually results in poor performance. Information and announcements communicated in class will not necessarily be repeated over e-mail or over Blackboard.

Assigned reading: In lecture, class discussion, and in exams, I will assume that you have completed your assigned reading. All assigned reading can be found on Blackboard in the Course Content tab.

Cell phones & Laptops: The use of cell phones, including text messaging, is unacceptable during class time. If there is an emergency that may require you to be contacted, please let me know at the beginning of class. The use of laptops is limited to note taking.

Exam & Homework Policy: There are **no** makeup assignments in this course without arrangements made beforehand with me (e.g., missing class for a religious holiday). There will be no extensions or makeups without penalty except in instances such as the following:

- Hospitalization or illness that has been documented and judged by me as preventing you from a) preparing adequately for an exam, b) attending class, or c) completing an assignment
- Death or serious illness in your family
- Court appearances

Documentation must be provided by health officials (e.g., a physician or member of the student health center staff) in the case of illness; an immediate family member in the case of death or serious illness in the family; and official paperwork in the case of court dates. Decisions regarding extensions and makeups under these circumstances will be made on a case-by-case basis.

Cancellation Policy: If class is cancelled, you will be notified via your GMU email. I will provide details regarding coursework and/or assignments.

Honor Code: All students in this course are to become familiar with and follow the University's honor code, which does not tolerate any form of cheating and attempted cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing. Exams and assignments are expected to be individual efforts unless otherwise noted. Violations of the GMU Honor Code can result in failure of an assignment or exam, depending on the severity of violation. **All** violations will be reported to the Honor Committee. I reserve the right to enter a failing grade to any student found guilty of an honor code violation, but c'mon, let's not let it come to that. For more information on the Honor Code please visit: <http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/honorcode/>

Commitment to Diversity: In this course, and across the University, we seek to create a learning environment that fosters respect for people across identities. We welcome and value individuals and their differences, including gender expression and identity, race, economic status, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age, and ability. We encourage all members of the learning environment to engage with the material personally, but to also be open to exploring and learning from experiences different from their own.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & GRADING

Grades will be assigned on the following scale:

A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D	F
97 – 100%	93 – 96%	90 – 92%	87 – 89%	83 – 86%	80 – 82%	77 – 79%	73 – 76%	70 – 72%	60 – 69%	< 60%

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

Participation (20%): As I mentioned above, your participation is key to the success of this course! Together, we will strive to create an atmosphere in which open dialogue and communication are encouraged and respectful, even in instances of disagreement. Please ask questions, offer observations, and suggest alternative perspectives during class time with the aim of advancing discourse about *ideas* rather than attacking *individuals*.

Racial Identity Development Paper (25%): Using one of the models of racial identity that we have discussed, choose a character from a book or film and evaluate their journey through at least two stages of racial identity development. You can choose any book or film that you'd like, but some good examples are: For Colored Girls Only; Precious; Guess Who's Coming to Dinner; Training Day; Friday; Antoine Fischer; The Help; Akeelah & the Bee; Malcolm X; Ali. As an alternative assignment, you may detail your own racial identity development, as it aligns with one of the theories that we have discussed. In either case, your paper should be 3-6 pages long (double spaced pages, 1-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman font).

Due: THURSDAY, MARCH 22 at 4:30pm via Blackboard (Assignments tab)

Reaction Paper Assignment (30%): There will be two required reaction papers, each worth 15%, that you will submit through Blackboard (in the Assignments tab). You can choose to write a reaction paper on any of the topics that we will discuss, but you must complete at least one before Spring break. The reaction paper must be submitted within 24 hours of class time (e.g., if you wanted to write a reaction paper on the 3/1 Education & Work topic, it must be submitted by Friday 3/2 at 7:15pm). Reaction papers should be brief (1-2 double spaced pages, 1-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman font) and are an opportunity for you to think deeply about the material and share your ideas. Reflections that are clear, thoughtful, and relevant will receive full credit. You do not have to answer each of these questions, but to get you thinking in line with the assignment, potential questions for you to consider in your reaction papers are: 1) What about the reading and lecture material stood out or surprised you, and why? 2) What connections can be made between the reading and lecture material covered and your personal experiences? 3) What questions or issues did the material raise that you would want to learn more about?

End of Semester Personal Reflection Paper (25%): Please use this paper as a place to demonstrate the integration of your personal reactions, growth, new learning, and academic insights related to this course. Reflections should include feelings and thoughts in response to your experience throughout the course. Integrate course readings, films, lecture, and discussions, but please do not just summarize them! Reaction papers have no outlined maximum page length, but they should be well thought out and at least 4 pages long (double spaced pages, 1-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman font). You do not have to answer each of these questions, but to get you thinking in line with the assignment, potential questions for you to consider in your reaction papers are: 1) How has the information that you learned in this course reinforced, challenged, or altered your thinking about the black experience or psychology as a field? 2) Which topics resonated with you the most, and why? 3) How will your experience in this course inform your future steps (personally, academically, and/or professionally)?

Due: THURSDAY, MAY 10 at 7:10pm via Blackboard (Assignments tab)

GRADUATE STUDENTS

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Written Project & Oral Presentation (30%): Graduate students must complete a written research project and oral presentation. Students must explore an issue related to the black experience, broadly. If you are currently involved in research – like your thesis or dissertation! – and it is related to the black experience, this would be a good place to capitalize on work you're already doing. If your work isn't intimately tied with the black experience already, think

about how your interests can be applied to black people or the content that we will discuss. Before you begin this project, there are several steps you must follow:

1. You are required to discuss your research project with me! Send me an e-mail, schedule a meeting, or find me before/after class to discuss your project by **FEBRUARY 22**.
2. By **MARCH 8**, submit a one page summary of your topic, along with a bibliography that includes at least 10 sources. Your summary should outline the nature of the problem/topic to be explored, and available theoretical and empirical literature on this issue (it doesn't need to be fleshed out completely). If you plan to conduct or use empirical data, be sure to provide a statement on how these data are to be collected or if already collected, where the data originate from. If you are testing a specific question, be sure to state a hypothesis.
3. You will give a **15-20 minute** oral presentation on your topic and facilitate up to **10 minutes of discussion** (it is a good idea to come up with a few questions on your own in case people don't offer any!). The oral presentation is worth 5% and will take place over the last two class periods.
4. The final written portion of the project (8-12 pages, double spaced, 1-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman font, APA style references) is due on **MAY 10 at 7:15pm** via Blackboard (Assignments tab).

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Student Support Services: If you have symptoms that are causing you significant distress or impairment in your life, please note that George Mason University does offer services to support students' academic and emotional development (even for graduate students!). Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), located in SUB I room 3129 (<http://caps.gmu.edu/>), offers workshops in academic skills, stress management training, and individual and group counseling for students who would like some help with social, emotional, or educational concerns. Consider taking advantage of these resources if you need them.

Sexual Misconduct & Interpersonal Violence: In this course, we may discuss sexual assault and interpersonal violence in reference to course material. As such, I'd like to make it clear that George Mason University is committed to providing a learning, living, and working environment that is free from discrimination, and we are committed to a campus that is free of sexual misconduct and other acts of interpersonal violence in order to promote community well-being and student success. We encourage students who believe that they have been sexually harassed, assaulted, or subjected to sexual misconduct to seek assistance and support. University Policy 1202 Sexual Harassment and Misconduct (<http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/sexual-harassment-policy/>) speaks to the specifics of our process, our resources, and the options available to you. Confidential student resources are available on campus at the Student Support and Advocacy Center (<http://ssac.gmu.edu/>), Counseling and Psychological Services (<http://caps.gmu.edu/>), and Student Health Services (<http://shs.gmu.edu/>). All other members of the University community (including faculty, except those noted above) are **not** considered confidential resources and are **required** to report incidents of sexual misconduct to the University Title IX Coordinator. For a full list of resources, support opportunities, and reporting options, contact Dr. Jennifer Hammat, Title IX Coordinator, at <http://diversity.gmu.edu/title-ix>, at (703) 993 – 8730, or in the Compliance, Diversity, and Ethics office in the Aquia Building, Suite 373.

Accommodation of Disabilities: If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Services (DRC) at (703) 993-2474. **All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.** Note that this provision includes the range of disabilities, including physical, psychiatric, and learning disabilities.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Reading assignments due for each class period are posted to Blackboard in the Course Content tab!

DATE	TOPIC	WHAT'S DUE...
<u>FOUNDATIONS IN BLACK PSYCHOLOGY</u>		
WEEK 1:	1/25 Introduction & Historical Foundations	
WEEK 2:	2/1 Research & Methodology	
WEEK 3:	2/8 Race & Racism	
WEEK 4:	2/15 Racial Identity Development & Racial Socialization	
<u>SOCIAL SYSTEMS & STRUCTURES</u>		
WEEK 5:	2/22 Kinship & Families	Grad: Topic for written project
WEEK 6:	3/1 Education & Work	
WEEK 7:	3/8 Neighborhoods & Communities	Grad: 1-page summary All: At least 1 reaction paper
WEEK 8:	3/15 NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK ☺	
<u>INDIVIDUAL & DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESSES</u>		
WEEK 9:	3/22 Interpersonal & Close Relationships	All: Racial Identity Development Paper
WEEK 10:	3/29 Cognition, Learning, & Language	
WEEK 11:	4/5 Religion & Spirituality	
WEEK 12:	4/12 Life-Span Development	
<u>ADJUSTMENT & ADAPTATION</u>		
WEEK 13:	4/19 Health, Illness, & Disability	
WEEK 14:	4/26 Psychosocial Adaptation & Mental Health + Student Presentations	
WEEK 15:	5/3 Student Presentations + Wrapping it All Up!	
FINAL EXAM:	To be submitted on Blackboard (Assignments tab) by Thurs 5/10 at 7:15pm	Undergrad: Personal Reflection Grad: Written Project All: You should've submitted two reaction papers by now!