

Bridge/AAS 201: RACE, RACISM AND CRITICAL THINKING

Fall 2009

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Office Hours: 205 University Hall
Mondays, 12:30 – 2p.m., and Tuesdays, 1-2:30 p.m.
Office Location: 205 University Hall
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Class Information: JR 134 on MW, 9:30 a.m. to 10:45 a.m. (course number: 18649)

Catalog Course Description

Introduction to the process of critical thinking through the lens of race-based theories and selected historical and contemporary discourse of African-Americans, Asian Americans, European Americans, and Latinos on race relations and multiculturalism in American society. Examines contemporary social issues through the use of scholarly studies and a range of cultural “texts” in order to explore the effects of race and racism on the relationship between language and logic, processes and form of reasoning, and practices of critical reflection. Also examines intersection of race, gender, and class. (Available for General Education Section A2, Critical Thinking of Basic Skills)

Instructor’s Course Description

This course is restricted in enrollment to students in the 2008 EOP Bridge learning community and builds on the skills gained by students in their past Bridge classes of Developmental Reading, Developmental Writing, Freshman Composition, and Freshman Seminar (University 100). This course will expand students’ existing skills in critical thinking that they use in everyday settings to new arenas, especially relating to academic work. Specifically, students will learn that developing skills in critical thinking does not mean learning how to criticize the ideas of others but learning how to recognize and overcome fallacies in one’s own thinking. Students will learn about various approaches to critical thinking, including Western formal logic, the use of analysis and synthesis, the importance of metaphors in thinking, the power of paradoxes, the inquiry method of learning, the approach to thinking in the U.S. legal system, dialectical thinking, and “ecological” and holistic approaches to consciousness promoted in the founding principles of Asian American Studies. This course will help students understand why college students typically believe in “weird things,” such as urban legends, celebrity gossip, and dangerous ideas promoted by large corporations today, such as in the fast food industry. Students will also explore what various “mind tricks” such as optical illusions, magic, fortune telling, superstitions and lying (and the difficulty of detecting lies) can teach us about the human thinking process. This course also emphasizes the ways that the concept of race is used in U.S. society to both obscure and highlight critical issues in society.

This course also helps EOP Bridge students build on basic academic skills, including reading, writing, research, public speaking, note-taking, and time management. Bridge/AAS 201 is one course in the EOP long-term learning community (097-098-155-U100 and Speech and Critical Thinking) and thus emphasizes the four Bridge community values of Respect, Responsibility, Attitude, and Maturity.

Finally, this course emphasizes the special responsibility of students in EOP and Asian American Studies to share what they are learning with others, such as parents and younger sisters and brothers. Students at universities such as CSUN are a privileged group because they remain the only sector in our community able to learn about history and contemporary issues and how these connect to each person’s life. In contrast, others in our community, especially new immigrant adults, will never have a chance to learn what students learn in college classes. Students, thus, have a special responsibility to share their knowledge with others.

Student Learning Outcomes from Instructor

1. Students will enhance existing skills in critical thinking and develop new skills through use of Western formal logic, the inquiry method of learning, dialectical thinking, and ecological and holistic approaches to thinking;
2. Students will understand common fallacies affecting college students through analysis of urban legends, celebrity gossip, optical illusions, magic, superstitions, and other forms of popular culture;

3. Students will build on academic skills in reading, writing, research, public speaking, note-taking, group work and time management that they previously developed through earlier EOP Bridge long-term learning community classes in developmental reading, developmental writing, Freshman Composition, and Freshman Seminar (University 100);
4. Through class assignments and a critical reading of Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation*, students will learn how the concept of race is used in U.S. society to both obscure and highlight critical issues in our world;
5. Through the Midterm and Final projects for this class, students will learn how critical thinking skills relate to researching about important issues affecting their lives;
6. Through various assignments, students will learn about their "special responsibility" as students in Asian American Studies classes and EOP to "give back" knowledge to others, such as family members and youth in their home neighborhoods.

Student Learning Outcomes from Asian American Studies Department

1. Explain and apply the basic concepts essential to a critical examination and evaluation of argumentative discourse.
2. Use investigative and analytical thinking skills to examine alternatives, explore complex questions and solve challenging problems.
3. Synthesize information in order to arrive at reasoned conclusions.
4. Evaluate the logic and validity of arguments and the relevance of data and information.
5. Recognize and avoid common logical and rhetorical fallacies.

Course Objectives from Asian American Studies Department

1. Understand the basics of argumentation including: 3 ways to appeal to the audience; components of an argument; inductive versus deductive reasoning, syllogism, enthymeme, common fallacies, and evaluation of the evidence.
2. Critically reflect the nexus between knowledge and power, the link between social structure and agency, and the intertwining between the personal and the political.
3. Use basic library research to evaluate and synthesize conflicting information in order to arrive at reasoned conclusions.
4. Recognize crucial perspectives on "race" and their social political implications.
5. Apply basic argumentation concepts to selected race topics.
6. Critically examine basic racial concepts and theories that have been used to explain the statuses of various racial groups.
7. Develop critical thinking, writing, reading, and public speaking skills via active class participation and group collaboration.

Text Required

- Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*

Course Requirements and Grading

Grading is by letter grade (A, B, C, D, F), with pluses and minuses to refine evaluation. Extra credit will count as one-quarter of a test or other assignment. The instructor does not use a class curve.

Homework Assignments and Tests	50%
Midterm Project	20%
Final Research Project	20%
Attendance and Participation	10%

Absences and tardies are noted at each class meeting. Students will be penalized for all unexcused absences and tardies and excessive excused absenteeism. Students are reminded that they are in the third and final semester of their EOP Bridge Contract requiring that they maintain good attendance in all classes as a condition to remain in EOP and at CSUN and receive financial aid.

Late work is penalized at least one letter grade. Students who are absent on days that tests are given will be given the opportunity to write make-up essays that will be graded for both content and grammar.

Midterm and Final Project

The Midterm and Final focus on a single project that each student will do involving critical thinking. For the Midterm and Final, each student will focus on one “authentic question” affecting their life. The Midterm and Final each count as 20% of a student’s grade for this course. Early in the semester, there will be homework assignments to help students identify their “authentic questions.” Here are the guidelines for identifying an “authentic question”:

- An “authentic question” has **personal meaning** and **great urgency** for a student.
- An “authentic question” is a question that a student cannot answer at this time but wants to research to discover an answer.
- An “authentic question” is **not** an “easy question.” Those students making the mistake of choosing an “easy question” will soon discover that they have made this assignment very difficult for themselves.
- An “authentic question” involves critical thinking skills that we are covering in class.

For the Midterm, students will write a short paper (7 to 9 pages) identifying their “authentic question,” explaining why it is important to their life, and describing the steps they will take to research the question. For this paper, students will receive two grades: one for content and the second for grammar. Students are encouraged to go the LRC Writing Lab or writing labs in Chicana/o Studies and Pan African Studies for help in writing their papers. Students who go to a writing lab will receive one letter grade higher for both content and grammar (attach proof of visiting the lab with the paper. For the Final, each student will expand on the Midterm paper by doing research, creating an annotated bibliography, and turning in a finished paper of at least 15-18 pages.

Important Notice on Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty, such as cheating on exams or plagiarism in homework and other assignments, is not tolerated at CSUN, and students committing these offenses will be referred to both EOP and CSUN administration.

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities must register with the Center on Disabilities and complete a services agreement each semester. Staff within the Center will verify the existence of a disability based on the documentation provided and approved accommodations. Students who are approved for test taking accommodations must provide an Alternative Testing Form to their faculty member signed by a counselor in the Center on Disabilities prior to making testing arrangements. The Center on Disabilities is located in Bayramian Hall, room 110. Staff can be reached at 818.677.2684.

Course Schedule for Bridge/AAS 201

Week 1, 8/24 and 8/26

Introduction to the course — What is critical thinking?

Required readings:

Schlosser, introduction

Assignments:

Essay Assignment: letter to instructor assessing student’s past freshman year, goals and challenges for upcoming year, and recommendations to instructor on how to help the student

Critical Thinking Assignment: Examining a recent experience (past six months) when it was difficult to think critically

Week 2, 8/30 and 9/2

Required readings:

Schlosser, introduction and chapter 1

Assignments:

Exam on Schlosser introduction

Essay Assignment: Writing a personal statement for scholarship applications

Week 3, 9/9 [9/7 is Labor Day – CSUN Holiday]

Required readings:

Schlosser, chapter 1 and chapter 2

Assignments:

Exam on Schlosser chapter 1
Critical Thinking Exercise: Optical illusions

Week 4, 9/14 and 9/16

Required readings:

Schlosser, chapter 2

Assignments:

Critical Thinking Assignment: Why are urban legends believed by many college students?
Exam on Schlosser chapter 2

Week 5, 9/21 and 9/23

Required readings:

Schlosser, chapter 3

Assignments:

Critical Thinking Assignment: Social investigation of one fast food restaurant
Exam on Schlosser chapter 3

Week 6, 9/28 and 9/30

Required readings:

Schlosser, chapter 4

Assignments:

Discussion: How the U.S. legal system approaches critical thinking: strengths and weaknesses
Critical Thinking Assignment: How corporations fool people through advertising
Exam on Schlosser chapter 4

Week 7, 10/5 and 10/7

Required readings:

Schlosser, chapter 5

Assignments:

Understanding fallacies about what makes people happy
Exam on Schlosser chapter 5

Week 8, 10/12 and 10/14

Required readings:

Schlosser, chapter 6

Assignments:

Student presentations of midterm papers
Critical Thinking Assignment: Lying (being able to detect and tell lies)
Exam on Schlosser chapter 6
Midterm presentations

Week 9, 10/19 and 10/21

Required readings:

Schlosser, chapter 7

Assignments:

Critical Thinking Assignment: Inquiry method and levels of inquiry
Exam on Schlosser chapter 7
Midterm presentations

Week 10, 10/26 and 10/28

Required readings:

Schlosser, chapter 8

Assignments:

Critical Thinking Assignment: Identifying logical fallacies
Exam on Schlosser chapter 8

Week 11, 11/2 and 11/4

Required readings:

Schlosser, chapter 9

Assignments:

Critical Thinking Assignment: Poetry-writing based on chapter 9

Exam on Schlosser chapter 9

Week 12, 11/9 [11/11 is Veterans Day – CSUN Holiday]

Required readings:

Schlosser, chapter 10

Assignments:

Exam on Schlosser chapter 10

Week 13, 11/16 and 11/18

Required readings:

Schlosser, Epilogue and Afterword

Assignments:

Exam on Schlosser epilogue and afterword

Week 14, 11/23 and 11/25

Assignments:

Final presentations

Week 15, 11/30 and 12/02

Assignments:

Final presentations

Week 16, 12/07 and 12/9

Assignments:

Final presentations

Week 16 & 17: CSUN Final Exams

Final research paper due by Wed., Dec. 16, 12 noon, in Professor Omatsu's office, 205 University Hall