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Writing Associate: Mia Rogers  
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Office Hours:  
Tuesdays 11:00am-12:00pm  
Thursdays 11:00am-12:00pm  
And By Appointment

Office Hours:  
Mondays 4:30-6:30pm  
Thursdays 3:00-5:00pm  
And By Appointment

Narratives of Passing  
Africana Studies 345 / Comparative American Studies 345  
Spring 2014  
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:00 – 2:50 pm

Course Description  
If individuals can undetectably pass through social boundaries meant to keep those individuals—and others categorized with them—out, then the act of passing calls into question the nature both of the boundaries and of the categories they delineate. This course uses passing as a paradigm to destabilize normative notions of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality and to illustrate how those phenomena are produced. In doing so, we will consider questions like: How does passing operate in the specific context of the United States of America? Is passing about pretending to be someone you are not, or is it about becoming someone different than you were before? What is the relationship between passing and assimilation? To answer those questions, we will analyze narrative literature and film about passing in the 20th-century U.S. alongside theoretical texts about identity, in order to understand relationships between inequality and privilege, performativity and representation, normativity and difference, and visible and invisible identities.

Course Objectives  
To understand the constructed, performative, and intersectional nature of sociocultural phenomena like race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and class  
To bring theoretical and narrative texts into productive conversation so that each illuminates what the other has to teach us about passing  
To demonstrate your understanding of the theoretical concepts of identity in discussions and writing  
To develop a daily writing practice as a way to maintain regular access to your thoughts about course concepts  
To create space for the narrative telling, and analytical processing, of personal stories that relate to passing  
To build research skills and develop a relationship to research as a process with utility beyond a mere exercise

Expectations  
Our class is a teaching-learning community. That is not to say that I am exclusively the teacher, and you are exclusively the learners. Instead, we all come in with different experiences and various perspectives on the course material. Your presence and participation, both as a listener and as a vocal contributor, are necessary for everyone else to learn. It is not possible to build a community of trust and learning if the population of that community is always in flux. Because of that, I expect you to be at every class session.
The requirements in this course are designed so that you can finish them completely and on time, and arrive at each class session fully prepared to engage in productive conversation. We alternate books and films throughout the semester in order to give you time to complete the reading. For book-length texts, any part of the narrative is fair game throughout the week we’re discussing it, so it will serve you well to read the entire book by the start of class on the first day the text is listed in the schedule below. Doing so will improve the quality of your participation in discussions about the text and prevent you from experiencing what others in the community say as “spoilers.” In any case, you must have the book read in its entirety before the start of the second class session when we’ll be discussing the text.

**Laptops, iPads, and cell phones are not allowed out in class.**

**Attendance**
Attendance at every meeting of our class is absolutely mandatory.

That said, I know we all exist outside the classroom, and sometimes things happen to us that are outside our control. So if you need to be out one day because of illness, a health emergency, or a family emergency, get in touch with me about it in advance.

In addition, if you ever need to be absent, you must proactively make an appointment with me to discuss one-on-one in office hours the text relevant to the missed class session.

**Participation**

**In-Class Participation (Required)**
The success of our teaching-learning community depends on your willingness to actively and voluntarily share your analyses of the assigned readings. As a member of the community, you should take personal responsibility for contributing toward an exciting and productive conversation every class.

There are a number of reasons I’ve learned why some people don’t speak up in classroom discussions. But formulating thoughts based on something you’ve read, and putting those thoughts in conversation with others’ ideas, in the context of an ongoing conversation, is a necessary academic skill—just like essay-writing and test-taking. In order to demonstrate that skill you need to participate actively, meaningfully, and regularly.

**Co-Facilitation (Voluntary)**
In the second half of the term, students will have the opportunity to volunteer to co-facilitate. Individuals or pairs of co-facilitators will meet with me in my office at least two days in advance of the class session they’ll be co-facilitating. During that meeting, we will develop a lesson plan and then work together to facilitate that lesson plan on the day of class.

**Assignments**

**Semester Research Project (Required)**
There is one capstone assignment in this course: a research project of your own design that engages with the concept of passing. In order to maximize your engagement, the project should be in some way of use to you and/or to a community in which you are invested. Your research could manifest in a term paper you might use as a writing sample for graduate school applications, a sample syllabus with associated assignment descriptions and lesson plans for a course you might teach, an exhibition of artistic works with artist’s statement that you could display publicly, a poster or paper presentation with an abstract you might submit for an academic conference, a chap book of poems you could self-publish, a narrative memoir or collection of short stories you might revise someday for publication, or something else entirely. In any case, your proposal
for the research project will include the questions your research is aimed at answering about passing and identity; the methods you think will best serve you in answering those questions; the rationale for why those methods are the most effective ones you could choose for this project; and a list of sources you will use in completing the project. Your research project will be due in stages, as listed below. Each stage will include a written reflective statement in which you consider how you have met the objectives of the assignment and how you have built and improved upon your work from the previous stage. Research assignments are each due in a period of one academic week, no later than 5:00 pm on the Friday of that week (with the exception of the final).

1. Research Proposal due Monday, February 24 – Friday, February 28
2. Paper Analyzing Primary and Secondary Sources due Monday, March 31 – Friday, April 4
3. Full Draft of Research Project due Monday, April 28 – Friday, May 2
4. Final Revised Research Project due Saturday, May 17 (by 11:00 am)

Daily Writing (Required)
This serves as an alternative to typical academic writing practices, in which you often think and write about the subject matter of a major assignment only right before that assignment is due. In this course, you will instead collect daily your thoughts about passing, as it manifests in your life currently or as you have experienced it in the past. Your daily writing should serve two primary functions: 1) to produce writing that you will ultimately revise into your semester research project, and 2) to reflect upon, process, or analyze course texts before (or after) class discussions. I may at times give you prompts for particular things to produce. Whether or not I do, you should write for at least 15 minutes at a time, any five days out of each week. Your daily writing practice begins immediately at the beginning of the semester. Daily writing will always be due directly before a major research assignment. Your full, current body of daily writing is due in a period of one academic week, no later than 5:00 pm on the Friday of that week.

1. Monday, February 17 – Friday, February 21
2. Monday, March 17 – Friday, March 21
3. Monday, April 21 – Friday, April 25

Peer Accountability Group (Required)
Each of you will be a member of a group of four that will serve as a source of accountability to facilitate you completing your writing. You will be in the same group for the whole semester. The function of this group, in addition to serving as a more intimate community within our class, is to meet weekly (virtually or in person) to set goals for the type and amount of daily writing you will do, check in about whether and how you completed that writing in the time allotted, and provide suggestions and support for how to meet your goals each week. You may also choose to use the group as a space to continue or build upon class discussions, and to peer-review your research assignments. I will assign the groups, and then you will be responsible for running them autonomously. I expect each group to meet once a week for the length of the entire term.

A Note from Our Writing Associate
Hello! My name is Mia Rogers, and I will be your Writing Associate for the class. I am here to assist you at any stage during the writing process. I will also be involved in facilitating your peer accountability groups and checking in during group meetings two times this semester. Feel free to get in touch with me if you have any questions about the writing in this course or want feedback as you develop your research project.

My office hours this semester will be Monday from 4:30-6:30pm and Thursday from 3:00-5:00pm. I will be setting up slots for office hours via Blackboard. In addition to regular office hours, I am available by appointment, which we can set up via email. The best way to set up a meeting with me or to ask any questions is via email; I check my email just about every five minutes.
I like all parts of the writing process, including the part before you’ve written anything and the part where you just want to bounce ideas off someone else. I took this course last year, and I love doing this job, so please feel free to use me as a resource!

**Office Hours**
Office hours are an integral part of this course. They are times when you can ask for help with concepts from readings or discussions that you don’t quite get, seek guidance in advance of turning in graded assignments, talk to me about future interests of yours that may be relevant to the course (or to literature or cultural studies in general), and give me a chance to get to know you and your individual style and needs better. Because of the individualized nature of your semester research project, you are required to attend office hours to discuss ideas, check in about your progress, and receive feedback various times this semester—once in the first few weeks of the semester for an introductory meeting, once at mid-semester to discuss your progress in the course, and once after each research assignment submission to get feedback before the next project phase.

**Evaluation**
We’ll talk about grading on the first day of class. These are the basic guidelines:

You earn an **A** or **A-** if you do everything you are supposed to do and do it outstandingly.

You earn a **B+, B, or B-** if you do everything you are supposed to do and do it well.

You earn a **C+, C, or C-** if you do the bare minimum of everything you are supposed to do.

You earn a **D+, D, or D-** if you do not do everything you are supposed to do.

You earn an **F** if you do not do most or any of what you are supposed to do.

**Plagiarism**
I take plagiarism very seriously. I have also found that it is not always clear to students what constitutes plagiarism. To clarify that, you should take this very helpful quiz at Indiana University’s website: [http://www.indiana.edu/~tedfrick/plagiarism/index2.html](http://www.indiana.edu/~tedfrick/plagiarism/index2.html). To familiarize yourself with Oberlin’s Honor Code, which has bearing on plagiarism and other issues of academic integrity, you should go to: [http://new.oberlin.edu/students/policies/honor](http://new.oberlin.edu/students/policies/honor). An incident of plagiarism initiates procedures that no one wants to go through—not you, not me, not the administrators. So avoid all that by using the resources above to understand what plagiarism is and, most importantly, by giving yourself time to come to me for help if you need it, well in advance of when an assignment is due.

**Disabilities**
If you need accommodations for any sort of physical, psychiatric, or learning disability, please talk to me about it the first time we meet during office hours. Also, I encourage you to contact the Office of Disability Services in Peters G-27/G-28 (440.775.5588 or [http://new.oberlin.edu/office/disability-services/](http://new.oberlin.edu/office/disability-services/)), if you have not already done so. The office provides accommodation plans, documentation, and support for students who are blind, deaf, hard of hearing, or who have AD(H)D, Autism, Asperger’s Syndrome, head injury or Traumatic Brain Injury, learning disabilities, orthopedic or mobility disorders, or psychological disorders. If something unforeseen happens during the semester—like injury, debilitating illness, or clinical depression—please let me know so that we can discuss arrangements for appropriate accommodations. If you experience a medical emergency that interferes with any work for our class, you should contact your class dean or the Dean of Studies Office in Peters 205 (440.775.8540 or [http://new.oberlin.edu/office/dean-of-studies/index.dot](http://new.oberlin.edu/office/dean-of-studies/index.dot)).
**Texts**

**Books**
Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929) – 103 pages  

The above books are available for purchase at the Oberlin Bookstore. The books are also available to borrow through OhioLink or Interlibrary Loan ([http://www.oberlin.edu/library/books.html](http://www.oberlin.edu/library/books.html)), and are on reserve behind the Circulation Desk at the Oberlin College Main Library in Mudd.

**Films**
*Imitation of Life* (1934) – 111 minutes  
*Gentleman’s Agreement* (1947) – 118 minutes  
*The Spook Who Sat By the Door* (1973) – 102 minutes  
*Six Degrees of Separation* (1993) – 112 minutes

**Secondary Texts**
Articles, essays, and book chapters listed in the schedule below are available on our course Blackboard site.

**Schedule**

**Week 2: Intersectionality and Passing**

**Tuesday, February 11**  
Read Before Class  
*Passing.*

**Thursday, February 13**  
Read Before Class  
*Passing.*  

**Week 3: Race and “Passing Up”**

**DAILY WRITING DUE**

**Monday, February 17 – Friday, February 21**  
*Daily Writing Due No Later Than 5:00 pm on Blackboard*

**Tuesday, February 18**  
View In Class  
*Imitation of Life* (1934).

**Thursday, February 20**  
Read Before Class  

View In Class  
*Imitation of Life* (1934).
Week 4: Race and “Passing Down”
RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT DUE

Monday, February 24
– Friday, February 28
Research Proposal Due No Later Than 5:00 pm on Blackboard

Tuesday, February 25
Read Before Class

Thursday, February 27
Read Before Class
Black Like Me.

Saturday, March 1
Daily Writing Due No Later Than 11:59 pm on Blackboard

Week 5: Race and “Passing Down”

Tuesday, March 4
Read Before Class
Black Like Me.

Thursday, March 6
Read Before Class

Week 6: Religion, Ethnicity, and “Passing Down”

Tuesday, March 11
View In Class
Gentleman’s Agreement.

Thursday, March 13
Read Before Class

View In Class
Gentleman’s Agreement.

Week 7: Religion, Ethnicity, and “Passing Up”
DAILY WRITING DUE

Monday, March 17 – Friday, March 21
Daily Writing Due No Later Than 5:00 pm on Blackboard

Tuesday, March 18
Read Before Class
The Human Stain.

Thursday, March 20
Read Before Class
The Human Stain.

Week 8: Spring Break
NO CLASSES
Week 9: Political Passing
RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT DUE

Monday, March 31 – Friday, April 4
Source Synthesis Paper Due No Later Than 5:00 pm on Blackboard

Tuesday, April 1
View In Class

The Spook Who Sat By the Door.

Thursday, April 3
Read Before Class


Week 10: Forced Passing

Tuesday, April 8
Read Before Class

Caucasia.

Thursday, April 10
Read Before Class

Caucasia.

Week 11: Class and Passing

Tuesday, April 15
View In Class

Six Degrees of Separation.

Thursday, April 17
Read Before Class


Week 12: Gender, Sexuality, and Passing
DAILY WRITING DUE

Monday, April 21 – Friday, April 25
Daily Writing Due No Later Than 5:00 pm on Blackboard

Tuesday, April 22
Read Before Class

Transposes.

Thursday, April 24
Read Before Class

Transposes.

Week 13: Immigration, Ethnicity, and Passing
RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT DUE

Monday, April 28 – Friday, May 2
Research Project Draft Due No Later Than 5:00 pm on Blackboard

Tuesday, April 29
Read Before Class

American Son.

Thursday, May 1
Read Before Class

American Son.
Week 14: Passing Research

Tuesday, May 6  
In Class  
Student Research Presentations

Thursday, May 8  
In Class  
Student Research Presentations

Final Exam Period  
RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT DUE

Saturday, May 17  
Final Research Project Due on Blackboard No Later Than 11:00 am