We love to keep something sacred and private, and to do that we have to burn all the letters.

- Emily Saliers of the Indigo Girls, NPR Interview

**Course Description**

Before smartphones, social media, texting, Skype, or even the analog telephone, people wrote letters to communicate across distances, conduct business, and to document their lives. Important cultural figures were celebrated with the publication of their “life in letters.” Also, the publication of letters served as evidence of historical fact. Accordingly, in this seminar course, we will focus a critical lens on letters which are situated between private and public discourse are autobiographical works in which they figure prominently as epistolary narratives highlighting lived testimonies about class, race, racial violence and gender. We will examine a letter written by James Baldwin to his nephew; Richard Wright’s correspondence with a friend in Paris; Ta-Nehisi Coates Letter to his son, later published as the book *Between the World and Me* (2015). We will also read excerpts from letters published in Taeku Lee’s *Mobilizing Public Opinion: Black Insurgency and Racial Attitudes in the Civil Rights Era*, in which Lee analyzes 6,765 constituent letters about racial issues sent to Presidents Harry Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson between 1948 and 1965. In addition, we will examine how Frederick Douglas’ epistles during the height of the Abolitionist Movement, prove most enlightening as he struggled to humanize the discourse concerning the horrors of slavery. These texts raise the specter and functionality of the epistolary form as literary artifacts of critical significance.

**Learning Outcomes**

By the end of the term:

- Students will learn about epistolary theory and practices in order to reflect on the historical, aesthetic, psychological, emotional and political qualities of this enduring form of narrative found in African American writing;
- Students will demonstrate the ability to read epistolary texts closely;
- Students will learn that life writing is mainly about the self-in-the-writing. While there are many forms or genres in which a reader may glean this written self, letters are considered a life-writing genre in which the author adopts the first-person narration.
- Students will learn how letters serve as dynamic inspiration for a variety of literary genres, such as novels, short stories, memoirs; and film.
- Students will cultivate a keen sense of their own scholarly identities both creative and critical passions in order to embark on your own paths in epistolary scholarship.
Required Readings

A collection of letters written by African American authors will be available on Blackboard in addition, you will read:


Schedule of Assignment and Grading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Assignment</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percentage Breakdown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical Reading and Discussion about Letter(s)</td>
<td>Read the Sadat/Carter Letters (Prompt will be provided).</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Response Commentary</td>
<td>Choose one 1 letter from a collection to write a response commentary (Prompt will be provided).</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Commentary</td>
<td>Based on the 6,765 letters in the Taeku Lee’s text, choose 5 letters to develop a critical commentary (Prompt will be given).</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Oral Presentation (7-10 minutes)                        | Present an oral presentation about a letter you have read. (Prompt will be provided). | 10%                  |

| Critical Discourse Analysis (3 choices):                | 1. Reading Epistolaries (Letters) as Testimony or Autobiographical Truths. Question: How do letters transition from private (personal communication) to literary works? | 30%                  |
|                                                        | 2. Reading Epistolaries (Letters) as Rage in a Self-Reflective Narrative. Question: The act of writing is central to the epistolary form’s mimesis because the writer is literally on the page, composing, thinking, feeling, while the reader is reading and thus concurrently experiencing the narrator’s composing, thinking and feeling. |                      |
|                                                        | 3. Reading Epistolaries (Letters) as Advocacy and Call to Action. |                      |
Question: Can emotionally engaging texts that provide access to the intimate sphere of creation, intellect and sentiment, produce change in readers and thereby possibly change society? (Prompt will be provided).

| Attendance and Participation (Portfolio) | Receive credit for participating in class (will discuss what “participation”). | 10% |

**Grade Distribution**

Your grades are arrived at after careful consideration of your full portfolios and the assignment standards and rubrics hence will not be changed or otherwise negotiated regardless of your required GPA to declare/get out of probation or any other considerations apart from your performance in the course.

**Grade Scale**

| 94-100 | A | 77-79 | C+ |
| 90-93 | A- | 73-76 | C |
| 87-89 | B+ | 70-72 | C- |
| 83-86 | B | 67-69 | D+ |
| 80-82 | B- | 60-66 | D |
| 0-59 | F |

**The Class Procedures and Guidelines**

**Portfolios**

Since we will engage in reading collections of letters (the epistolary), your Portfolio will contain include:

- Writing about letters or letter collections that demonstrates your ability to identify, describe, and analyze various aspects of epistolary theory;
- Writing about letters use rhetorical strategies to explore a topic applicable to the course and that draws substantively on concept that letters are autobiographical texts;
- Writing about letters that shows use of a flexible writing process (generating ideas, drafting, substantive revision, and editing) and shows your ability to adapt this process for different writing situations and tasks; and
- Writing about letters that shows how you used reflection to make choices and changes in your writing and that explains how you would use reflection and the other skills taught in this course to approach a completely new writing task (Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)).

**Conferences**

I will hold (20-30 minute) conferences with every major assignment you will produce during the fall semester. Conferences are important because they enable us to talk one-on-one about your work. I utilize [E-Conference Sign-up](#) to allow you to choose a day and time for a conference that is convenient for you. Failure to attend a conference equals an absence. Since conferences may occur outside of regularly scheduled class time, I will probably cancel a class or two.
Submission of Drafts

The timely submission of all drafts to Turnitin.com and hard copy (for in-class peer review sessions) is a very important requirement for this course. Please be sure to submit all drafts according to the deadlines as noted on the Weekly Schedule. If due dates changes occur, you will be notified in advance to allow you time to complete the require assignment(s).

The Writing Process

Since writing is a process of making meaning as well as communicating, my responses to the written and oral work you will produce in this course will involve my assessment of how well you are developing skills of rhetorical analysis and argument. Students should expect frequent written and oral response on the content of their writing from me. Classes rely heavily on lecture/discussion workshop format. Instruction emphasizes the connection between writing, reading, and critical thinking; students should give thoughtful, reasoned responses to the readings. Both reading and writing are the subjects of class discussions and workshops, and students are expected to be active participants of the classroom community. Learning from each other will be a large part of the classroom experience.

A. Explanation of Final Grades

Final Conference Exit Interviews and Final Grade Submissions

A. Final Conferences/Exit Interviews

I will hold final conference/exit interviews with each student at the conclusion of the semester. During this conference, you will bring along your Portfolio representing all work produced during the semester and the latest draft of your final paper for our discussion.

B. Final Grade Submissions

I will be available on (Skype) up to one week after final grades are posted to the Banner System to answer any questions you may have regarding your final grade.

Attendance, Absences, and Tardiness

Students are highly encouraged to attend all classes as regular class attendance can significantly help a student do better in the class. A student is not allowed to miss more than six classes without severe consequences, up to and including, failing the course. Also, missing more than 10 minutes of a class counts as half of an absence and missing more than 30 minutes of a class counts as a full absence.

There are many important additional guidelines related to this area. To read complete details and to get answers to questions like”

- Who is responsible for keeping attendance?
- What happens if I miss a class? What happens if I exceed six absences?
- What is the policy on tardiness or missing part, but not all, of a class session?
- What happens if I have a medical excuse, family crisis, or extracurricular activity?

Visit this link or scan this QR code.

http://schools.aucegypt.edu/academics/rhet/FAQ/Pages/Attendance.aspx/FAQ

Academic Integrity
In accordance with the AUC’s efforts to promote a culture of academic integrity on campus, the Rhetoric and Composition Department strictly enforces the academic integrity principles found in AUC’s Code of Academic Integrity. Instructors are trained to ensure students are doing their own work; additionally, students must also use Turnitin.com for all drafts of major assignments. Violations of academic integrity can lead to serious consequences, including failing the course and having notes about violations added to your permanent transcript.

For further details about academic integrity and to get answers to questions such as

- How do I know what is legitimate borrowing from a source and what is plagiarism?
- How will the instructor know if I have copied my paper from the Internet, had the paper written by a professional writing service, or tried some other tricky thing?
- What are the consequences of violations of academic integrity?
- What are the procedures for using Turnitin.com?

Visit this link or scan this QR code.

http://schools.aucegypt.edu/academics/rhet/FAQ/Pages/Academic_Integrity.aspx

- I feel that I will need some additional support. What should I do?
- I have a concern about the instructor or the course. What should I do?
- What does the writing center offer? How can the writing center help me?

Visit this link or scan this QR code.

http://schools.aucegypt.edu/academics/rhet/FAQ/Pages/Special_Needs.aspx

**Research in RHET**

Research is highly valued at AUC, and students are encouraged to participate in research during their time at AUC, however, research, both on-campus and off-campus, MUST comply with a number of important policies and regulations for security, legal, and ethical reasons. Students who plan to do ANY on-campus research involving people (surveys, interviews, etc) or ANY off-campus research of any nature MUST receive approval PRIOR to starting their research. To begin this process a student should discuss their plans with their instructor as well as be familiar with the policies found at the link below.

For important information about the research process, ethical research, extracurricular research opportunities, and to get answers to questions like

- When I conduct a survey or an interview, can I collect data from subjects off-campus?
- Do I need any approvals if I collect data from subjects on-campus?
- What is the IRB and what is CAPMAS?
- What presentation or publication opportunities do I have?

Visit the following link or scan this QR code

http://schools.aucegypt.edu/academics/rhet/FAQ/Pages/Research.aspx

**Scope of this Syllabus and Contingency Plans**

This syllabus includes all written content, graphic displays, as well as the content referenced in the links/QR codes included in this document. Any student who continues in the course is expected to understand and abide by all policies, guidelines and schedules mentioned therein.
However, in the event of the suspension of normal university classes, the initial plan is to continue with the course as long as there is internet accessibility in Egypt, but this may require adjustment to policies, guidelines, and schedules. Thus, in the case of the suspension of classes, please check your email and course website for details about how the course will continue.

Syllabus Agreement Student Acknowledgement

I have read and understand the RHET 3120 course syllabus including the expectations of this course. I understand that this course requires my participation, fulfillment of obligations with regards to prompt submission of assignments and projects and compilation of a Portfolio of my individual and group works throughout the semester to meet the requirements for Mid-Term and Post-Mid-Term Assessment(s).

_________________________________________

Student Signature