

AML2410: American Autobiography (section 0641)

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Office Location: Tigert 302

Office Hours: T 9 (4-5 p.m.) and by appointment

Course Information

Course Description

When we write personal narratives, how do we decide what to include? Why do we leave certain things out, and what is the effect of doing so? To what extent do race, class, or gender differences affect our writing? Throughout the history of the United States, autobiographical texts like those of Benjamin Franklin, Malcolm X, and Zitkala-Ša have helped shape American lives by introducing new, influential ideas. In this course, we will look at a variety of autobiographical texts (mostly prose, but also including poetry and a graphic novel) and consider how such personal narratives have shaped our ideas about the United States and the relations between its citizens. We will touch on a variety of topics related to the autobiographical mode of writing in the U.S., including storytelling and creation of the self; the politics of remembering and forgetting; the blurring of truth and fiction; and finally, the politics of race, gender, sexuality, and class in shaping personal experiences. In doing so, we will examine to what extent the ideas and values we hold for granted were actually “written” into the social fabric of the United States, and to what extent life narratives either subscribe to or “talk back” to these official narratives.

“This is a General Education course providing student learning outcomes listed in the Undergraduate Catalog. For more information, see <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/general-education-requirement.aspx>

Course Objectives:

By the end of AML 2410, you will (be able to):

- Plan, draft, revise, and edit a paper
- Summarize, analyze, and synthesize academic sources
- Read critically and ask critical questions
- Accurately cite and incorporate sources
- Be aware of the (political) power of texts
- Have a good understanding of how life narratives shaped (ideas about) America
- Have a good understanding of some of the key issues in writing life narratives, such as self-invention/creation, omission, and ideology

Course Texts

Required:

Texts appear in order of class use. You may purchase any version – hardcover, paperback, or electronic – as long as it is complete. Additional readings will be provided via course reserves.

- Franklin, Benjamin. *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. New York: Tribeca Books, 2013. Print. ISBN: 1936594099.

- Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001. Print. ISBN: 0486419312.
- X, Malcolm and Alex Haley. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York: Penguin Modern Classics, 2001. Print. ISBN: 0141185430
- Cassady, Carolyn. *Off the Road: My Years with Cassady, Kerouac, and Ginsberg*. New York: Penguin Books, 1991. Print. ISBN: 014015390X.
- Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*. New York: Mariner Books, 2007. Print. ISBN: 0618871713

Course Assignments

Assignment	Points
Writing journal	200
3 critical responses	150 (total)
Midterm essay	200
Research proposal	50
Final Paper + Outline	250
Participation	150
Total	1000

Explanation of assignments

Writing Journal (200 points)

You are asked to keep a writing journal for two reasons: first, to take notes for every reading. Keeping detailed notes will help your understanding of the text, and can also help spark new ideas. Second, since the topic of the course is writing about the *self*, keeping a writing journal will be helpful to make connections between class material and your own experiences (these can be explicitly class-related experiences or other experiences that are somehow related to writing the self). Please bring your journal to conferences and hand it in at the end of the semester. Your notes and journal entries should be at least 2000 words (combined).

Critical Responses (3 x 50 = 150 points)

You will provide a brief summary of each of the scholarly articles we are reading, after which you pose a discussion question that addresses a key issue or concept, identify some of the limitations of the argument, or relate the ideas raised by the text back to the novel we are reading. These critical responses will help you to accurately summarize scholarly articles, identify main ideas and evaluate these ideas, and apply key concepts when reading literature. See Sakai for more detailed instructions (400-500 words each, 1200 words total).

Midterm essay (200 points)

This essay gives you the opportunity to put skills into practice by building on your journal entries, reading notes, and critical responses. If you want, you can turn one of these exercises/responses into a longer essay. You will perform a critical analysis of one of the works we have read so far, using some of the theory we have read in conjunction with these texts (scholarly articles and key concepts). We will practice close reading, analyzing, and synthesizing throughout the semester (1500-1800 words).

Research Proposal (50 points)

You will write a brief proposal accompanied by a works-cited list of at least five sources (two of which can be articles that we have read in class) in which you line out your plan for your final research paper. The proposal serves two purposes: it is meant to help you narrow down your topic and come up with a research question, and it helps you to position your research in conversation with other scholars' works by becoming aware of additional lines of argument and controversies related to your topic (500 words).

Outline + Final Paper (50+200 = 250 points)

As the culmination of the course, your final paper will engage with one of the main texts we have read in class as well as some of the major issues and themes we have discussed. The paper should make a clear and thoughtful argument about the text(s) (articulated in a clear thesis statement), and should be informed by at least 3 outside critical sources. To make sure you are well-prepared, you will hand in a detailed outline before starting the paper. The research paper will allow you to put into practice the skills you have refined over the course of the semester (close reading, analysis and synthesis). See Sakai for more detailed instructions (2500 words).

Participation (150 points)

Class discussion will be an integral part of this course. Students are expected to come to class with readings and assignments completed and **at least one question prepared** so that they may make meaningful contributions in class. At the beginning of the semester, you will be asked to sign up to lead one class discussion together with two or three classmates. Being a discussion leader means you will do a little extra research into the topic of that day, prepare questions for discussion, and start the discussion.

Whether you are a discussion leader or not, always make sure to bring the text(s) and one question for discussion on the days we are discussing them! Short writing exercises, tardiness/attendance, participation in class discussion and participation in classroom activities all count towards participation.

Grading Scale/Grading Rubric

Grading Scale

A	4.0	93-100	930-1000	C	2.0	73-76	730-769
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A-	3.67	90-92	900-929	C-	1.67	70-72	700-729
B+	3.33	87-89	870-899	D+	1.33	67-69	670-699
B	3.0	83-86	830-869	D	1.0	63-66	630-669
B-	2.67	80-82	800-829	D-	0.67	60-62	600-629
C+	2.33	77-79	770-799	E	0.00	0-59	0-599

Grading Rubric

Each assignment has its own requirements, but for each paper I will evaluate:

1. content, including argument, development, and support
2. organization, including paragraph structure, overall flow of ideas, transitions
3. mechanics, including grammar, spelling, and style.

A PAPER

An A-paper has a strong thesis and makes a coherent and original argument. It follows the assignment, is well-organized, communicates ideas clearly, and there are (almost) no mechanics mistakes.

B PAPER

A B-paper does the same things as an A-paper, but is somewhat lacking in one area: perhaps the structure of the paper could be improved (either on the paragraph level or in the essay as a whole), the writer provided insufficient evidence or analysis, or there are myriad mechanics mistakes. A B-paper could also be well-written, but lacking in originality.

C PAPER

The C-paper follows the assignment, but is lacking in two of the areas mentioned above (content, organization, mechanics). Usually, a C-paper also needs to try and move beyond a superficial engagement with the text.

D PAPER

The D-paper either does not follow the assignment, is lacking in all three areas, or both.

E PAPER

The E-paper is reserved for essays that are not turned in, or for work that is plagiarized.

For more information on Grading Policies at UF, see
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Course schedule

This schedule is tentative and subject to change throughout the semester. All assignments and

readings are due the day they are listed. Make sure to check your UF e-mail and Sakai regularly for announcements and updates.

Week 1 (August 26, 28)

Tue: Introductions, syllabus overview

Thu: Read Anne Lamott's "Shitty First Drafts"
Read "Life Narrative: Definition and Distinctions"
Do reflective exercise and bring to class (Sakai)

Week 2 (September 2, 4)

Tue: Read *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* CH I-VIII
Come up with a critical question and bring to class
Read analysis/critical response handout (Sakai)

Thu: Read *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* CH IX-XIII
Do exercise "Your Name" and bring to class (Sakai)

Week 3 (September 9, 11)

Tue: Read *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* CH XIV - XIX
Answer questions on Sakai and bring to class
Read "Narrative Freedom," Robert Zussman

Thu: Read "Spoken and Unspoken," Pierre Macherey
Read "Benjamin Franklin's Opinion of German-Americans," A. Lloyd Lack, *New York Times*
Read "The Founding Immigrants," Kenneth C. Davis, *New York Times*
http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/03/opinion/03davis.html?_r=1& (Sakai)

Week 4 (September 16, 18)

Tue: Read excerpts (1+2 / 19 + 20) "Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson" <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/851/851-h/851-h.htm>
Read "Introduction," Rachel Blevins-Faery
Discussion led by discussion leaders

Thu: Peer reviews critical response #1
Hand in Critical Response #1 (hand in before midnight)

Week 5 (September 23, 25)

Tue: Read *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Chapters I - XV)
Read "An Introduction to Slave Narratives," UNC Chapel Hill:
<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/intro.html>

Thu: Read *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Chapters XVI - XXVI)
Read "The Language of Slavery" by Henry Louis Gates jr.
Discussion by discussion leaders
In class: practice analysis

Week 6 (September 30, October 2)

Tue: Read *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Chapters XXVII - end)

Thu: Read Zitkala-Sa "Impressions of an Indian Childhood" and "School Days of an Indian Girl"
<http://www.facstaff.bucknell.edu/gcarr/19cusww/zs/IIC.html>
<http://www.facstaff.bucknell.edu/gcarr/19cusww/zs/SDIG.html>

Week 7 (October 7, 9)

Tue: Mandatory conferences critical response #2

Thu: Hand in Critical Response #2

Read "Collaboration or Colonialism: Text and Process in Native American Women's Autobiographies," Kathleen Mullen Sands
Discussion leaders

Week 8 (October 14, 16)

Tue: Watch video: creating an outline
Read handouts thesis statements
Citation recap

Thu: Read handouts "Using evidence effectively" and "paragraph unity"
In-class drafting midterm essay - bring writing materials!

Week 9 (October 21, 23)

Tue: Mandatory conferences midterm essay

Thu: Hand in Midterm Essay

Week 10 (October 28, 30)

Tue: Read *Off the Road* (CH 1 - 10)

Thu: Read *Off the Road* (CH 10 - 20)
Read "Historians on the Autobiographical Frontier," Jeremy A. Popkin
Discussion by discussion leaders
Peer reviews critical response #3

Week 11 (November 4, 6)

Tue: Hand-in Critical Response #3

Read Malcolm X (Introduction - Chapter 6)

Thu: Read handout research proposal
Read Malcolm X (Chapter 7- 12)
Discussion by discussion leaders

Week 12 (November 11, 13)

Tue: NO CLASS, Veterans Day

Thu: Read *Fun Home*

Read Ann Cvetkovich's "Drawing the Archive in Bechdel's 'Fun Home'"

Week 13 (November 18, 20)

Tue: Mandatory conferences research proposal

Thu: Hand in research proposal + outline

Re-read handouts "Thesis statements" "Using evidence effectively" and "Paraphrasing" (Sakai)

Week 14 (November 25, 27)

Tue: Read handouts "Introductions" and "Conclusions" (Sakai)

Read Ken Macrorie's "The Poisoned Fish" (Sakai)

Thu: NO CLASS, Thanksgiving

Week 15 (December 2, 4)

Tue: *First draft paper due - Peer reviews in class!*

Thu: Mandatory conferences final paper

Week 16 (December 9)

Tue: Wrap-up - Final paper due at 11.55 p.m!

Course Policies Participation and Attendance

Regular attendance and active participation are crucial. Class participation includes contributing to class discussions; coming to class on time, prepared with books and homework; preparing for in-class activities; collaborating and participating in group activities; and overall working and paying close attention to the lectures and activities of the classroom. In general, students are expected to contribute constructively to each class session.

In this course we will follow a strict attendance policy. **If you miss more than six periods during the term, you will fail the entire course.** Missing a two-period class (on Thursdays) also counts as

missing two periods. The university exempts from this policy only those absences involving university-sponsored events, such as athletics and band, and religious holidays. Absences related to university-sponsored events must be discussed with me prior to the date that will be missed. Absences, even for extraordinary reasons will result in missing work that cannot be made up; therefore, you can expect absences to have a negative impact on grades.

Please Note: If you are absent, it is your responsibility to make yourself aware of all due dates and required work. If absent due to a scheduled event, you are still responsible for turning assignments in on time.

Tardiness: Being late is disruptive, so try to always be on time. Three incidents of tardiness will count as one absence.

Classroom Conduct

Keep in mind that UF students come from diverse cultural, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. Some of the texts we will discuss and write about engage controversial topics and opinions. Diversified student backgrounds combined with provocative texts require that you demonstrate respect for ideas that may differ from your own. Disrespectful behavior will result in dismissal, and accordingly absence, from the class. Any use of electronic devices not related to classroom learning: phones, personal data assistants, iPods, etc. are disruptive and will not be tolerated. Please turn them off and keep them out of sight.

Assignment Maintenance Responsibilities

You are responsible for maintaining copies of all work submitted in this course and retaining all returned, marked work until the semester is over. Should the need arise for a resubmission of papers or a review of marked papers, it is the your responsibility to have and to make available this material.

Late Work Policy and Mode of Submission

I do not accept late work. All papers will be submitted as MS Word (.doc or .docx) or Rich Text Format (.rtf) documents to E-learning/Sakai before class on the designated due date. I may consider extenuating circumstances, but you must contact me at least twenty-four hours before the assignment is due. All assignments and postings should be polished and presented in a professional manner. All papers must be in 12-point Times New Roman font, single-spaced with 1-inch margins and numbered pages.

Final Grade Appeals

Students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant in Department of English. Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.

University Policies General Education

This is a General Education course providing student learning outcomes listed in the

Undergraduate Catalog. For more information, see
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/general-education-requirement.aspx>

Statement of Composition (C) and Humanities (H) Credit

This course can satisfy the UF General Education requirement for Composition or Humanities. For more information, see:
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/general-education-requirement.aspx>

Statement of Writing Requirement

This course can provide 6000 words toward fulfillment of the UF requirement for writing. For more information, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/writing-and-math-requirement.aspx>

Students with Disabilities

The University of Florida complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>. The office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation.

Statement Concerning Sexual Harassment

UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: <http://www.hr.ufl.edu/eo/sexharassment.htm>

Statement Concerning Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.

Statement Concerning Academic Honesty

Plagiarism is a serious violation of the [Student Honor Code](#). The Honor Code prohibits and defines plagiarism as follows:

A student shall not represent as the student's own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to):

- a.) Quoting oral or written materials, whether published or unpublished, without proper attribution.
- b.) Submitting a document or assignment which in whole or in part is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment not authored by the student. (University of Florida, Student Honor Code, 15 Aug. 2007
<<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>>)

All students must abide by the Student Honor Code. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, see:
<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>