

AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES SENIOR ESSAY HANDBOOK 2009 - 2010

INTRODUCTION

Writing the senior essay is the central academic experience of your final year at Yale College. The senior essay provides the opportunity for you to integrate your interdisciplinary courses into a coherent, persuasive scholarly essay on a topic in the area of African American studies. The African American studies department expects an original, well-organized, well written essay. This handbook, your advisor, and the senior essay deadlines are there to make sure that you accomplish your task. Like any other major task, the senior essay may seem to be difficult when you consider it as a whole. The most important strategy you can have is to break it down into manageable tasks, following the timeline and calendar. Follow the schedule, meet with your advisor, and if you feel you are getting off track at any time, contact me. Writing the senior essay is a unique experience that can run the gamut from stressful to exciting. This will be a full and rewarding year for you and the AFAM faculty and I look forward to working with you in this great intellectual pursuit.

Professor Khalilah Brown-Dean
DUS

TIMELINE AND DUE DATES FOR THE CLASS OF 2009

Read, learn, and inwardly digest the deadlines for your senior essay. The deadlines are your guide for the successful completion of your essay.

Fall Semester

September	Register for AFAM 480a, Senior Colloquium: African American Studies The colloquium meets on Thursday afternoons from 1:30p.m. – 3:20p.m.
September 25	Deadline for students who wish to pursue a combined degree to have conferred with the DUS
October 1	Senior Essay Form due. Submit to Professors Brown-Dean and Thomas in their mailboxes on the first floor in the AFAM Department, 81 Wall Street. <u>You must secure the consent of your advisor before turning in your form.</u> If you are unable to secure her or his signature, they must send an email to Professor Brown-Dean acknowledging their agreement to serve as your advisor. Course Planner due. Submit to Professor Brown-Dean in her mailbox on the first floor in the AFAM Department, 81 Wall Street.
October 16	Three-page prospectus and three-page annotated bibliography due. Copies must be given to the DUS and to the Instructor of the Colloquium.
November 2	The DUS will confirm the advisors.
December 1	10 page essay, outline of the entire project, and bibliography due in class.
December 7	Senior Essay Presentations to the Department

Spring Semester

January	Register for AFAM 491b
March 12	Senior Essay Title Form due to AFAM Registrar, 81 Wall St., Room 104. Initial draft of your essay due to your advisor
March	Senior Essay Writers' Retreat

April 15	Senior Essays Due to AFAM Registrar, 81 Wall St., Room 104, by 5:00pm
April ?	Departmental Celebration and Recognition of Seniors and announcement of Pickens Prize recipient(s).

THE ADVISOR

CHOOSING AN ADVISOR

You should choose and confirm your advisor by October 1st. Ideally, you will have already had preliminary conversations with your advisor before this date. Your advisor should be a member of the AFAM faculty or have a strong collegial relationship with the department.

You are responsible for finding an advisor. You must ask a faculty member to do it. We will not assign an advisor to you. One serious warning to you: do not attempt to write your essay without an advisor. The department does not allow it. Professors can successfully advise only one to two advisees, so act at once, since many have a full contingent of students by the end of the first week of the semester.

Indeed, it is preferable to find an advisor in the spring of your junior year. You will not write a successful senior essay without your advisor's involvement in shaping the topic.

Your topic need not be fully formed before you seek an advisor. Your advisor can help you refine it. You may want to discuss your topic with more than one faculty member. If your first choice as an advisor can take no more advisees, ask that person for his or her advice on someone else who might be a good advisor.

Be energetic, flexible, and imaginative in searching for an advisor. If you are having great trouble finding an advisor, consult with the DUS.

WORKING WITH YOUR ADVISOR

Establish a smooth working relationship with your advisor. Some advisors work in response to their advisee's requests for meetings. Some schedule regular meetings and add written assignments, making the relationship more like a formal seminar. Some bring together advisees working on similar topics for group meetings. Discuss your advisor's expectations and your expectations. Discuss the assignments that are due, particularly those in the first semester, and be sure that you have a clear idea of what is required.

READER SUGGESTIONS

Be prepared to offer a list of suggestions for potential readers of your essay to the DUS by the end of the fall semester. The final decision on who will read the essay rests entirely with the DUS.

SENIOR COLLOQUIUM

AFAM 480a, Senior Colloquium gives you the opportunity to exchange ideas with your peers and with other more advanced scholars. You will submit a prospectus, compile a working bibliography, begin or continue research, and write the first 8 to 10 pages of your senior essay. This will be the basis of your oral presentation to the AFAM department in early December. After completing the colloquium, you will carry out the remaining research and writing of your senior essay by registering for AFAM 491b (or in exceptional cases AFAM 491a) under the guidance of a faculty member in the chosen discipline or area of concentration.

Students are strongly encouraged to use the summer between the junior and senior years for research directly related to the senior essay. For example, field or documentary research might be undertaken in urban or rural African American communities throughout the Black Atlantic Diaspora. The particular research problem and design are to be worked out in each case with a faculty advisor.

You will present your work in progress on your senior essay to the AFAM department and your advisors in December. This is a 10-minute presentation. You may use the first 8 to 10 pages of your senior essay as the basis for this presentation.

WRITING THE ESSAY

WRITING THE RESEARCH PLAN

Write a one- or two-page plan to tell your advisor about your sources. The research plan will restate the topic, giving a brief mention of the major works in the field. Then it will pose several questions you will ask of the topic. Asking these questions is critical, since they will shape the direction of your research.

Tell your advisor about the primary sources you will use. Where are the primary sources? Describe them. When will you visit them? Can you get any of them through Interlibrary Loan? (If so, order them early). Will you be applying for travel grants from your college to visit them? What sources have you been unable to locate?

WRITING THE THREE-PAGE PROSPECTUS

By now you should have distilled your thoughts and questions about your topic into a thesis statement. Your three-page prospectus should open with a short description of the topic and present your thesis statement. Your thesis statement is the argument you hope to make based on your source materials. It is, in effect, the "message" you want to leave with your readers, the conclusion that will indicate the significance of what you have written. At this point in your work your thesis may be tentative, and it may change as you continue your research. That is fine. But providing at least a provisional thesis statement is an important part of the process of moving forward on your essay. The three-page prospectus should offer a brief background on the topic and explain how your research will make a unique contribution to it. This part will quite likely become the introduction to your senior essay. Then discuss the major secondary literature that exists on the topic and describe the primary sources you will use to contribute an original addition to that literature.

WRITING 10 PAGES

Planning a calendar of writing is an excellent way of breaking down a large task into easily manageable smaller ones. Consult with your advisor before you begin this assignment or make this choice; he or she has the option of making the choice for you. Your initial 10 pages is the foundation for your 10 minute presentation in December. This should incorporate your prospectus and appropriate expansions on the themes you have developed thus far from the prospectus. You may also point to future directions you would like to explore.

WRITING THE ESSAY

In order to turn in the initial draft of your senior essay before spring break, you must write it during January and February. Begin writing long before you feel ready to write. Indeed, you cannot know how much or how little you know before you begin to write. You will write several drafts before you have finished.

In order to give your advisor a polished draft in time for her or him to make comments on it and return it to you in time for you to incorporate his/her advice in the Senior Essay Writing Retreat after spring break. This is the most delicate part of the senior essay process. Your essay will benefit enormously from your advisor's comments. If you spend all semester in research and writing and do not get your advisor a draft early enough, you are selling your topic short. Your advisor has other advisees; it will take at least a week for him or her to read your essay.

Before you give your draft to your advisor, ask your college writing tutor to edit it. Your advisor's reading will do you the greatest service if he or she is not driven mad by awkward phrasing, disorganized paragraphs, and grammatical errors. Very, very few of us write polished prose the first time. Work with the writing tutor.

Write a convincing conclusion. This sort of original and argumentative essay needs a firm conclusion, one that tells us what you have told us and why it is important that we know it. After first consulting the bibliographical essay, readers often read the introduction and the conclusion before plunging into the text. Be sure that the conclusion does justice to your hard work. End with a bang, not a whimper!

THE SENIOR ESSAY WRITING RETREAT

This is a weekend at the? The AFAM department covers the cost of this retreat (transportation to and from the retreat center, meals, and housing). You will have this weekend to work on the final stages of your essay with other students and an AFAM faculty member. The weekend will give you sustained time to work on your essay. Be sure to block this time out in your schedule in the fall semester.

CHOOSING YOUR TOPIC

Choose a topic that can be done in the amount of time you have to write your senior essay. It is best to choose a topic that interests you. However, just because something interests you does not mean that it is a good topic. As you are considering a topic, try to write three sentences that describe it. Then ask three questions you want to know about it. Then determine three types of primary sources to which you might go to answer those questions. If you cannot do these things, rethink the topic, but be sure that it is something absolutely compelling to you.

Make good use of your time in the Senior Colloquium (and preferably before this) to briefly search the secondary literature to determine what exists and what does not exist on your topic. At this early stage, you want to be sure that enough secondary literature exists to guide you to new questions and sources, and you want to be sure that someone has not just published an important book that answers all of the questions you want to ask of a topic. Do not worry that there are no topics "left." A good topic is truly yours. It springs from a unique combination of your interests, your education, your experiences, and your temperament.

If you are having trouble identifying a topic that compels you and seems accessible, search the Sterling or Beinecke Library computers or consult with your advisor, Professor Thomas, or DUS, Professor Brown-Dean.

ELEMENTS OF THE SENIOR ESSAY

The essay consists of three parts: the text, the notes, and the bibliography.

STYLE MANUAL

Use *A Manual for Writers* by Kate Turabian, which is available at the Yale Bookstore. Buy it and use it. It provides the only styles acceptable. (That means that MLA or APA in-text documentation styles are not acceptable.) Citation is a complicated, risky business. Even seasoned scholars keep style manuals close at hand. Do not assume you know what you are doing. Consult this manual from the moment you begin to take notes and keep it by your side.

LENGTH

There is a word limit for the text: 12,500 words (you must have your word count on the very last page of the essay). This is approximately 35 pages of laser printed text. There is no minimum; successful senior essays approach the word limit. You must thoroughly treat your subject. Appendices, bibliography, and footnotes or endnotes do not count in the word limit.

CITATIONS

You may use either footnotes or endnotes. See *A Manual for Writers* for complete instructions. Do your notes completely and correctly the first time and save yourself enormous trouble later. For example, you will have to have correct page numbers for citations from secondary sources and box and file numbers from manuscript sources.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Bibliography should include all sources consulted and every single source cited in your notes. Many readers will turn first to the Bibliography to make sure that you have effectively surveyed secondary works in the field. Include works you have consulted, but not cited. The essay will be judged incomplete/late if it does not include a bibliography.

FINAL STEPS

COMPLETING THE SENIOR ESSAY TITLE FORM

The title of your senior essay should tell the reader what to expect from your essay (see AFAM Senior Essay Title Form). Do not choose long quotations or cryptic phrases. State the topic clearly in the title. If you wish to amplify the topic or add interest, do it *after* a colon. For example, "Writing the Senior Essay: The Agony and the Ecstasy," not "The Agony and the Ecstasy: Writing the Senior Essay."

SUBMITTING THE SENIOR ESSAY

Include a title page with the title, your name, your residential college, your advisor's name, and the date. Use consistent margins, number the pages, justify left only, proofread, and bind two copies and leave one unbound.

Turn in two bound copies and one unbound copy to the AFAM Registrar Janet Giarratano at 81 Wall Street, Room 105. Be sure to keep one for yourself.

The Deadline for handing in your senior essay is It is Thursday, April 15th, 2010, by 5 P.M. This time is non-negotiable. To quote from the Blue Book: "If the essay is submitted late without an excuse from the student's Residential College Dean,(before a Dean can submit a dean's excuse he must contact the Senior Essay Director) the penalty is one letter grade for the first day and one-half letter grade for each of the next two days past the deadline. However, no essay that would otherwise pass will be failed simply because it is late. Late essays will not be considered for departmental or Yale College prizes." Only major, incapacitating illnesses, and dire family emergencies will be considered as legitimate cause for an extension of this deadline by your college dean, who must consult with the Senior Essay Director *prior* to issuing the excuse. Note that this differs from a regular Dean's excuse, since the Senior Essay is a year-long project, and you are aware of the deadline as you read this. Most years, no one receives a Dean's excuse.

But a few people do miss the deadline, and it is usually because something unexpected happens at the last minute: a broken printer, a missing disk, or a high fever. They are heartbroken, since their grade drops automatically. Give yourself enough time to weather the unexpected and still produce the essay on time. Students who do not turn in an essay by the end of the semester are given a grade of INC (this grade represents a mark of incomplete). Even after the end of the semester, students may submit an essay to finish their degree and replace an earlier grade of INC. Such exceptionally late essays receive no grade deduction penalty, since not graduating on time is considered penalty enough. They will be read and graded ninety-days after the following term begins.

PRIZES

Essays may be nominated for the AFAM Department Pickens Prize by either by the faculty reader or the advisor. Yale College offers prizes, as do the residential colleges. A list of other departmental prizes can be found at <http://www.yale.edu/secretary/prizes/departmental.html>.

The Pickens Prize is determined by the DUS and DGS in consultation with the chair of the AFAM department. The Pickens Prize was instituted in 1974 to honor William Pickens, B.A., 1904. It is awarded annually to the most outstanding senior essay in the field of African and African American Studies.

GENERAL REMINDERS

The first thing is to get organized, and to stay that way. It does not matter if you use note cards and a file box, a little notebook with cards, a large notebook with sections, or a computer database. Keep a separate section or sheet for things to be followed up, for new sources noted, for your sudden flashes of inspiration. And don't carry all your notes around with you; the loss of a book bag or computer with three months of research efforts would be devastating. Keep your notes in your room, re-organize them from time to time, think about them, but always protect them. Back up everything and keep copies separate.

If you have not already done so, use the first few weeks of the Senior Colloquium to conceptualize your topic. You may find that as you do so, you will rephrase, alter, clarify or perhaps even discard your topic if another one becomes more important and interesting. Your essay must explore your topic with as much clarity and depth as possible at this point in your academic career.

A thirty-five-page work is qualitatively as well as quantitatively different from a twenty-page one. It will be helpful and relieve anxiety to write sections at a time, not necessarily in order or starting at the beginning. You might start on parts where you feel the research is complete. You should write your introduction last—allowing the work you have done in your essay to frame the contents of the introduction.

If your advisor is amenable, give her or him sections as they are written. It is important that you remember your advisor has a lot of reading to do in the weeks before the deadline and can give your work more careful reading if it is early.

Follow the timetable. You should reserve the same amount of time for your research and writing as you would for a class. Ideally this should be scheduled for regular times so that you do not let other things intrude.

Finally, be early! Avoid falling victim to all nighters, of computers and copiers going down, of driving to Branford because of the lines at Tyco. The best essays are those in which the writer has allowed sufficient time at the end for the small details, which make a fine paper.

The essay should be in nearly final form a week before the deadline. This gives time for polishing and careful editing.

The senior essay is a challenge and should not be a chore, however be disciplined. The experience of writing the essay, when undertaken with intelligent and intellectual application, can indeed be the memorable capstone to four years at Yale.

FORMS AND AFAM COURSES FOR THE 2009-2010 ACADEMIC YEAR

The following pages include the Senior Essay Form, the AFAM Course Planner, and the AFAM undergraduate courses for the 2009-2010 academic year.

**THIS FORM IS DUE BACK BY WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 1st, TO
PROFESSOR BROWN-DEAN AND COPY TO INSTRUCTOR OF SENIOR
COLLOQUIUM**

African American Studies \ The Senior Essay \ AFAM 491b

Spring _____

Student's Name: _____

Essay Title: _____

Advisor: _____

Department: _____

Campus Mailing Address: _____

Phone: _____

Advisor's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Reader: _____

Important Deadlines for AFAM 491b

1. **Draft Due: March 12, 2010, to Advisor**
2. **Final Copy Due: April 15, 2010 (1 to advisor; 1 to reader; 1 unbound to department)**

Note: Extensions may be granted only upon the advisor's recommendation and with the consent of the Director of Undergraduate Studies. Essays that are submitted after the final deadline will not be eligible for the William Pickens prize.

