

Black Psychology

Psych 461 (001)/ Psych 592 (002) / AFAM 390 (002) / WMST 450 (DL2) / WMST 550 (002)
Course Syllabus – Fall 2020

INSTRUCTOR Leah M. Adams, Ph.D. [she/her/hers]
Office: 3057 David King Hall (Note: I am not on campus this semester)
E-mail: ladamse@gmu.edu

MEETINGS Thurs 4:30pm – 5:45 pm (synchronous meeting)

OFFICE HOURS Thurs 3:00pm – 4:00pm (or by appointment) [virtual via Zoom]

DEADLINES August 31 is the last day to add this class
September 8 is the last day to drop this class with no tuition penalty
September 28 is the last day to drop this class with 100% tuition penalty

TECHNOLOGY

- **Official Communications via GMU E-mail:** Students must use their MasonLive email account to receive important University information, including communications related to this class. I will not respond to messages sent from or send messages to a non-Mason email address.
- **Class cancellation policy:** If the campus closes or class is canceled, students will be notified via their GMU email. The instructor will provide details regarding coursework and/or assignments.
- **Blackboard:** Activities and assignments in this course will regularly use the Blackboard learning system, available at <https://mymason.gmu.edu>. Students are required to have regular, reliable access to a computer with an updated operating system (recommended: Windows 10 or Mac OSX 10.13 or higher) and a stable broadband Internet connection (cable modem, DSL, satellite broadband, etc.).
- **Web-conferencing:** Activities and assignments in this course will regularly use web-conferencing software (Zoom). In addition to the requirements above, students are required to have a device with a functional microphone and camera. In an emergency, students can connect through a telephone call, but video connection is the expected norm.
- **Course Materials and Student Privacy:** All course materials posted to Blackboard or other course site are private to this class; by federal law, any materials that identify specific students (via their name, voice, or image) must not be shared with anyone not enrolled in this class. Video recordings – whether made by instructors or students – of class meetings that include audio, visual, or textual information from other students are private and must not be shared outside the class. Live video conference meetings (e.g., Zoom) that include audio, textual, or visual information from other students must be viewed privately and not shared with others in your household or recorded and shared outside the class. All of our synchronous meetings in this class will be recorded to provide necessary information for students in this class. Recordings will be stored on Blackboard and will only be accessible to students taking this course during this semester.

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, developmental processes, explorations of the Black self in context (e.g., community, family, relationships), and social justice 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, sensitive, and maybe uncomfortable. We will set ground rules for how to respectfully engage with each other at the start of the semester. As you make comments and ask questions, please be mindful of the diversity of opinions and experiences that may be reflected in the virtual room.

COURSE FORMAT

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this is an online course. The format will include synchronous and asynchronous content. We will meet synchronously via Zoom for the first half of class to primarily engage in large-class and small-group discussions. The material for the second half of the course time will be available to you to engage with asynchronously.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

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

- Describe and summarize the breadth, scope, and development of the field of Black psychology
- Summarize the historical foundations and core tenets of the Black psychology research paradigm
- Summarize the cultural, institutional, and historical influences that shape development, wellbeing, and health among Black people
- Compare variations in theories of development across African-centered, Afrocentric, and Western-centered theories
- Analyze and critique various approaches to measuring core constructs of interest in Black psychology (e.g., racism, racial identity)
- Apply the skills above in oral and written products

In addition to the above, graduate students will also be able to:

- Synthesize research emanating from the field of Black psychology within their personal line of research in order to fill critical gaps in knowledge about Black people's health, wellbeing, and development.

ASSESSMENT OF COURSE OBJECTIVES: COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students enrolled in this course under PSYC 592 or WMST 550 are considered graduate students. Additional details and grading rubrics for assignments will be offered in class.

- **Myself in context paper (5%):** You will submit a brief (2 – 4 pages, double-spaced) write up about who you are, and why you chose to enroll in this course. What are you hoping to learn this semester? What are the vantage points from which you are engaging with this material (e.g., psych major, AFAM major, non-Black person, activist, etc.)? How might those vantage points help or hinder your learning about these topics this semester? At this point, based only on the first week's materials, how do you anticipate using this course to move you closer towards your own goals (e.g., personal, professional, etc.)?
 - Due: Thursday 9/3 by 4:30pm
- **Measuring race/racism paper (15%):** In this assignment, you will focus on how core concepts in Black psychology are measured. You will find two empirical articles in which the authors measure racism and/or experiences related to race (e.g., discrimination). For the paper, you will summarize each article and describe how each measured the race-related constructs. Discuss the pros and cons of each approach, identify which article's approach was stronger, and justify your choice. Pro tip: It is ideal to choose articles that do not measure the constructs in the same way! Papers should be 3 – 5 pages long, excluding title page and references (double spaced, 1-inch

margins, 12-point Times New Roman font). Note: Just because I am a quantitative researcher, don't feel the need to stick with quantitative articles!

- Due: Thursday 9/24 by 4:30pm
- **Racial identity development paper** (15%): 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 4 – 6 pages long, excluding title page and references (double spaced pages, 1-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman font).
 - Due: Thursday 10/22 by 4:30pm
- **Weekly "Shape Up" reflection** (10 @ 5% undergraduates; 10 @ 4% graduates): Each week, with several exceptions, you will submit a brief "shape up" reflection in which you organize your thoughts about the week's content, including readings, lecture, and assigned media. You do not need to reflect on every aspect of that week's class. Instead, I hope that this is a way to crystallize your thinking about the content and ensure that you remain up to date as the semester proceeds. The "shape up" name comes from the fact that you will respond to four prompts corresponding to different shapes: 1) something that "squares" with your beliefs (i.e., something that you agree with/have experienced reflected in the week's content), 2) three points to remember from this week's material (triangle), 3) a question "circling" in your mind from this week's material, and 4) (if applicable) anything from the content that "crosses" the line (i.e., something you disagree with or take issue with from this week's material). There is no specific length requirement for these reflections, though you should address *why* you have responded to each "shape" prompt in the way that you have. This is an idea I am (with gratitude!) adopting and adapting shared by Patrice W. Hallock, Ph.D. at Utica College.
 - Due: Each week by Sunday 11:59pm
- **Final course reflection** (15% undergraduates; 10% graduates): Please use this final reflection to demonstrate the integration of your personal reactions, growth, new learning, and academic insights related to the material from this course. Reflections should include thoughts and feelings in response to your experience – integrate course readings, films, lectures, discussions, and/or class activities, but please do not just summarize them! You do not need to answer each of these questions, but to get your thinking in line with the goals of the assignment, potential questions include:
 1. How has the information covered in this course reinforced, challenged, or altered your thinking about the Black experience and/or the field of psychology?
 2. Which topics resonated with you most? Why?
 3. How will your experience in this course inform your future steps (e.g., academically, personally, professionally)?The format for this final reflection is open. Although you must attend to the spirit of the assignment (and the associated rubric!), feel free to share your reflection in whichever medium suits you (e.g., paper, audio recording, video recording, PowerPoint presentation).
 - Due: Thursday 12/10 by 11:59pm
- **Future directions project** (15% **graduate students only**): Focusing on their personal lines of research, graduate students will examine the degree to which work in their research topic

addresses the experiences of Black people. This assignment is meant to get you thinking about ways to incorporate the concepts and principles discussed this semester into your own empirical work. Papers will answer the following questions:

1. What is your area of research?
2. What do we currently know in the empirical literature regarding this topic?
3. What do we know about this topic, as it relates to Black people, specifically?
4. What gaps (e.g., theoretical, conceptual) exist in this topic, as it relates to Black people, specifically?
5. What methodological challenges exist in this topic, as it relates to Black people, specifically?
6. What is needed to address these gaps and methodological challenges? How might your work move the needle?

Papers should be thorough, but concise, ranging between 6 – 8 pages long, excluding title page and references.

- Topic meeting with Dr. Adams must occur by 10/29
- Due: Thursday 12/10 by 11:59pm

COURSE EXPECTATIONS & POLICIES

Attendance & Participation: Your involvement is key to the success of this class! Although I won't be taking formal attendance, it is expected that you will join us for the synchronous portion of class each week and that you will be an active member of our classroom community. Please do not allow the virtual format to keep your voice and perspective from being heard.

Asynchronous Material: Our course has not been truncated to 1.5 hours just because that is the only synchronous component! You are expected to engage with the material posted for the remaining portion of each session. Asynchronous materials may be accompanied by brief checks for comprehension and reflection.

Assigned reading & required text: There is no required textbook, but there are readings! 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 "Weekly Course Content" tab.

EVALUATION & GRADES

	Undergraduate Students	Graduate Students
Myself in context paper	5%	5%
Measuring race/racism paper	15%	15%
Racial identity development paper	15%	15%
Weekly "Shape Up" reflection	50% (10 @ 5% each)	40% (10 @ 4% each)
Final course reflection	15%	10%
Future directions project	N/A	15%

Note. "Graduate students" are any students registered in this class under: PSYC 592 or WMST 550.

Grades will be assigned on the following scale:

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

EXAM & HOMEWORK POLICY

We are in extraordinary times, and we cannot predict what the semester will bring us. In general, I do not offer makeup assignments or provide extensions without arrangements made beforehand with me (e.g., missing class for a religious holiday). Late work will lose one letter grade (10%) for every day late, up to 7 days, after which credit is no longer available. For example, if an assignment is due by Thursday at 11:59pm, submitting it on Friday at 12:01am will result in a one letter grade deduction. I work hard to keep us on track, and ask for the same from you.

Monica Policy (a.k.a. ♪“Just one of them days” ♪)

I do recognize that sometimes things just *happen* – life gets away from us, an unexpected issue arises. Because of this you’ve got **three** “Monica” days – three free days to be tardy on an assignment, no questions asked, no explanations needed. This means that you can submit a single assignment up to three days late without penalty (e.g., grade reduction), submit each of three assignments one day late without penalty, or some combination (e.g., one submission 2 days late, plus another 1 day late). Weekends count as days! If you use a Monica day, please write “Monica day +1” (or +2, +3). It is up to you to keep track of how many Monica days you have left.

Outside of the Monica Policy, 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.

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.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY & 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 by the instructor or teaching assistant. 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. The instructor for this course reserves the right to enter a failing grade to any student found guilty of an honor code violation. For more information on the Honor Code please visit: <https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/full-honor-code-document/>

ACCOMMODATION OF DISABILITIES

Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students by upholding the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. Note that this provision includes the range of disabilities, including physical, psychiatric, and learning

disabilities. If you are seeking accommodations for this class, please first visit <http://ds.gmu.edu/> for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Then please discuss your approved accommodations with me. All academic accommodations must be arranged through Disability Services. Disability Services is located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email: ods@gmu.edu | Phone: (703) 993 – 2474.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT, SEXUAL MISCONDUCT, AND INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE

As a faculty member and designated “Responsible Employee,” I am required to report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason’s Title IX Coordinator per university policy 1412. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact the Student Support and Advocacy Center (703-380-1434) or Counseling and Psychological Services (703-993-2380). You may also seek assistance from Mason’s Title IX Coordinator (703-993-8730; titleix@gmu.edu).

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

George Mason offers services to support students’ academic and emotional development. Counseling and Psychological Services, located in SUB I room 3129 (caps.gmu.edu), offers workshops in academic skills, stress management training, and virtual counseling for students who would like some help with social, emotional, or educational concerns. Consider taking advantage of these resources if you need them. For additional information about other student support services offered, visit: <https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/knowing-mason-students/student-support-resources-on-campus/>

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE (Subject to change)				
Week	Date	Topics	Readings available on Blackboard	What's Due?
HISTORICAL & RESEARCH CONTEXT				
1	R 8/27	Introduction & Historical Foundations	N/A	
2	R 9/3	Research & Methodology	Cokley & Awad (2013); Jamison (2008); Optional: Boykin (1978)	Myself in Context Paper Shape-Up #1
3	R 9/10	Race & Racism	Garcia & Sharif (2015); Haidt (2017); Lilienfeld (2017); Lilienfeld (2017a); Sue (2017)	Shape-Up #2
DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESSES				
4	R 9/17	Racial Socialization	Thomas & Blackmon (2015); Threlfall (2018)	Shape-Up #3
5	R 9/24	Racial Identity Development	Constantine et al. (1998); Jones & Erving (2015); Poston (1990); Sellers et al. (1998)	Measuring Race/Racism Paper
6	R 10/1	Cognition & Language	Baldwin (1979); Cottrell, Newman, & Roisman (2015); NY Times Dialect Quiz	Shape-Up #4
SELF IN CONTEXT				
7	R 10/8	Kinship & Families	Butler-Sweet (2011); Furstenberg (2007); Stamps (2017)	Shape-Up #5
8	R 10/15	NO CLASS: Radical Rest		
9	R 10/22	Friendships & Close Relationships	Holoien et al. (2015); Raley et al. (2015); Winkle-Wagner et al. (2019)	Shape-Up #6 Racial Identity Development Paper
10	R 10/29	Neighborhoods & Community	Leventhal & Brooks-Gun (2000); Massey & Tannen (2015); Pattillo (2005)	Shape-Up #7 Grad students: Must have met with me about final by now!
11	R 11/5	Education System	Code Switch podcast "Ron Brown College Preparatory High School" episodes; Hamilton et al. (2015); This American Life podcast episode "The Problem We All Live With"; Optional: Guiffrida & Douthit (2010)	Shape-Up #8
12	R 11/12	Religion & Spirituality	Avent, Cashwell & Brown-Jeffy (2015); Op-ed article; Voisin, Corbin, & Jones (2016)	Shape-Up #9

13	R 11/19	Coping & Wellness	Chapman & Adams-Bass (2015); Sleep gap article	Shape-Up #10
14	R 11/26	NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Break		
15	R 12/3	Forward.	TBD	
Final Paper/Project Due via Blackboard: Thursday, December 10 by 11:59pm				