Freshman Seminar Syllabus
The College of Arts and Sciences
Howard University
Fall 2014

FRSM 001-03 (81703) T 6:10-7 Cramton Auditorium
FRSM 001-02 (85640) W 12:10-1 Cramton Auditorium
www.coas.howard.edu/freshmanseminar

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Course Description

The College of Arts and Sciences Freshman Seminar 2014 is a one-credit hour course that meets once a week throughout the semester and is required for graduation. Primarily, the course is based on: 1) the mission statement of Howard University, 2) the mission statement of the College of Arts and Sciences, and 3) the core competencies that form the basis for a university-wide core curriculum. The University’s mission statement describes Howard University as “a comprehensive, research-oriented, historically Black private university with particular emphasis upon the provision of educational opportunities to promising Black students” who will become compassionate graduates searching for solutions to human and social problems in the United States and throughout the world. The mission of the College of Arts and Sciences is to provide you with an undergraduate education grounded in the quest for intellectual freedom, social justice, artistic expression, and pursuit of knowledge. Freshman Seminar encourages you to become engaged participants in the intellectual and cultural life of African peoples throughout the Diaspora by exploring this rich history and legacy and this legacy’s vibrant contemporary work and institutional life. Carefully planned lectures, forums, activities, and discussions will help you feel confident and comfortable in your new role as students at Howard University and as citizens of the world.

Each lecture will help you to answer the Seminar’s broad question: How have communities thought about and acted to create their education systems, especially in relation to the role of elders and apprentices? Du Bois writes in “The Field and Function of the Negro College,” for example: “Once upon a time…, I saw the functioning of a perfect system of education. It was in West Africa, beside a broad river…. There under the Yorubas and other Sudanese and Bantu tribes, the education of the child began almost before it could walk….They sat in council with their elders and learned the history and science and art of the tribe, and practiced all in their daily life…. Nothing more perfect has been invented than this system of training among primitive African tribes” (112-13).

To help meet the objectives for this course, lecturers will expose you to exemplars, reveal how and why these exemplars have achieved and practiced the production of transformative knowledge, and inspire you to study the techniques of other exemplars and, ultimately, to become transformative knowledge workers yourselves.
Required Text

Reviving a practice undertaken at various moments since its inception, the College of Arts and Sciences selects an annual common text for incoming freshman students. The selection is based on the way the book explores distinctly African ways of knowing and being; its level of multilateral engagement with Africa and the Diaspora; its readability; its complexity of thought; and its potential to inspire faculty and students to link ideas to original research. This year’s common text for all COAS freshman students is W. E. B. Du Bois’s The Education of Black People: Ten Critiques, 1906-1960 (New York: Monthly Review P, 2001). Careful reading of and discussion about The Education of Black People throughout the semester will help us understand and model the ways Du Bois, as a representative thinker, charts and critiques the development of discrete cultural identities that speak to unique ways of knowing and being in the world, particularly as they relate to the education of Black people. Reading the book will also help us, in the tradition of Howard scholars (students and faculty), to commit to acquiring and sustaining an enhanced consciousness that encourages us to imagine ourselves in the context of the world and its accumulated wisdom. You will be encouraged to pay especial attention to Du Bois’s use of language and the rhetorical moves he makes, rendering the text readily accessible to students. Artistically imaginative, conceptually complex, and improvisational in ways that distinguish it from other academic texts, The Education of Black People raises issues of continuity and change in education among populations of Black people.

The Freshman Seminar 2014 Lectures

- Learning, Wisdom, and The African World Experience (Dr. Greg Carr) 09/02-03
  - Transformative learning experiences involve more than acquiring academic knowledge. Such experiences must facilitate the gaining of wisdom, helping to build an enduring capacity to apply learning to meet communal challenges. This lecture examines the contribution to global traditions and innovations in teaching and learning from classical, medieval, and contemporary African experiences.

- “Omoluabi:” Self Actualization and Communal Responsibility (Dr. Segun Gbadegesin) 09/09-10
  - Success in acquiring true learning requires a certain kind of personality. From an African cultural perspective, Omoluabi is the essence of the human person, a wellspring of good character, exemplified by an understanding of the self and its responsibilities to the community. This lecture analyzes the concept of Omoluabi and its relevance in the project of useful learning.

- Abandonment and Dismemberment: “Something Torn and New” (Dr. Mario Beatty) 09/16-17
  - Forced separation from our ancestral homelands due to enslavement threatened to dismember Africans, physically, emotionally and spiritually. These Africans—faced with deep trauma and accompanying feelings of abandonment in the unfamiliar, alien, and hostile colonial worlds of the Western Hemisphere—maintained and created memories, traditions, and communities from the rich and complex cultures of the African worlds they brought across the ocean. This lecture examines the trauma of enslavement and how Africans created, preserved, and extended their humanity as the foundation for the contemporary African world experience and the perpetual human quest for a better society.
• Memory, Restoration, and African Renaissance: Social Consciousness and the Black Imagination (Dr. Jules P. Harrell) 09/30-10/01
  o 2013 Common Text author Wole Soyinka argues that as long as the past “is fictionalized or denied, Africa is doomed to the curse of repetition, albeit in disguised, even refined forms.” The sacred space of memory, he suggests, must be preserved. The process of “re-membering”—of reconnecting historical memory to modern social consciousness as a renaissance and flowering of imagination, innovation, and problem solving—will lead to conscious contributions to what 2012 Common Text author Ngugi wa Thiong’o calls “a common humanity of progress and achievement.” Du Bois argues that any attempt to raise the Black race to its full humanity (and, by extension, to raise “the fairest and fullest dream of a great united humanity”) must follow the methods “pointed out by the accumulated wisdom of the world for the development of full human power.” This lecture explores Black peoples’ engagement with cultural traditions to recover memory and to connect ideas and information across generations and among cultural communities.

• “The Eloquence of the Scribes”: Inscription as Liberating Practice (Dr. Dana A. Williams) 10/07-08
  o The eloquence of the spoken word and the devotion to writing—the art of language by line—are highly valued in African American culture. You are heirs of a long tradition of peoples who equate reading and writing with the expression of self-identity, self-possession, self-empowerment, and self-esteem. Indeed, once the commitment to academic excellence is successfully cultivated, it becomes clear that there is nothing as intellectually liberating as self-expression. One of the goals of this course then is to encourage you as an entering freshman to pursue a lifetime of independent discovery and to transmit to you a liberating tradition in reading and writing skills. You may then use these skills in your and the world’s best interest.

• Practices of Freedom and Justice: Investigating Black Diaspora (Dr. Fatimah L.C. Jackson) 10/21-22
  o The tradition of learning for service to the community and the world is rooted in the experience of the people of African descent, both on the home continent and in its vast Diaspora. The pursuit of freedom and justice has been a rallying cry of the educated in this oldest of traditions. This lecture identifies and analyzes the works of representative thinkers in this regard.

• Initiation, Expectations, and Mastery—Continuing the Legacy of Howard University (Dr. Alvin Thornton) 10/28-29
  o Generations of students and faculty have walked the paths, halls, classrooms, and laboratories of Howard University in pursuit of the mastery necessary to fulfill the institution’s mission to develop learning and wisdom to build the good society. They were initiated into the tradition of lifelong pursuit of learning for service to the local and global community. Current students in the Freshman Seminar course are heirs to this glorious tradition. This lecture aims at initiating them into a full awareness of this tradition, reminding them of the high expectations of this institution, their ancestors, and future generations that they continue the legacy.

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• The Presidential Address: A Charge to Keep (Dr. Wayne Frederick) 11/18-19
  o At the core of the ideas of wisdom, community responsibility, learning, and service is the expectation that those who have mastered and served must pass their wisdom and experience on to the next generation. This closing lecture by Dr. Wayne A. I. Frederick, the President of Howard University, highlights the examples of women and men who, through their contribution to all forms of human knowledge, have kept the charge of modeling good character while laboring to build the beloved community.

In due course, the College seeks to encourage you to develop critical and creative thinking in both the scholarly and artistic modes. The university-wide core competencies mandate that all Howard University undergraduates acquire effective skills in written communication; scientific reasoning, data management, and data analysis; critical thinking; historical awareness and cultural diversity appreciation; and computer and information technology. The themes of intellectual openness, cultural diversity, and historical awareness are identified as central ideas of the Core.

Course Goals

1. To provide you with the necessary tools to make the very best of your experiences in the College of Arts and Sciences and at Howard University;
2. To cultivate a commitment to academic excellence, social responsibility, and leadership inscribed in the legacy and tradition of Howard University;
3. To encourage every entering freshman to pursue a lifetime of independent discovery, including the appreciation of the importance of research;
4. To cultivate a spirit of leadership, responsibility, and service;
5. To produce students who are committed to the vision of a strong Howard University beyond graduation and in the new century;
6. To initiate and nurture your quests to become knowledgeable and compassionate about the world and prepared to engage critical global issues from an informed perspective;
7. To introduce you to exercises and experiences that reinforce verbal and analytical competencies and reinforce and strengthen competencies in information technology;
8. To build communities to connect you with all COAS students, faculty, advisors, and the Howard University community to ensure a successful and rich college experience;
9. To help you become aware of methods, techniques, and significance of disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary research; and
10. To provide you the opportunity to participate in College and University-wide lectures and then to use information gained during these lectures to explore the Seminar’s broad questions and, ultimately, to develop a final group project.

Evaluation System, Attendance, and Schedule of Activities and Assignments

Freshman Seminar classes are taught under the Pass/Fail system. Through this arrangement, you will receive a designation of “P” if your work is evaluated at the satisfactory level (80% or higher). Although pass (“P”) grades are not recorded in the overall GPA, you must pass Freshman Seminar in order to graduate. Fail (“F”) grades are, however, factored into the overall GPA.
You will be evaluated in the following manner:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mbongis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blog Posts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group Projects</td>
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Attendance Policy for Freshman Seminar
Good class attendance serves as the foundation for academic success. In accordance with the attendance policy outlined in the Student Reference Manual and Directory of Classes (available online), all students are expected to attend classes regularly and promptly. Freshman Seminar students, therefore, must attend all scheduled sessions. You will be required to complete and submit weekly Mbongi evaluation forms that identify key concepts taught, strengths and limitations of the ideas conveyed, the relation of the lecture to the week’s reading, the effectiveness of the lecturer’s presentation style, and self-reflections on readiness for and contributions made to the class session. Mbongis will be issued before class and no later than the first 10 minutes after the scheduled start time of class. If you arrive to class late and have reasonable justification for tardiness, a TA may issue you a “late arrival” mbongi, for which you may receive partial attendance credit. In some instances, points can be made up by attending co-curricular activities that relate to this course’s objectives. An “extra-credit” mbongi must be submitted for consideration for points to be awarded for a “late arrival” mbongi. If you have any undocumented, unexcused absences, you will receive an <F> for the course and must repeat Freshman Seminar. You should inform the TA for your section of emergency situations that may require an absence from class.

Weekly Quizzes and Blog Posts
Each week (due no later Monday 7 p.m.), you will be required to complete a quiz on that week’s reading and to respond to a prompt via the course blog. The quiz and the link for the blog post will remain available until the due date, after which point, the quiz and link will expire. There will not be an opportunity to make-up missed quizzes and posts, so be sure to complete both well before the posted deadline (Mondays before 7 p.m.). Word limits and “thinking prompts” will be indicated for each assignment. At the end of the semester, you will have submitted a minimum of fourteen (14) entries—an introductory self-reflection post, one post for each of the book’s ten chapters, one post about your group project, and one concluding self-reflection post.

Co-Curricular Requirements
You are required to attend three (3) co-curricular activities over the course of the semester. Recommended activities that are approved for co-curricular credit will be posted on Blackboard weekly. A “co-curricular activity” mbongi must be submitted for each activity. Co-curricular mbongis are available in the Content section of the Blackboard course site. Be sure to use the correct mbongi to have your submission considered for credit.

Incomplete Grades
Incomplete grades will be submitted only in instances where documented emergencies occur near the end of the semester. Said emergencies must preclude you from completing the final requirements of this course on time. Accordingly, an overwhelming majority of the course’s requirements must have already been met before the emergency. The written request (with accompanying documentation and justification) to be assigned an incomplete with a letter grade must occur prior to the submission of final grades.
Writing Matters!

Writing is an essential tool for thinking and communicating in virtually every profession. So, you are required to use standardized English in your blog posts. We expect you to produce writing that is not only thoughtful and accurate, but also organized, clear, and consistent with the rules of standardized English. For assistance with your writing, go to the student section of the Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) website http://www.cetla.howard.edu/wac/students.aspx.

Group Projects

The group project for this year’s Freshman Seminar involves having you conduct an Examination of the State of Black Education to begin to understand and provide solutions to both historical and current challenges. You will complement and supplement your analysis by conducting research about a select locale to paint a full picture of the social, economic, political, environmental, cultural, and philosophical experiences people of African descent face in relation to education and schooling.

Each student will be a member of a group of 5-7 students, and each group will develop and submit a group project that seeks to present:

- A full analysis of the state of Black education in a select locale and
- Discipline (major) based solutions that address identified challenges.

Each group will be required to consult with at least one member of the Howard University faculty for research assistance in identifying solutions to challenges of education. A list of faculty advisors will be provided to you shortly after the beginning of class, though you are not limited to names on the list if your group identifies other Howard faculty willing to participate.

Each member of the group will be held accountable for full participation in the development of the project from start to finish. Students who do not participate fully and consistently in the group project will receive a score of zero; all other students will receive the score that the project earns.

The Mark E. Mack New York African Burial Ground Tour

Called the “single-most important, historic urban archaeological project undertaken in the United States,” the African Burial Ground project began in 1991, when, “during excavation work for a new federal office building, workers discovered the skeletal remains of the first of more than 400 men, women and children of African descent. During the 17th and 18th centuries, free and enslaved Africans buried over 15,000 of their deceased in a 6.6 acre burial ground in lower Manhattan outside the boundaries of the settlement of New Amsterdam (later known as New York). Over generations, the unmarked cemetery was covered over by development and landfill.” Spurred by protests from the African American community of New York, the Department of the Interior’s National Park Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture sought out Howard University scholars and students to reconstruct the lives and world of these Africans, document the project, and develop an unprecedented memorial that commemorates and communicates the story of the African Burial Ground. Today the site is a national monument. In 2003, a ritual processional of reburial of the Africans took place that began where some of them had been preserved at the Howard University Montague Cobb Laboratory, continued through the major cities of the East Coast, and ended with a three day ritual of re-interment at the African Burial Ground. In 2007, a historic international monument was dedicated at the Burial Ground, and in 2009, Howard University Press published the seven-volume The New York African

Freshman Seminar students will have the opportunity to visit the African Burial Ground in New York City on September 20 or October 04.

**Weekly Structure and Topics**

**August 26, 27**  
Course Introduction

**September 02, 03**  
*Learning, Wisdom and the African World Experience*

**September 09, 10**  
*“Omoluabi”: Self Actualization and Communal Responsibility*

**September 16, 17**  
*Abandonment and Dismemberment: “Something Torn and New”*

*SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 20: AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND TRIP TO NYC*

**September 23, 24**  
*Too Much Schooling/Too Little Education: Post-Enslavement and Competing Ideologies for Educating Black People*

*FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26: OPENING CONVOCATION – ATTENDANCE MANDATORY*

**September 30, October 01**  
*Memory, Restoration, and African Renaissance: Social Consciousness and the Black Imagination*

*SATURDAY, OCTOBER 04: AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND TRIP TO NYC*

**October 07, 08**  
*The Eloquence of the Scribes: Inscription as Liberating Practice*

*Midterm grade reports submitted*

**October 14, 15**  
*Taking Control of Black Education: Assessing Successes and Failures*

**October 21, 22**  
*Practices of Freedom and Justice: The Black Diaspora*

**October 28, 29**  
*Initiation, Expectations, and Mastery—Continuing the Legacy of Howard University*

**November 04, 05**  
*Mass Higher Education: Who is College “For”? Lessons from Elders*

**November 11, 12**  

**November 18, 19**  
*The Presidential Address: The Charge to Keep*

**November 25, 26**  
Thanksgiving Break

**December 05**  
Final Projects Due