

Independent Work in the

**Department of African American
Studies**

Princeton University 2020-2021

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The Field of African American Studies

The Department of African American Studies offers coursework for undergraduates with interest in studying the complex interplay between political, economic, and cultural forces shaping the historic achievements and struggles of African-descended people in the United States and their relationship to others around the world.

With a combination of courses and interdisciplinary research opportunities, students who complete the African American Studies concentration will be equipped with the critical and analytical skills that will prepare them for a range of professions. They will be highly qualified to pursue graduate work in the field or its cognate disciplines and prepared to enter a society in which race continues to be salient.

The African American Studies Subfields

The course of study is organized into three thematic subfields. Concentrators will take courses in each subfield and will then choose one as a primary area of inquiry.

1. **African American Culture and Life (AACL):** Students encounter the theoretical canon and keywords, which shape the contemporary discipline of African American studies. Accessing a range of interdisciplinary areas, situated primarily in the United States, students will learn to take a critical posture in examining the patterns and practices that order and transform black subjects and black life. Courses in the AACL subfield intersect with English, Religion, History, and American Studies.
2. **Race and Public Policy (RPP):** Students use and interrogate social science methodologies in examining the condition of the American state and American institutions and practices. With an analysis of race and ethnicity at the center, students will examine the development of institutions and practices, with the growth and formation of racial and ethnic identities, including changing perceptions, measures, and reproduction of inequality. Courses in the RPP subfield intersect with the Woodrow Wilson School, Sociology, and Politics.
3. **Global Race and Ethnicity (GRE):** Students use the prevailing analytical tools and critical perspectives of African American studies to consider comparative approaches to groups, broadly defined. Students will examine the intellectual traditions, socio-political contexts, expressive forms, and modes of belonging of people who are understood to share common boundaries/experiences as either: (1) Africans and the African Diaspora outside of the United States and (2) non-African-descended people of color within the United States. Courses in the GRE subfield intersect with Comparative Literature, Art & Archaeology, and African Studies.

Goals of Independent Work in African American Studies

Independent research provides students with an opportunity to develop skills as critical thinkers and careful readers, and to gain experience as creative researchers. Because African American Studies is interdisciplinary by nature, research for independent work may involve readings, archival research, literary analysis in primary texts, as well as work and methods from the Humanities, Social Sciences, STEM, and other normative areas.

Grading Practices in the Department of African American Studies

Good work in the Department of African American Studies possesses three distinguishing qualities:

1. Reflects independent research and thinking
2. Develops and defends an argument
3. Exhibits attention to the craft of writing

The Undergraduate Announcement assigns each letter a verbal equivalent ranging from "excellent" to "failure." When grading papers in African American Studies, the faculty takes these stipulations seriously. Our expectation is that theses and papers are to be carefully written and based on independent research and creative thinking.

An **A or A-** thesis, paper, or exam is excellent in that it is clearly written, develops and defends an interesting thesis successfully based on research, and demonstrates elements of originality in thinking and elegance in its execution. An **A+** paper would have all of these features and exhibit in at least one way, a quality that lifts it above other excellent assignments. It is exceptional and significantly exceeds the highest expectations for undergraduate work.

A **B+ or B** thesis, paper, or exam is very good in that it satisfies the stated expectations of the assignment and does so in a respectable manner. But the paper falls short of A- level work in either its organization, the clarity of its writing, the formulation and presentation of its argument, or the quality of research. There are moments of insight and evidence of independent and creative thinking, but the argument is not presented clearly or convincingly.

A **B-** thesis, paper, or exam exhibits the characteristics of B+ or B work but provides a less than thorough defense of the argument because of weaknesses in writing, discernable gaps in argumentation, organization, or some confusion in the use of evidence.

A **C+, C, or C-** thesis, paper, or exam is satisfactory in that it shows evidence of sustained effort to engage the subject matter, but demonstrates only modest or uneven success in defending and developing an argument. All too often, C-level work offers little more than a summary of ideas and information covered in the course (often a reflection of inadequate research); the writing is awkward and unclear, poor organization, and the main thesis has trouble surviving counter-argument.

A **D** thesis, paper, or exam is minimally acceptable. Although D-level work shows some attempt to satisfy the basic assignment, it demonstrates serious deficiencies in the execution of the work. Careless writing, lack of an identifiable thesis, really poor organization characterizes this level of work.

An **F** thesis, paper, or exam fails to meet the requirements of the assignment.

Departmental GPA Calculation

Departmentals (9) = 50%

Junior Paper = 15%

Senior Thesis = 30%

Senior Exam = 5%

Evaluation of Independent Work

Concentrators in African American Studies work with a faculty adviser assigned by the Department. In the case of the junior paper, the adviser grades the work (with substantive comments) and offers suggestions for further research. The senior thesis is evaluated by the student's adviser and by a second faculty reader. The adviser and reader, in conversation with the department faculty, determine the final thesis grade following the senior comprehensive oral exam.

Important Benchmark Dates for Junior Papers and Senior Theses, 2020-2021

The Department provides a detailed calendar for concentrators and their advisers each year. The following timelines for the JP and thesis provide benchmarks for the completion of independent work.

JUNIOR PAPER

Fall Term

December 9 Submit [Junior Paper Adviser preferences, JP Topic, and subfield track selection](#)

January 15 Email your JP prospectus to your adviser and ask to schedule a day and time to meet in the first week of class in the spring term.

Spring term

During the spring term, you are strongly encouraged to have at least three sessions with a Graduate Student Coach. These will be scheduled in January.

Week 1 Meet with your adviser, no later than Friday, February 5 to 1) discuss your prospectus; 2) discuss how frequently you will meet, and best ways to check-in; 3) plan your next research/writing task.

Week 4 Submit partial first draft (perhaps one major section) to your adviser, no later than Friday, February 26.

Week 5 Students receive first drafts back, with comments from advisers, no later than Friday, March 5.

Week 7 **SPRING BREAK**

Week 8 Submit partial second draft to your adviser, no later than Friday, March 26.

Week 9 Students receive second drafts back, with comments from advisers, no later than Friday, April 2.

Week 11 Submit third and mostly complete draft to your adviser, no later than Friday, April 16.

Week 12 Students receive third drafts back, with comments from advisers, no later than Friday, April 23.

May 3 FINAL Junior Paper uploaded by 5:00 pm. You will receive a link and instructions on how to upload the paper to Google Drive.

May 7 Submit [Senior Thesis Adviser preferences](#).

SENIOR THESIS

Fall Term

- Week 1 Schedule meeting with your adviser to discuss thesis topic and plan for the semester, including tentative meeting times, no later than Friday, September 4.
- Week 5 Submit a five-page thesis proposal to your adviser, no later than Monday, October 5. The proposal should include:
- description of the topic, the scope of the project, and methodological approach you plan to take
 - discussion of how your coursework at Princeton or elsewhere has prepared you to pursue the topic
 - a brief survey of sources and a review of the kinds of evidence you plan to use
 - a discussion of the contribution your work will make to the existing scholarship in your area
 - a preliminary bibliography
 - a preliminary writing plan or chapter outline
- November 20 Submit a partial first draft (twenty pages) to your adviser
- January 22 Submit a draft of an additional twenty pages to your adviser

Spring Term

- Week 2 Submit a draft of an additional twenty pages to your adviser, no later than Friday, February 12.
- Week 6 Review your degree progress in [TigerHub](#) and submit your online [Degree Progress Check-In](#) by March 12 at 5:00 pm.
- Week 7 Submit a draft of the entire thesis to your adviser, no later than Friday, March 19.
- Week 12 Upload your thesis via [Thesis Central](#) by April 19 at noon.
- April 29 Students receive reader reports and grade.
- April 30 Submit your [Senior Comprehensive Statement and Honors Calculation](#) by 5:00 pm.
- May 6-7 [Senior Comprehensive Exams](#) – **BLOCK BOTH DAYS ON YOUR CALENDAR.**

Department Extension Policy

Extensions of independent work deadlines may be granted only under extraordinary circumstances, usually involving medical conditions. Students **must** petition the departmental representative in advance of the deadline. **Individual advisers cannot grant extensions.** For extensions beyond Dean's date, students must consult their residential college Dean or Director of Studies.

Independent Work in the Department of African American Studies: The Process

The **JUNIOR SEMINAR** is required for all concentrators. The grade for this credit-bearing course is determined by the professors of the fall junior seminar. In the spring, juniors write an 8,000 – 10,000 word (excluding bibliography and notes) junior paper, which is graded by the JP adviser.

AAS 300 JUNIOR SEMINAR: RESEARCH AND WRITING IN AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

One distinctive feature of the concentration in African American Studies is the plan for independent work in the junior year. During the fall term, all juniors will enroll in a seminar with a member or members of the faculty. This course will introduce students to theories and methods of research design in African American Studies. Drawing upon a wide-ranging methodological toolkit from the humanities and social sciences, students will learn to develop a research question animated by their interests and identify which types of evidence are most suitable for answering their questions. Students will write several short exploratory papers to "write their way" to their junior project research question. By the end of the semester, juniors will be in a strong position to begin your independent work.

METHODS OF INQUIRY

Methods in African American Studies are highly interdisciplinary; therefore, the methods of inquiry are determined by your research question. These may include textual analysis, historical analysis, philosophical analysis, and ethnographic or sociological fieldwork. Please note that some methods of inquiry, primarily pertaining to fieldwork, require the approval of the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) that oversees research involving human subjects (<https://ria.princeton.edu/human-research>). This process may delay the start of field research, so planning is required.

Junior Paper

JP PROSPECTUS GUIDELINES

Excluding tables, figures, images, bibliography, and appendices, the text of the JP prospectus should be roughly 4,000 words. For additional specifications of prospectus format and citation style, see below.

1. The title page, including working title; student's name; Department; date; signed honor pledge
2. The main body of the proposal, including:
 - The introductory section in which students present their topic and its significance and put forward the research question
 - Discussion of the state of the existing literature on the subject, and how the work contributes to this scholarly conversation
 - Consideration of the methods and sources to be used
3. Tentative outline
4. Bibliography

SPRING JUNIOR PAPER INDEPENDENT WORK

During the spring term, juniors will complete independent research. Students are expected to complete new research and to write each week, and they will submit at least two rough drafts to their advisers over the course of the spring semester (see the [calendar above](#)). The final JP paper is due on the date set by the University. **This year the deadline is Monday, May 3.** Extensions can be granted only by your residential college dean. Failure to meet the deadline without permission will result in an F grade.

GENERAL FORMAT

Excluding tables, figures, images, bibliography, and appendices, the text of the paper should be between 8,000-10,000 words. The document must be double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides. After the title page, all pages should be numbered. The title page should contain the title, name of author, and date. On the bottom of the title page, you should certify that "This paper represents my own work in accordance with University regulations," and sign your name.

CITATIONS

All written work submitted should be appropriately cited and attributed to document the sources for any ideas and information that do not belong to you. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism.

Discuss the ideal citation style for your topic with your adviser. Unless otherwise specified, your documentation system should be Chicago style footnotes as detailed in the [Chicago Manual of Style](#).

While the remainder of this guide focuses on Senior Independent Work, much of it will prove helpful to JP writers as well.

Senior Thesis

Writing a thesis over a year can be an extraordinary challenge. But a clear research question, proper planning, and regular meetings with your thesis adviser can make this a rewarding and manageable process.

While the thesis is independent work in its conception, the following guidelines should offer some practical advice to students writing a work of this scope for the first time.

FINDING A TOPIC

Finding a suitable thesis topic is one of the most challenging stages of writing a thesis. The problem of beginning is often the beginning of the problem. Whatever you do, start where you are most enthusiastic. The courses you have taken are good starting points. Building on a favorite course paper or elements of the junior paper are also ways of exploring a topic. Consider your best adviser in this process and which available faculty member has research interests that align with your interests.

The Department assigns advisers at the end of your junior year. Students should plan to reach out to their advisers over the summer. The Director of Undergraduate Studies will take into consideration your topic and the advisers' fields of interest. After that first meeting, throw yourself into the relevant primary and secondary sources related to your topic and work closely with your adviser. Together you will formulate a clear and concise research question that will focus your efforts.

WRITING A THESIS PROPOSAL

State your research question, develop a bibliography of sources relevant to your topic, and describe your writing plan. The prospectus is not written in stone. It lays out a preliminary outline of where you think you are and where you wish to go. The actual writing may take you in a different direction. But, writing the prospectus helps you to refine your research question, and to formulate a clear plan for the work ahead. The proposal is typically five pages long, and should include at least:

- A description of the topic, the scope of the project, and methodological approach you plan to take
- A brief survey of sources and discussion of the kinds of evidence you plan to use
- A preliminary bibliography
- A preliminary outline of the structure of the thesis.

Your adviser may require that you submit a revised proposal before you move to the research and writing phase.

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

GENERAL FORMAT

The thesis length maximum is 100 pages. However, under exceptional circumstances, this length can be exceeded with permission from your thesis adviser. Your paper must be printed one-sided, in black-letter type upon plain white paper. The text must be double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides. After the title page, all pages should be numbered. The title page should contain the title, name of author, and date. On the bottom of the title page, you should certify that "This paper represents my own work in accordance with University regulations," and sign your name.

CITATIONS

Unless otherwise specified, your documentation system should be Chicago style footnotes as detailed in the [Chicago Manual of Style](#).

GRADING

The thesis is graded by the adviser and a second reader assigned by the Curriculum Committee. The adviser and the second reader independently submit comments and a grade. If the grades differ, then the adviser and the reader will discuss and collectively decide the final grade.

BINDING BY PEQUOD

You will receive instructions on how to obtain a bound copy of your thesis on April 9.

WORKING WITH YOUR ADVISER

What advisees can expect of their advisers. Advisees should expect to meet with their advisers regularly to have drafts read within a reasonable, agreed-upon amount of time. Advisers should expect to receive detailed and constructive feedback.

Although your adviser is your primary sounding-board in this process, you should take advantage of the resources at Princeton and seek advice from other members of the faculty within the Department, the librarians in African American Studies, and beyond.

What advisers can expect of their advisees. Advisers should expect an advisee to take the initiative. Advisers should expect an advisee to cooperate in setting up a detailed work schedule in coordination with departmental benchmarks for the completion of independent work. Advisers should expect students to show up punctually for scheduled meetings. Your adviser should be expected to be given a reasonable amount of time to read and comment on drafts.

Senior Comprehensive Examination

The University's requirement for a senior comprehensive examination is satisfied in AAS by a formal presentation of the thesis, followed by a more open conversation. The exam will last approximately 50 minutes. Three people will be present for the entire examination: the student, the adviser, and a second reader selected in consultation with the Curriculum Committee.

Formal presentation: Students should deliver a formal 10-minute presentation. This should give a crisp articulation of the thesis's main argument. The student is encouraged to deliver a stylized selection of material rather than an overview of the entire thesis, focusing on, for example, the thesis's major finding, most original interpretation, or the best chapter. It should thoroughly respond to any questions or concerns raised in the readers' reports. It should be crafted and practiced as an oral essay, not exceeding more than 10 minutes. It will be graded for clarity, persuasiveness, and elegance in its execution.

Conversation: The adviser and second reader will then engage the student in a wide-ranging discussion of thesis research. They will then turn to the student's course of study in the Department, following up on reflections offered in the Senior Comprehensive Statement. This part of the conversation encourages self-reflection, as well as honest and potentially critical feedback for the Department.

Senior Comprehensive Statement

The senior comprehensive statement consists of a short essay with four sections.

Section one, "Scholarly Development:" should narrate the student's scholarly development in the Department. (For example, the student might ponder some of the following questions: What led you to choose AAS as your concentration? What courses have made the most impact on your thinking and why? Are there any courses not on offer that you wish had been?) This essay is meant to encourage self-reflection, and it may be written as a meditative first-person narrative. It is also used to help faculty reflect on what works well and where we can improve course offerings, course design, advising, and the overall coherence and rigor of the AAS concentration. (Section one should be roughly 700 to 900 words.)

Section two, "Beyond the Classroom:" should describe any work beyond the classroom that reflects the student's commitment to the intellectual, political, and artistic traditions in African American Studies. This may include activist, organizing, or creative work, for example. The Department will give this section special attention in our deliberations for the Distinguished Senior Prize in African American Studies. (Section two should be no longer than 500 words, and it may be concise if the student does not wish to be considered for the award.)

Section three, "Departmental Works:" is a simple list. Please list all departmental courses, as well as the title and advisers' names for the JP and the senior thesis.

Section four, "Honors Calculation:" As you know, some AAS courses can serve to fill more than one sub-field or requirement. Because of this, we need to confirm which courses you want to fulfill each section for the honors calculation.

Funding for Independent Work

Concentrators who require research funding for independent work may apply to the Department of African American Studies, other individual academic departments, and other offices and programs on campus through the Student Activities Funding Engine (SAFE). The online application process requires a full account of your research proposal, a detailed itemized budget, a planned itinerary, the name of your thesis adviser, and a departmental representative. We encourage you to start working on your application materials early so that you have ample time to meet the strict deadlines set by the various funding sources. In addition, make sure you list the correct adviser and departmental representative to prevent any unnecessary delays in having your request reviewed.

The following are some of the research funding opportunities provided by the Department:

JUNIOR PAPER RESEARCH FUNDING

To assist you in building your expertise and your library, the Department of African American Studies will provide funding for up to 8 (eight) books that are essential to your junior independent work.

AAS CONCENTRATORS SUMMER RESEARCH FUNDING

Summer awards provide financial support to enable Concentrators to pursue worthy projects. These provide opportunities for research, personal growth, foster independence, creativity, leadership skills, and to broaden or deepen their understanding of the historic achievements and struggles of African-descended people in this country and their relation to others around the world. Funding of up to \$1,000 per summer is available.

AAS CONCENTRATORS SUMMER STUDY ABROAD SUPPORT

The Summer Study Abroad Support supplements other funding provided to AAS concentrators as they study abroad over the summer. Funding of up to \$1,000 per summer is available.

AAS CONCENTRATORS SENIOR THESIS RESEARCH FUNDING

Senior thesis research grants of up to \$3,000 are available to AAS concentrators to supplement specific research needs. Research funds may be used to support travel, the purchase of books, supplies, and materials needed to complete the senior thesis.

AAS SENIOR COLLOQUIUM THESIS RESEARCH FUNDING

In addition to the other senior thesis funding opportunities available, \$500 in senior thesis research funding is available to ENROLLED AAS Senior Colloquium students ONLY. These students can also apply for an additional \$250 if necessary, for a total of \$750.

AAS CONCENTRATORS CONFERENCE FUNDING

This opportunity provides funding to AAS concentrators to attend relevant academic conferences.

GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATION AND RELATED EXPENSES GRANT

Funding grants of up to \$2,300 for graduate school application-related expenses, not covered by the recruiting institution (e.g., application fees [up to 5 applications], post-graduate exam fees [1 exam per student], travel expenses associated with admissions interviews, post-acceptance visits) is available to AAS concentrators planning to pursue a graduate degree.

To apply for this funding, eligible students will need to complete a funding application in [SAFE](#) that includes a research proposal, a detailed budget outlining the proposed usage of the funds, and a letter of support written by your JP or senior thesis adviser.

Resources

AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES LIBRARIAN

The African American Studies Librarian, Steven A. Knowlton, is available for guidance and to offer suggestions regarding resources for research in African American Studies.

Steven A. Knowlton
1-6F.3 Firestone Library
609-258-04967
steven.knowlton@princeton.edu

WRITING CENTER

The Writing Center offers free one-on-one conferences with experienced fellow writers trained to consult on assignments in any discipline. Specialized 80-minute conferences are available for JP and Senior Thesis writers at any stage in the writing process, who may sign up to work with a graduate student fellow from the Department of their choice on the [Writing Center Appointments Page](#)

AAS Writing Center Liaison
Theresa Heitz **(TBD)**
Writing Center Coordinator
Princeton Writing Program
New South 223
theitz@princeton.edu

Additionally, Independent Work Mentors from the Writing Center prepare workshops and programming to aid juniors and seniors in their research. Our department liaison can provide programming on a range of issues to meet student demands. Students should also regularly check or subscribe to the [Princeton Undergraduate Research Calendar](#) (PURC) for upcoming programming, which covers topics ranging from preparing funding proposals, to note-taking and making an argument to draft review.

Appendix:

JUNIOR PAPER TITLE PAGE SAMPLE

TITLE

By

Student's Name '22

Submitted to

The Department of African American Studies, Princeton University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts

Adviser: Professor's Name

Date and Year

Please sign the honor code on each of your junior papers on the last page of the document.

I pledge my honor on that this junior paper represents my own work in accordance with University regulations.

SENIOR THESIS TITLE PAGE SAMPLE

TITLE

by

Student's Name '21

Submitted to

The Department of African American Studies, Princeton University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Adviser: Professor's Name

Date and Year

Please sign the honor code on each copy of your senior thesis on the last page of the document.

I pledge my honor on that this junior paper represents my own work in accordance with University regulations.