Psychology from an African-centered Perspective  
(SNL HC 289)  
School for New Learning  
DePaul University  
Fall 2016  
Wednesdays, September 7 – November 9, 2016  
Loop Campus, Lewis 1402

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Course Description:  
The field of psychology has a legacy of viewing people through the lens of a “universal” norm, assuming that everyone’s experiences are the same, regardless of individual and group differences related to race, ethnicity, gender, age, etc. Those who fall outside of this “universal” norm are too often seen as deficient and/or deficit. This perspective has particularly shaped personal attitudes towards and beliefs about people of African descent, and has had a tremendous influence on social policy relevant to this group. It has also impacted how people of African descent view themselves and treat each other.

What if the behavior, attitudes and thoughts of people of African descent were viewed through a lens that takes into account their cultural realities and experiences? How would they be understood? How would they understand themselves?

This course will examine the theory of African-centered psychology and utilize an African-centered theoretical framework to examine salient themes relating to the psychology of people of African descent, with an emphasis on those living in the USA. These themes will include child development and family functioning, identity, racism and oppression, spirituality, and healing. Through this examination, you, the learner will become more knowledgeable about the psychological experiences of people of African descent, the role of history and culture in human development, and the subjectivity research in the social and natural sciences. You will also reflect on the relevance of the course material to your personal life.

Faculty Biographical Sketch  
Derise Tolliver Atta, Ph.D. is a licensed clinical psychologist and Associate Professor/Resident Faculty/Faculty Mentor at the School for New Learning, DePaul University. She earned her graduate degree from Duke University and her undergraduate degree from Wellesley College. She is a past Chicago Director of the DePaul University/Tangaza University College B.A. Degree Program, which is based in Nairobi,
Kenya. She was a founding co-director of DePaul University’s study abroad program in Ghana, West Africa and has been facilitating the course since 1996. She is also the Chairperson of SNL’s Africa Diaspora Committee and Faculty Coordinator of the SNL International and Travel Study Committee.

Dr. Tolliver Atta teaches about Afrikan psychology, spirituality and culture in adult education, health and wellness, racism, oppression and liberation, and she has published articles on these topics. She is passionate about sharing her knowledge of natural approaches to health and healing. Her life mission is to help people “re-member” who they truly are, and she tries to facilitate this through her teaching, scholarship and service.

Competencies
A-3-E: Can compare substantially different theological or philosophical systems.
   1. Identifies two theological or philosophical systems.
   2. Determines the basis for meaningful comparison between these two systems.
   3. Articulates key assumptions and ideas of both systems as they apply to a particular issue.

H-1-F: Can describe and explain the roles of individuals, groups, societies, or states in history.
   1. Demonstrates an understanding of connections among selected events over time.
   2. Uses an informed historical approach to interpret events or roles of individuals, groups, or states.

H-3-A: Can use two or more theories of human psychology to understand and solve problems.
   1. Articulates two or more theories or models explaining human behavior.
   2. Identifies a problem and proposes a solution using appropriate theoretical approaches.

H-4: Can analyze power relations among racial, social, cultural, or economic groups in the United States.
   1. Describes the unequal power relations between at least two racial, social, cultural, or economic groups in the U.S.
   2. Discusses the historical, sociological, or economic dynamics under which these groups came to be in conflict.

H-5: Can analyze issues and problems from a global perspective.
   1. Analyzes one or more global issues, problems, or opportunities facing the human race.
   2. Explains how these issues affect individuals or societies in both positive and negative ways.

The following competences can be negotiated:
FX (if focus area is history, spirituality, psychology, Africana or Black studies, diversity, culture, multiculturalism, or a related field); A3X; H1X; H3B; H3X;

General Course Objectives
1. To develop an understanding of the traditional African worldview and its similarities to and differences from the Western worldview
2. To develop an understanding of African-centered approaches to psychology
in comparison to Eurocentric approaches
3. To become familiar with historical and contemporary African-centered scholars, scholarship, and philosophy
4. To understand how culture and the legacy of oppression and racism have affected the psychological development of people of African descent and others
5. To be able to apply African-centered principles to contemporary issues
6. To develop an awareness of one's own attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors connected to this material

Learning Outcomes (described for each competence offered – see actual competence statements above)
A3E: Compare and contrast African-centered and Eurocentric systems of thought and identify specific elements of each - African-centered and Western worldviews, two different philosophical and life systems, are examined (with emphasis on the African-centered) to better understand the life of experiences of people of African descent, as well as others, particularly in the USA. The foundations of each of these paradigms are considered as students examine key ideas related to psychological functioning.

H1F: Learn about Ancient African foundations of psychology; Maafa, the “African Holocaust,” the historical precursors and subsequent ramifications in contemporary world; and historical perspectives of race and psychology - Students learn about the ancient African foundations of psychology, the impact of the enslavement of Africans on present-day psychological functioning of people of African descent and others, and how the legacy of racism and prejudice in the field of psychology has, at times, fueled and maintained misunderstandings about people of African descent. Examination of history is important as it provides a necessary context for comprehensive understanding of present-day happenings. Students also become familiar with historical and contemporary African-centered scholars, scholarship and philosophy.

H3A: Explain specific psychological issues and functioning using an African-centered paradigm primarily and with some comparison to Eurocentric conventional explanations - African-centered and Eurocentric paradigms are compared and contrasted and applied to explanations for specific psychological issues and dilemmas, e.g. family functioning, child development, healing, etc. Learners examine psychological development of people of African-descent from an African-centered perspective with some contrast to conventional psychological theories and perspectives.

H3B: Develop a better understanding of how the psychological functioning of children and adults of African descent has been shaped because of the interplay of various social factors - The interaction between race and ethnicity, in conjunction with one or more of the other listed social factors, is discussed as it relates to the lives of people of African descent, primarily within the USA. Again, the focus is on psychology and psychological functioning. Learners come to understand how culture and the legacy of oppression and racism have affected people of African descent and others with whom they are in relationship.

H4: Understand how differences in power relations, which have contributed to inequalities and disparities between racial groups (and subgroups within racial groups) are connected to contrasting worldviews. – Students will examine how worldview and cultural paradigms contribute to perceptions of fairness and justice. By analyzing issues of power relations between people of African descent and people
of European descent, students should come away with a deeper understanding of the systemic nature of inequality and injustice.

H5: Connect the manifestation of a global issue with the tension between the African-centered worldview/paradigm and the Eurocentric worldview/paradigm.

**Learning Experiences**

* Assigned readings and class discussions
* Guest speakers
* Course mini-lectures and labs
* Weekly written assignments
* In-class exercises
* An individual essay
* A collaborative group project (if taken for 2 competences)

**Additional learning resources to be used:**

* Selected readings and handouts provided in class
* Libraries
* Resource people
* Visual and audio media (e.g. A Great and Mighty Walk documentary, YouTube clips of Dr. Wade Nobles, etc.)
* Internet sources

**Required texts**


**Attendance**

It is important that you attend each class session. **Please note that students missing more than two in-class sessions of this ten week course will not have met the requirements for a passing grade.** If you are unable to attend a class, it is your responsibility to (1) inform the instructor at least 24 hours prior to the missed class and (2) make arrangements with a classmate to get notes and pick up handouts for you (that means make a friend the first night of class!) and (3) keep up with assignments. **The instructor will not fax nor email notes or assignments.**

Do not talk or text on your phone or surf the internet while in the classroom during class activities. If you need to do such, respect your peers and instructor by leaving the room or you may be asked to do so. Similarly, set your pagers, cell phones or any other electronic devices so they do not ring or buzz loudly during class.

**Evidence to be submitted for assessment of learning**

Described below are the major activities for this course and their contribution to the overall grade:

**Class participation/attendance (everyone).** (10 points/week, 100 points total – lateness will be downgraded 1 point/week)
**Weekly written assignments (everyone).** There are 2 types of written assignments. 2 entries per week are required to be turned in at the beginning of each class. The reading analyses provide you with the opportunity to make meaning of your weekly assignments, where you will include an informed reaction to the week’s topic. The other entry will address thought questions/activities that you will receive at the end of each class session. (10 points/week for Reading Analyses and 10 points/week for Thought Question - 200 points total - late entries will be downgraded 2 points for each week late)

**Presentation (those with two competences).** You will become a member of one of the following groups—school, family, community agency. Each group will be responsible for developing and presenting the designated social system as an African-centered institution. (100 points)

**Essay (everyone).** This 5-10 page typewritten assignment will give you the opportunity to apply your understanding of African-centered principles in the context of a specific competency. (This is to be a scholarly paper, not an opinion piece. You will be expected to cite scholarly sources to support your statements and assertions, as well as to refer to specific African-centered principles and concepts). Choose only one of the topics below if you are registered for two competences. **Check with Dr. Tolliver Atta no later than week 5 before you begin writing your paper. Your first draft of this essay is due Week 8 – late drafts will not receive an early review).**

A3E: Topic should address an issue related to African-centered spirituality or philosophy.
H1F: Essay should critically report on an African-centered scholar and his/her ideas within a historical context (not solely a biography).
H3A: Topic should apply an African-centered approach as well as another psychological theory to understanding a psychological issue that was not covered in class.
H4: Topic should identify a specific area of inequality and analyze it from an African-centered perspective.
H5: Topic should explore a specific global issue or concern based on an African-centered perspective.
FX: Topic should apply African-centered concepts to focus area. (100 points – late essays will be downgraded 5 points per day late; late essays cannot be revised)

**Grading**
Specific guidelines will be presented for major assignments to clarify the expectations for each learning product. Each assignment will be assessed according to the grading rubrics that are presented below. Work will be evaluated as follows:

*A* = designates work of high quality
*B* = designates work of good quality
*C* = designates work which minimally meets requirements set forward in assignment
*D* = designates work of poor quality which does not meet minimum requirements set forth in the assignment
*F* = designates substantial work not submitted

**Criteria for Assessment – Attendance**
A: attended all classes  
B: missed only one class excused  
C: missed one class unexcused or two classes excused  
D: missed two classes  

**NOTE:** *Missing more than 2 classes will result in an F grade for this course!*

**Group presentation**  
A: 4-5 elements of African-centered perspective are explicitly named/identified in presentation; engage audience well; full group contribution; transformation of the institution is evident  
B: 3 elements of African-centered perspective obvious/identified in presentation; some audience engagement; group cohesion apparent; some transformation of the institution evident  
C: 2 elements of African-centered perspective obvious/identified in presentation; audience engagement is considered; some group collaboration  
D: 1 element of African-centered perspective obvious/identified; little audience engagement; little group collaboration apparent; focus on participation of Blacks in institution without attention to transformation of organizational elements  
F: no elements of the African-centered perspective obvious nor clearly presented; no engagement of audience; no collaboration evident

**Individual essay (grade based on format, references, organization, topic coverage)**  
A: theme/thesis clearly stated with sufficient background; includes, with elaboration, 4-5 elements from African-centered perspective as evidence; thoroughly assesses relationship of evidence to argument; comprehensively explains and analyzes aspects of critical thinking; no grammatical, spelling or syntactical errors; sophisticated application of a standard writing style to college work; list of references and appropriate citations within the text of essay; appropriate transitions between sections of essay; no editorializing or sensational language (unless necessary to support theme/thesis)  
B: theme/thesis evident with some background material; provides, with elaboration, 2-3 elements from African-centered perspective as evidence; work substantively addresses guidelines of assignment; writing has no more than 2 grammatical, spelling or syntactical errors; good application of a standard writing style to college work; little or no editorializing  
C: theme/thesis and introduction begins to take shape; provides 2 elements from African-centered perspective as evidence; weakness in organization and development of ideas; work only addresses part of the assignment; serious grammatical, spelling or syntactical errors; minimal and/or inconsistent application of a standard writing style to college work; some editorializing, sensational and/or flowery language  
D: theme/thesis weak and/or insufficient background information provided; includes 1 or no element from African-centered perspective as evidence; poorly written in organization, development, grammar, spelling and/or syntax; superficial or simplistic treatment of issues and ideas; poor application and/or inconsistent application of standard writing style to college work; full of editorializing or sensational, flowery language
F: work does not meet minimum standards

**Weekly assignments**
A: Completion of all thought questions and reading analysis; high relevancy to the readings, topics from class; thorough development of ideas; develops relationship between readings and personal experience; addresses all aspects of the thought question; presents support beyond opinion; includes all readings in the analysis through synthesized presentation; substantive entries of at least one page per entry
B: Completion of 75% of thought questions; completion of 75% of reading analyses; entries usually related to readings and ideas from class; some comprehensive development of ideas; occasional relationship between readings and personal experience; usually addresses all aspects of the thought question directions; one of readings missing from analysis; some support for statements from readings and/or classroom materials; most entries are at least one page
C: Completion of 50% of thought questions, 50% of reading analyses; entries minimally related to specific readings and ideas from class; ideas not well developed nor supported by readings or classroom materials; minimal addressing of thought question directions; superficial treatment of issues and ideas; reading analyses omit half of assigned readings
D: Completion of less than 50% of thought questions, less than 50% reading analyses; entries could be for another class as don't seem much related to course ideas or readings; responses appear simplistic and superficial without any thoroughness applied; reading analyses omit more than half of assigned readings
F: No thought questions nor reading analyses submitted or submitted more than 2 weeks late

Unfinished work may be given an Incomplete (IN) grade. In order to qualify for the IN, students must have regularly attended class, and must have completed three-fourths of assignments.

In order for a student to have an incomplete (IN) grade granted in this course, there must be a significant extenuating circumstance evidenced by the student (e.g., medical and/or significant personal issues). The student will need to initiate and file an SNL Incomplete grade contract before the final session of the course to receive an incomplete grade. Students are strongly advised to review the university deadlines for withdrawal without tuition refund and the implications for financial aid and grades.

**Class Schedule**

What follows is a tentative week to week schedule, which is likely to vary as class needs and questions dictate.

**Week 1**  Introduction and Overview
**Sept. 7**  Ancient African foundations of psychology
            The legacy of Western psychology
Reading assignment
Guthrie, R. (2004). Even the rat was white. NY: Allyn & Bacon., Chapters 1, 2, 6

Week 2 Paradigms: African-centered and Eurocentric perspectives
Sept. 14

Reading assignment
Mbiti, J. (n.d.) General manifestations of African religiosities; and Elements to admire in African Traditional Religions, all retrievable at http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/

Week 3 Spirituality and ritual
Sept. 21 Guest speaker

Reading assignment
http://www.joydegruy.com/assets/docs/BreakingChains.pdf

Week 4 The Maafa
Sept. 28 Guest speaker

Reading assignment
African-American child development (handout)
Week 5  Child development and family functioning
Oct. 5  Guest speaker

Reading assignment
Black racial identity model (handout)

Week 6  Personality and racial identity development
Oct 12

Reading assignment
Guthrie, R. (2004). Even the rat was white. NY: Allyn & Bacon., Chapters 3, 4

Week 7  Education and socialization
Oct. 19

Reading assignment

Week 8  Racism and oppression
Oct. 26  Guest speaker

Reading assignment


Week 9
From theory to practice
Nov. 2
Application of African-centered perspectives to address contemporary issues in psychology

Reading assignment

Article on African-centered approaches to violence prevention

Week 10
Group Presentations
Nov. 9
Application of African-centered perspectives to address contemporary issues in psychology, continued
  The future of African-centered psychology
Celebration

NOTE: An organized, tabbed-by-week portfolio containing all written assignments (original copies of reading analyses and thought questions, with comments from Dr. Tolliver Atta, and revised copies, if applicable; all drafts and revisions of your essay; all worksheets completed in class and outside of class, etc.) is due no later than 6pm, at 14 E. Jackson, 14th floor, Nov.16, 2016. If you are not able to turn in your completed portfolio by then, you can request to receive an Incomplete grade. If your request is accepted (based on you having successfully completed at least 75% of assignments and missed no more than 2 class sessions), you will have until January 4, 2016 to turn in your work.
  THERE WILL BE NO EXTENSIONS BEYOND THIS DATE!

Addenda

DePaul University Academic Integrity Policy

DePaul University is a learning community that fosters the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas within a context that emphasizes a sense of responsibility for oneself, for others and for society at large. Violations of academic integrity, in any of their forms, are, therefore, detrimental to the values of DePaul, to the students’ own development as responsible members of society, and to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Violations include but are not limited to the following categories: cheating; plagiarism; fabrication; falsification or sabotage of research data; destruction or misuse of the university’s academic resources; alteration or falsification of academic
records; and academic misconduct. Conduct that is punishable under the Academic Integrity Policy could result in additional disciplinary actions by other university officials and possible civil or criminal prosecution. Please refer to your Student Handbook or visit http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/homehandbook.html for further details.

Statement on Plagiarism:

The DePaul Student Handbook defines plagiarism as follows: “Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following: (a) The direct copying of any source, such as written and verbal material, computer files, audio disks, video programs or musical scores, whether published or unpublished, in whole or in part, without proper acknowledgement that it is someone else’s. (b) Copying of any source in whole or in part with only minor changes in wording or syntax even with acknowledgement. (c) Submitting as one’s own work a report, examination paper, computer file, lab report or other assignment which has been prepared by someone else. This includes research papers purchased from any other person or agency. (d) The paraphrasing of another’s work or ideas without proper acknowledgment.” Plagiarism will result in a failure of the assignment or possibly of the course. If you are unsure of how to cite a source, ask!

DePaul University Incomplete Policy

Undergraduate and graduate students will have up to two quarters to complete an incomplete. At the end of the second quarter (excluding summer) following the term in which the incomplete grade was assigned, remaining incompletes will automatically convert to "F" grades. In the case of the Law School incompletes must be completed by the end of the semester following the one in which the incomplete was assigned. Ordinarily no incomplete grade may be completed after the grace period has expired. Instructors may not change incomplete grades after the end of the grace period without the permission of a college-based Exceptions Committee. This policy applies to undergraduate, graduate and professional programs. NOTE: In the case of a student who has applied for graduation and who has been approved for an Incomplete in his or her final term, the incomplete must be resolved within the four week grace period before final degree certification.

n.b. The SNL student who wishes to receive the grade of IN must formally request in writing that the instructor issue this grade. This request must be made before the end of the quarter in which the student is enrolled in a course.

Protection of Human Research Participants

This course may involve research activities intended solely for classroom learning outcomes. Collecting data from human beings for such activities do not require institutional review if there is no intent to generalize, publish, or otherwise disseminate the findings. However, students must still abide by federally-mandated guidelines for the protection of human beings who may be the sources of such data. These include, but are not limited to, keeping persons’ identifiable characteristics confidential and taking care to minimize or entirely remove the possibility of mental, social, financial, or physical harm.
If findings from your research activities may be disseminated beyond classroom discussion, your activities carry risk of harm to the participants, or the identities of the participants are ascertainable, students must obtain approval from the SNL Local Review Board and DePaul Institutional Review Board. Please consult with the course instructor and visit the website of the Office of Research Protections at DePaul University (http://research.depaul.edu) for additional information and guidance.

**For Students Who Need Accommodations Based on the Impact of a Disability**

Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential.

To ensure that you receive the most appropriate accommodation based on your needs, contact the instructor as early as possible in the quarter, preferably within the first week of class, and make sure you have contacted:

- PLuS Program (for LD, AD/HD) at 773-325-4239 in the Schmidt Academic Center, room 220 or;
- The Office for Students with Disabilities (for all other disabilities) at 773-325-7290, DePaul University Student Center, room 307.

**Writing Help**

For help with organizing your ideas, grammar, citing sources, avoiding plagiarism, sample SNL assignments and much more, see the Writing Guide for SNL Students at http://snl.depaul.edu/writing/index.html. For on-campus and online tutoring, see the DePaul University Writing Centers at http://condor.depaul.edu/~writing/.

[In addition, consider adding the Writing Centers’ syllabus supplement available here http://condor.depaul.edu/writing/instructors/syllabus.html]

**Description of Pass/Fail Grading Option**

Students have the option of taking all SNL undergraduate courses as Pass/Fail even if a class is initially structured for a letter grade assessment. In these cases a Pass is awarded when competence is demonstrated at a level that would otherwise earn a grade of C- or higher.

In deciding to select Pass/Fail grading students should be aware that competencies assessed in a course as Pass will earn credit hours toward degree completion but will not be included in computing grade point averages. Attempted competence demonstration assessed within a class as Fail will not only be recorded as credit hours attempted but will also be included in computing a student’s grade point average.
If a student wishes to switch their method of assessment to the Pass/Fail option, this must be requested from the instructor in writing during the first two weeks of the quarter. The assessment style may not be changed after this period, with no exceptions.