Teaching Academic Writing as Relationship and Capacity Building
The AA&AS senior thesis, like all formal writing assignments done in our literature, humanities, and social science courses, is designed to help our students achieve intellectual maturity. The successful completion of a thesis is the final requirement for students majoring in AA&AS. Either through one-on-one mentorship with a faculty advisor (Afro 4991W) or taking any one 4000 or 5000-level course, students will produce research papers that are 25-40 pages in length.

While the masterly of the topic and research and writing skills is of utmost importance in a senior thesis project, our task as a faculty advisor also entails transforming how our students approach the experience of writing in general.

First, the central principle of our approach to teaching writing is that it is a process that requires practice, attention, revision, and collaboration with others. Just as our identity as a writer is always in the making, the act of writing is a process in itself. It demands active participation and practice from both faculty and students. As such, the experience of drafting and completing a senior paper ought to be mutually beneficial. An emphasis must be placed on relationship building. With this perspective in mind, we make academic writing as capacity building as well, for it has potential to become a vehicle to make the space of intellectual formation and transformation meaningful. Moreover, we begin with the shared understanding that the culture of academic writing where revising is regarded as an integral part of knowledge production emerges slowly and, often, through unpredictable creativity. Lastly, our goal is not simply to help students achieve analytical depth and sharpness. Rather we hone our pedagogy in writing so that a life-long desire on the part of our students to want to become confident writers can be engendered and sustained.

Getting Started
Research and writing go hand in hand. However, to make this relationship productive, both a faculty advisor and a student will first need to approach the process of drafting a senior paper in stages. Typically, research papers consist of the following components: (a) abstract; (b) introduction; (c) literature review; (d) methods (theoretical and analytical orientations; (e) discussion and analysis of results and evidence; (d) conclusion; (e) bibliography.

In the first stage, a faculty advisor and a student will need to work together to develop a research proposal. In consultation with a faculty advisor, a student will identify a research topic. The task of a faculty advisor is to provide a well-defined structure to allow a student to engage with existing literature rigorously. To this end, a faculty advisor will either assign or help identify 2-3 relevant primary or secondary sources (e.g., journal articles, book chapters, and other advisor-approved materials, such as public engagement and/or study abroad experiences) that can allow a student to make an inroad into existing literature to shape a research topic. This concrete engagement molds a student to see oneself as a participant in knowledge production. That is to say, a student will learn how scholars not only challenge claims made by other scholars, but also present expanded and new orientations and perspectives. In the process, a student becomes cognizant of how to utilize existing social, political, and cultural theories and/or design methods to engage in research, analysis, and interpretation as required by disciplinary standards. Moreover, this engagement with existing work will allow students to begin identifying other relevant primary and secondary sources to develop the working bibliography.
Upon completing this literature review assignment based on 2-3 journal articles, book chapters, and other faculty-approved materials, a student will be prepared to begin drafting a research proposal to sharpen the articulation of a research topic. The most important component of a research proposal is a comprehensive existing literature review (1250 words). A student is required to gather at least 10 additional primary and secondary sources, both books and articles and evaluate these sources very closely, identifying not just thesis statements but also analytical and theoretical methods and orientations and other methodologies from disciplines within which their work lies. In addition, as a student scrutinizes every aspect of existing scholarship, he or she will be required to pay close attention to the types of primary sources and data that scholars utilize to present their analyses. The research proposal also includes an explanation of student’s scholarly contribution [500 words]. A student will present a working thesis statement, analytical and theoretical approaches, and a brief explanation of how he or she intends to utilize primary sources and data. Lastly, the bibliography must be attached to the proposal.

- Literature Review Exercise (5%) – Due at the end of Week 2
- Research Proposal (10%) – Due at the end of Week 5

These two preparatory assignments will be evaluated based on the following criteria:
- Synthesize various texts by formulating a unified topic of discussion and analysis in written work
- Communicate thoughts and perspectives of others, as well as unexpected connections and relationships in written work;
- Hone sensitivities toward details and logical organization, both in their own writing and the work of others

Writing and Revising
Building upon the work done thus far, a student begins the process of composing an initial draft. The key shift that a student needs to make, deliberately, in this stage of writing is to move from a critique of existing literature to concrete engagement with evidence and data. That is to say, a student must discuss and analyze evidence and data under consideration. As a part of a check-in process, a student must submit to a faculty advisor a work-in-progress section of his or her paper that demonstrates an effort to discuss and analyze evidence and data. By the end of Week 10, a student will submit a first draft. A peer review is optional, but it can be arranged upon request. The final draft will be submitted by the end of Week 14.

- The Evaluation of Analysis (5%) – Due Week 7
- First Draft (20%) – Due Week 10
- Final Draft (60%) – Due Week 14

The drafts will be evaluated by the following rubric:
**GRADING RUBRIC**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Argument</th>
<th>Excellent/Good</th>
<th>Satisfactory/Need Improvement</th>
<th>Poor</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 &amp; 4 points (A &amp; B+/B)</td>
<td>3 and 20 Points (B- &amp; C+/C)</td>
<td>1 Point (Below C-)</td>
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<tr>
<td>thesis</td>
<td>The thesis presents well-constructed thesis statement and supports it with concrete examples effectively and fully throughout the paper.</td>
<td>The thesis presents an adequate thesis statement and supports it with concrete examples throughout the paper.</td>
<td>The thesis has a vague thesis statement or no thesis statement. The overall analysis is superficial, and it contains little or no concrete examples throughout the paper.</td>
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<td>Breadth and Depth</td>
<td>The thesis demonstrates breadth of knowledge of the topic, strong understanding of readings, effective synthesis of relevant course materials, and an intellectual rigor.</td>
<td>The thesis demonstrates adequate understanding of the topic and readings, as well as an attempt to synthesize relevant course materials.</td>
<td>The thesis demonstrates partial understanding or no understanding of the topic and readings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Insight and Analysis</td>
<td>The thesis demonstrates independent thoughts and keen analytical insights, as well as creative interpretations (that is communicating unexpected connections and relationships).</td>
<td>The thesis demonstrates some insightful analysis of readings and relevant course materials, as well as an attempt to reinforce the stated argument (thesis) throughout the paper.</td>
<td>The thesis makes little or no reference to readings, and overall understanding is incomplete, incoherent, or flawed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>The thesis shows utmost sensitivity toward grammar, spelling, clear sentence development, logical organization, effective paragraphing, transitions, and documentation.</td>
<td>The thesis shows some sensitivity toward grammar, spelling, clear sentence development, logical organization, effective paragraphing, transitions, and documentation, but basic sentence problems and awkward constructions, at times, impede comprehension.</td>
<td>The thesis lacks sensitivity toward grammar, spelling, clear sentence development, logical organization, effective paragraphing, transitions, and documentation. Sentences are unclear; sections are unfocused; and errors impede comprehension.</td>
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AA&AS SENIOR THESIS RESEARCH AND WRITING STUDENT/FACULTY CONTRACT

STUDENT INFORMATION

NAME: ____________________________________________________

MAJOR: ____________________________________________________

COLLEGE: ____________________________________________________

ID NUMBER: ____________________________________________________

SENIOR THESIS COURSE INFORMATION

Check: ☐ Afro 4991 or ☐ Afro 4/5000-level course: _____________________

Faculty Advisor: ______________________________________________________

Semester ____________________________

Year ____________________________________

Number of Credits ___________________

SIGNATURES

Please sign and submit this form to Social Sciences Building 810. If you have questions contact the department at aaas@umn.edu or 612-624-9847.

______________________________________________
Approved—Faculty Evaluator’s Signature      Date

______________________________________________
Approved—Dept. Signature        Date

______________________________________________
Student’s Signature        Date

______________________________________________
Date the Senior Thesis will be submitted
Application for Afro 4991W: Thesis Research and Writing

Afro 4991W: Thesis Research and Writing is a three-credit course designed to help students write and complete a senior paper (25-40 pages) through one-on-one mentorship (tutorial) arrangement with faculty. The completion of a senior capstone course is the final requirement of the African American & African Studies major program. Working closely with a faculty advisor, students will engage in rigorous research and thesis writing. Students who are interested in pursuing academic career are especially encouraged to pursue this option because Afro 4991W offers essential tools to design research and methodology, analyze sources and data, and produce an original senior thesis.

Students who are interested in taking Afro 4991W are required to, first, go through the screening process. A semester before taking Afro 4991W, students must submit the completed application to Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) three weeks prior to the first date of class registration for the following semester. Both a faculty advisor and DUS will review the application and make the decision by the first date of class registration. If the application is approved, students will be given permission numbers to register for this course.

Students who do not meet the deadline or fail to secure a faculty approval will need to complete the senior capstone requirement in African American & African Studies by choosing the second option of taking one of the Afro 4000/5000-level courses that is not being used as an elective.

Instructions

Read the following details carefully and submit your typed responses to Director of Undergraduate Studies Yuichiro Onishi (ohni0001@umn.edu). All questions concerning the screening process and instructions for completing the application must be directed to Professor Onishi.

Part I: The Goals Statement

Respond to the following two questions:

- Which faculty would you like as your advisor? Briefly state your reason. Also identify a second choice.
- How might this course help shape your future goals?

Your response to Part I should be no more than 300 words. Also be sure to save your document in the PDF format in the following way: last name|dot|goals|dot|pdf.
Guidelines for Senior Thesis Research & Writing  
Department of African American & African Studies (AA&AS)

Part II: The Research Proposal

You are also required to submit a research proposal. It will help establish a productive and enriching one-on-one relationship with your faculty advisor. Your topic statement must be 750 words in length (no more than 1000 words). Be sure to save your document in the PDF format in the following way: `last name[dot]topics[dot]pdf`.

The research proposal must:

- Identify and describe your research topic;
- Explore secondary sources (3-4 sources)\(^1\) and state what is known about your topic, particularly arguments, methodologies, and theories;
- Present the significance of your topic, especially by basing your topic on key secondary sources that you have evaluated;
- Describe what primary sources and/or data you intend to utilize to shape your analysis and interpretation in a senior paper. Will you work with artifacts from the past (primary sources), humanistic literature, creative product, social sciences data, and/or a combination of multiple sources/data?
- Present a tentative thesis statement: explain how your argument compliment or challenge the existing interpretations found in secondary sources that you have consulted so far;
- Attach preliminary working bibliography of secondary sources.

\(^1\) “Secondary sources are those records generated by an event but written by non-participants in or witnesses of the event. Secondary sources are based on or derived from primary sources but have been interpreted or analyzed. Examples of secondary sources include magazine and journal articles and books which analyze or interpret primary sources.” [https://www.lib.umn.edu/libdata/page.phtml?page_id=142#toc2128](https://www.lib.umn.edu/libdata/page.phtml?page_id=142#toc2128)