School for New Learning
Bachelor of Arts
Spring Quarter 2016

Course: Advanced Elective Seminar
Topic: African American Fiction – Octavia E. Butler’s *Wild Seed*

IN 307-909 (E1: 31406)
IN 307-910 (E2: 31407)

Instructor: Deborah W. Holton, PhD, MFA
dholton@depaul.edu (preferred communication)
Office: 312-362-8595

All appointments are by arrangement, either in person or conference call. Feel free to send an email or discuss in class your meeting preferences.

Course Dates: Tuesdays, March 29 – June 7, 2016

Time: 5:45 – 9 PM

Course Location: TBA

Course Description

The best of writers draw inspiration from topics that are of interest to them rooted in their own tacit and explicit knowledge. In other words, an author conducts her own brand of research that coalesces into a particular fictional work. Zora Neale Hurston said it well: “Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose. It is a seeking that he who wishes may know the cosmic secrets of the world and that they dwell therein.”

Scholars attend to the analysis of a text by looking at what the writer has created from within the disciplinary ways of knowing in which they work. How does approaching the text from various contexts and academic disciplines enhance our reading of an author’s fiction? When does an author incorporate or diverge from other ways of knowing? In this course we will learn how to “poke and pry” for deeper meanings informed by multiple ways of knowing.

Through an integrative exploration of a selected author’s work, such as that of researcher, folklorist, creative writer Zora Neale Hurston or science fiction and speculative fiction writer Octavia Butler, students will analyze the complexity of the writer’s gaze in view of particular disciplines within the liberal learning categories. Students will articulate their heightened awareness of the author’s creative choices in response to issues within disciplinary contexts, noting the boundaries or limitations of such knowledge. Active participation in learning activities that include reading, discussion, research, writing, and presentation will enhance the learning experience and our learning environment. Developing competence in integrative thinking is the primary learning outcome in this advanced course.

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Learning Competences and Outcomes

E1: Can explain a topic of interest generated from direct engagement with a fictional text from at least two academic disciplines within the liberal learning categories.

1. Can identify a research topic derived from direct engagement with a primary fictional text;
2. Can use integrative knowledge principles to investigate the chosen topic from two academic disciplines within the liberal learning categories;
3. Can evaluate the two major academic disciplines in terms of their limitations and potential as they apply to the primary text;

E2: Can apply knowledge from two or more academic disciplines within the liberal learning categories to the interpretation of a fictional text and synthesize one’s findings for an audience.

1. Can investigate an author’s ideas and perspectives on her or his own work as they apply to one’s research topic;
2. Can compare scholarship about one’s topic relative to each chosen academic discipline;
3. Can analyze, drawing from 1 and 2 above, the author’s use of knowledge from one or more academic disciplines in the creation of a fictional world;
4. Can present to an audience a synthesis of one’s research that includes a discussion of the value of integrative knowledge and its application to actual situations.

Learning Strategies & Resources

Lecture and discussions; in-class and independent readings; research; in-class listening; in-class and independent writing; and, student presentations will support the learning outcomes.

Articles will be available either as links in D2L or in e-reserves: www.lib.depaul.edu. Additional readings may be assigned in class.

Required reading

Books


Articles

Denman, J Andrew. "Taking out the Trash: Octavia E. Butler's Wild Seed and the


**Media**


Interview with Octavia Butler, Part 2: [https://youtu.be/W1W9CNwl2e8](https://youtu.be/W1W9CNwl2e8)

**Recommended**


**Learning Deliverables**

- Learning journals (8 entries total)
- Two essays, 4-5 pages each, based on library research.
- Final presentation (Digication format, presented in class)

**Learning activities**

- Reading of assigned primary and secondary texts;
• Active participation in all class discussions and activities, including leading discussions centered on ongoing research;
• Journal writing: students will keep a typed journal (1-2 page per week) of their engagement with the assigned texts as they focus their attention on a topic that can be explored from at least two academic disciplines within the liberal learning categories. Journals will serve as documentation of sustained engagement, reflections on in-class activities, questions and responses to ongoing research, and one’s changing perspectives based on new learning. Students may be asked to share excerpts in class; journals will be collected weekly.
• Two 4-5 page formal essays, following MLA style
  o Students will conduct library research to evaluate two or more academic disciplines, with creative writing being one of the two selected disciplines, in terms of the discipline’s limitations and potential in application to the primary text.
  o Students will conduct library research to support their analysis of the author’s use of one or more academic disciplines in the creation of a fictional world.
• Final presentation: a synthesis of one’s research and a discussion of how that research has deepened your understanding of the text as well as how integrative thinking can apply to actual situations. Students should include their analytical methodology, and are encouraged to demonstrate the complexity of their learning with charts, concept maps, posters, or other appropriate visual materials. All presentations should be posted to Digication.

Assessment of Student Learning

The Advanced Elective is a graded course, although students may request the Pass/Fail option according to the policy below. Your final grade will be based on the successful completion of your writing assignments, class activities, class participation, and final presentations. Each competence will be graded based on the requirements for the competence.

Grading Criteria & Scale

Assignments in this course will be graded based on your ability to follow the checklists provided and submit work of both quality and quantity, with particular attention to submission deadlines. Note that grading in this course is divided into two parts. The first pertains to how well you demonstrate your learning from assigned texts, assignments, and activities through active participation in class discussions and activities.

All students are expected to show that they have read the texts provided, that they comprehend them, and that they are thinking critically about them, including their potential applications and implications beyond the classroom, and do so to communicate with all members of the class. As you demonstrate your learning, essential is a mindfulness of others as you “share space and time” in discussions and activities. In other words, let the Golden Rule be your guide, “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

The second pertains to how well you show your learning through your written work. I will consider both quantity and quality when grading. I’ve provided a checklist for quality below. Concerning quantity, I’ve outlined written assignments for each competence and program expectation in Part 2 below. Details about written assignments your instructor will provide in class.

2/8/16
Part 1: Discussion and in-class activities

Use the checklists below to help you self-assess the grade level of your achievement. Students meet the specifications of the grade, including Pass/Fail, through their attendance and active participation according to the checklists below.

Discussions and Activities Checklist

**B-Level is the general expectation for all students.**

I attend all class sessions, arriving and leaving at the official hour, including field-trips, with the possible exception of no more than 2 excused absences; and, I prepare for class by having read the assignment(s) by the due dates; and, I prepare for class by having completed assigned activities by the due dates; and, I articulate a clear summary of texts; and, I reflect on activities in a thoughtful and contributive manner; and I ask questions, express judgments and/or pose other areas to explore at each discussion session; and, I have writing utensils (paper and pen, or an unobtrusive electronic device such as a tablet) to capture my freewriting and notes in class (no computers, please); and, I have turned off my cell phone, and will not use my computer unless asked to do so by my facilitator; and, I actively participate in class discussions and activities, mindful of the appropriateness of my actions as I engage with my peers, and sensitive to the topic and time allotted in class.

**A-Level**

I consistently operate at the B level as indicated above; and in addition, I attend all class sessions, arriving and leaving at the official hour, with the possible exception of no more than 1 excused absence; and, I articulate my reading of texts beyond the course requirements; and, I serve as a student resource to the class by sharing my additional learning in discussions and activities.

**C-Level**

I have missed no more than 3 class sessions; and/or, I arrive late and/or leave early for no more than 3 class sessions; and/or, I’m not prepared for class because I haven’t read the assignment(s), 3 times maximum; and/or, I haven’t completed the assigned activities, 3 times maximum; and/or, I can’t provide a clear summary of texts, 3 times maximum; and/or, I only enter discussions and/or participate in activities when asked, 3 times maximum; and/or, I only ask questions, or make general remarks, that show my vague familiarity with assigned readings and/or activities, 3 times maximum.
D/F-Level - No Credit

I have missed more than 3 class sessions and/or,
I am late or leave early more than 3 class sessions and/or,
I’m unable to respond to questions, nor can I summarize readings more than 3 class sessions; and/or,
I’m silent most of the sessions; or,
I don’t participate at all.

Part 2: Written work

In this course, all students regardless of competence or program are expected to adhere to the requirements for written work articulated in this document that supplements your syllabus.

Use the checklists below to help you self-assess the grade level of your achievement. Students meet the grading specifications for their writing through their timely submission, adherence to the assignment instructions, and the quality of their work. All students are encouraged to use the checklists for each assignment before submitting them for feedback and final draft submissions.

Note too the importance of submitting your work on time. Timely submission assures feedback; work submitted more than two days after the deadline may be ineligible. Late submissions are penalized both with a lower grade and also with limited or no instructor feedback. Further, all students, regardless of grade-level, can benefit from scheduled consultations with the DePaul Writing Center. See Policies below.

Writing Assignments Quality Checklist

B-Level is the general expectation for all students.

I have paid attention to the assignment details and my work reflects my understanding; and,
I have written a synthesis of my ideas in my own words; and,
My writing is of good quality; and,
My writing is clearly organized and comprehensive in my reflection of the issues at hand;
My writing presents a substantive thesis and argument with evident development and support of ideas; and,
The words and ideas of others I have cited; and,
I have proofread my work for proper citation and citation formatting, including my Works Cited bibliography; and,
I have proofread my work for spelling errors; and,
I have proofread my work for grammatical and syntactical errors; and,
I have edited my work for organization and consistency; and,
I have cited sources within my text, with full credit, including in my journal entry; and,
I have used the MLA style for college writing when formatting my essays, and have follow the style sheets provided in class and/or have referenced the MLA Handbook directly; and,
I have submitted my work on time.
A-Level

My writing reflects my attention to all B level requirements as indicated above; and, I have exceeded B-level expectations in that:
My writing reflects my reading of texts beyond the course requirements; and,
My informal bibliography is annotated; and,
My writing is of high quality, reflecting a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand; and,
My writing reflects a clearly identifiable thesis and argument; and,
My writing is thorough, comprehensive, cogent, and creative, with a clearly identifiable thesis.
My writing is within submission page/word count guidelines.

C-Level

My work shows that I didn’t follow the assignment instructions beyond the minimal requirement; and/or,
I have missed no more than 2 submission deadlines, which means that I may not receive feedback; and/or,
My ideas reflect that I’ve read the requisite texts, but aren’t well organized; and/or,
My ideas reflect that I’ve read the requisite texts, but aren’t well developed; and/or,
I didn’t provide examples to support my ideas; and/or,
I didn’t explain my ideas thoroughly; and/or,
I didn’t finish the assignment; and/or,
I didn’t proofread my work for grammatical, spelling, syntactical or formatting errors.

D/F-Level - No Credit

I didn’t complete the assignment according to the assignment instructions to meet even minimal requirements; and/or,
I missed more than 2 submission deadlines which means that I may not receive feedback; and/or,
My writing doesn’t meet the minimal standards for organization, development, grammar, spelling, and/or syntax; and/or,
My writing shows that I haven’t read the assigned texts to support my ideas; and/or,
I haven’t submitted any written work.

Course Requirement Grading Weights

All written work must be submitted to the D2L Dropbox. Detailed instructions and guidelines will be provided in class. See also the Checklists below. The following is an overview of assessment:
Class participation 35%

Active participation 15%
Lead ongoing-research topic related discussion (in consultation with instructor) 10%
Final presentation 10%

Written Assignments 65%

Weekly learning journals: (8 total, 5% possible for each) 40%
Midterm paper 10%
Final paper 15%

See the Checklists above for expectations for both in-class participation and written work that correspond to the following university standards.

A The instructor judged the student to have accomplished the stated objectives of the course in an EXCELLENT manner.
B The instructor judged the student to have accomplished the stated objectives of the course in a VERY GOOD manner.
C The instructor judged the student to have accomplished the stated objectives of the course in a SATISFACTORY manner.
The instructor judged the student to have accomplished the stated objectives of the course in a POOR manner. (A grade of D will not fulfill the requirements in a major field of concentration.)
F The instructor judged the student NOT to have accomplished the stated objectives of the course.
PA Passing achievement in a pass/fail course. (Grades A through D represent passing performance.)
W Withdrawal from the course initiated by the student after the Last Day to Drop With No Penalty and before the Withdrawal Deadline. The W grade is automatically recorded on the student’s transcript once it has been processed.

Pass/Fail Grading Options

For SNL students, competencies awarded for prior learning or in the Lifelong Learning Domain do not count towards the twenty credit hours limit on the pass/fail option. In addition, SNL students can select this option for most SNL courses. SNL students must notify faculty prior to the end of the second week of the course for which the pass-fail is requested. If the course is passed, the credit hours earned are entered on the student’s record; the grade is not included in computing the grade point average. If the course is failed, the F grade is recorded on the record and the credit hours attempted are included in computing the grade point average. For Lifelong Learning Domain courses that provide a grading option, students must notify faculty prior to the end of the second week of the course they are requesting that option. See Grades.

Course Schedule (tentative)
Please note that this schedule is tentative and is subject to change prior to the second week of the course, or as class needs indicate. Significant changes will be discussed in class and with student consensus approval. See Policies below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DUE DATES</th>
<th>TOPICS</th>
<th>READINGS</th>
<th>ASSIGNMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session 1 3/29</td>
<td>Octavia Butler – Integrative Thinker</td>
<td></td>
<td>Note: All assignments are due in the week they are listed. Consult class documents for more details.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Session 2 4/5 | Reimagining History | • Butler, *Wild Seed*  
• Martin, Becoming an Integrative Thinker  
• Leadership and Integrative Thinking | • Readings  
• Journal entry 1 |
| Session 3 4/12 | Disciplinary Underpinnings - History | • Butler, *Wild Seed*  
• Govan  
• Dubey, Enslavement  
• Bollinger  
• Wrenn | • Readings  
• Journal entry 2  
• Research reports |
| Session 4 4/19 | Disciplinary Underpinnings - Literature | • Butler, *Wild Seed*  
• Joo  
• Thaler  
• Holton | • Readings  
• Journal entry 3  
• Research reports |
| Session 5 4/26 | Disciplinary Underpinnings - Science | • Hampton  
• Dubey, Becoming Animal  
• Butler, *Wild Seed* | • Readings  
• Paper #1 |
| Session 6 5/3 | The Author Speaks | • Rose, Charlie. Interview with Octavia Butler, Part 1: [https://youtu.be/6Mig4tk](https://youtu.be/6Mig4tk)  
• Rose, Interview with Octavia Butler, Part 2: [https://youtu.be/W1W9CNwl2e8](https://youtu.be/W1W9CNwl2e8)  
• Journal entry 4  
• Research reports |
| Session 7 5/10 | Integrating Knowledge in a Fictional World | • Fry  
• Butler, *Black Scholar* Interview  
• Balagun | • Readings  
• Journal entry 5  
• Research reports |
| Session 8 5/17 | Integrating Knowledge into a Fictional World, cont. | • Martin, Ch. 5  
• Denman | • Readings  
• Journal entry 6  
• Research reports |
| Session 9 5/24 | Integrating Knowledge into a Fictional World, cont. | • Butler, *Wild Seed* | • Readings  
• Journal entry 7 |
| Session Synthesis – | • Butler, *Wild Seed* | • Journal entry 8 |
Course Policies

SNL Attendance Policy

Attendance is both mandatory and essential in SNL courses. Students and faculty are expected to arrive on time, and to actively participate in every scheduled class session. Specific course policies may be listed in the course syllabus. Acceptance of the syllabus indicates agreement to policies outlined in that document.

Students are expected to attend each class and to remain for the duration. Coming 15 minutes late or leaving 15 minutes early constitutes an absence for the student. The overall grade for participation drops one-third after any absence. Students who miss class due to illness or other significant personal circumstance are required to complete the Absence Notification Process through the Dean of Students Office (DePaul Center #1100) in order to have their absence excused. Two absences for any reason, whether excused or not, may constitute failure of the course.

Missing class makes assessment a difficult process; students who miss any class work are subject to a grade reduction. Students who miss more than 10% of any given course are subject to failure. This means that if you miss participating in more than two classes you may not have met the requirements for a passing grade. For example, missing one all-day (two sessions) class (9 am – 4 pm) = 20%. It is within your instructor’s right to fail you—just so you know.

Your instructor should be notified if your life events do not allow you to participate in the course for more than one week. This is particularly important when there are small group discussions or you are working as part of a team.

If you find yourself getting behind, please contact your instructor immediately.

Time Management and Attendance

SNL's courses, be they on-ground or online, are not self-paced and require a regular time commitment EACH week throughout the quarter. You are required to prepare assignments as well as prepare for discussions.

You will have to dedicate some time every day or at least every second day to your studies. A typical four credit hour "face to face" course at SNL involves three hours of classroom meeting per week, plus at least three to six hours of study and homework per week. If you have any
problems with your technology, or if you need to improve your reading or writing skills, it may take even longer.

**Your Instructor's Role**

Your instructor's role in this course is that of a discussion facilitator and learning advisor. It is not your instructor's responsibility to make sure you participate regularly and submit your assignments. You will receive feedback on written assignments submitted on time.

**Your Role as a Student**

As a student, you will be taking a proactive approach to your learning. As the course instructor's role is that of a learning guide, your role is that of the leader in your own learning. You will be managing your own time so that you can complete the readings, activities and assignments for the course, and you will also be expected to take a more active role in peer learning.

Please also note that this is a course offered by DePaul University's School for New Learning (SNL), a college for undergraduate and graduate degree-seeking students 24 years and older. SNL welcomes the perspectives and encourages the participation of all DePaul students, and students who take this course should respect and be mindful of SNL's mission in supporting a diverse and inclusive environment. More information about SNL can be found [here](#).

**Late Submissions**

This course will demand a significant investment of your time and energy. Readings will include sections from various texts, along with selections from the DePaul's eReserve site and/or other resources. In discussions, you will be asked to reflect upon readings and course exercises. You will also write formal and/or informal papers, plans, and assessment documents.

Some course assignments will require research. All assignments, however, are designed based on your attention to the learning activities and exercises that precede them. It is therefore essential that you read the materials associated with each assignment thoroughly and carefully.

If for any reason you are unable to complete an assignment by the established deadline, you should contact me immediately for guidance on how to proceed. The expectation for receiving satisfactory credit on any course deliverable (discussions, assignments, assessments, etc.) is on-time submission. Exceptions to this policy will be considered only in cases involving extreme circumstances (emergencies) in which you have notified me. Remember: timely feedback requires a timely submission. Points are deducted for late work, and your instructor reserves the right to refuse late submissions.

**Attitude**

A professional and academic attitude is expected throughout this course. Measureable examples of non-academic or unprofessional attitude include but are not limited to: talking to others when your instructor is speaking; mocking another's opinion; cell phones ringing; emailing, texting or using the internet whether on a phone or computer when not requested specifically by your instructor. If any issues arise a student may be asked to leave the classroom. Your instructor will work with the Dean of Students Office to navigate such student issues.
Civil Discourse

DePaul University is a community that thrives on open discourse that challenges students, both intellectually and personally, to be Socially Responsible Leaders. It is the expectation that all dialogue (discussions, informal interactions, one-on-one meetings, etc.) associated with this course is civil and respectful of the dignity of all participants—each student and your instructor. Any instances of disrespect or hostility can jeopardize a student’s ability to be successful in the course. Your instructor will partner with the Dean of Students Office to assist in managing such issues.

Course Netiquette

Class discussions, both online and on-ground, are an important part of your overall academic experience. To ensure a positive learning environment, please follow the following minimum expectations. Use your common sense, as not all situations can be covered:

- Be polite
- Respect other participants’ views or opinions
- Think before you write or speak, and ask yourself if you would say the same thing in person
- Use positive phrases (i.e., "Good idea!" or "Thanks for the suggestions," etc.)
- Be sensitive to cultural differences
- Avoid hostile, curt or sarcastic comments
- No objectionable, sexist, or racist language will be tolerated
- Create a positive community, both on-ground and online, by offering assistance and support to other participants.
- Use correct grammar and syntax at all times

Student participation in class discussions will be measured in two ways. First, students are highly encouraged to ask questions and offer comments relevant to the discussed topic; use the rubric provided in class to self-assess the quality of your participation. Participation allows your instructor to “hear” each student’s voice when grading papers. Secondly, your instructor will call upon students so that they may offer comments related to the reading assignments. Students must keep up with the readings to participate in class discussions and activities.

Cell Phones/On Call:

If you bring a cell phone to class, it must be off or set to a silent mode. Should you need to answer a call during class, students must leave the room in an undistruptive manner. Out of respect to fellow students and your instructor, texting is never allowed in class. If you are required to be on call as part of your job, please advise your instructor at the start of the course.

Syllabus changes

A revised syllabus will be posted during the first meeting week of the course. Students will be notified of any minor changes or updates to it thereafter via communication tools within Desire 2 Learn (D2L). Any significant changes to it will be discussed in class and with student consensus approval.
University-wide policies

This course includes and adheres to the college and university policies described in the links below:

- [Academic Integrity Policy](#)
- [Incomplete Policy](#)
- [Course Withdrawal Timelines and Grade/Fee Consequences](#)
- [Accommodations Based on the Impact of a Disability](#)
- [Protection of Human Research Participants](#)

Course Resources

**General Assessment Criteria for All Writing Assignments**

*This course will follow the MLA citation format. All writing assignments are expected to conform to basic college-level standards of mechanics and presentation.*

- For help with organizing your ideas, grammar, citing sources, avoiding plagiarism, sample SNL assignments and much, much more, see the SNL Writing Guide, linked below.

- Consider visiting the Writing Center to discuss your assignments for this course or any others. You may schedule appointments (30 or 50 minutes) on an as-needed or weekly basis, scheduling up to 3 hours worth of appointments per week. Online services include Feedback–by–Email and IM conferencing (with or without a webcam). All writing center services are free.

Writing Center tutors are specially selected and trained graduate and undergraduate students who can help you at almost any stage of your writing. They will not do your work for you, but they can help you focus and develop your ideas, review your drafts, and polish your writing. They can answer questions about grammar, mechanics, different kinds of writing styles, and documentation formats. They also can answer questions and provide feedback online, through IM/webcam chats and email.

Obviously, the tutors won’t necessarily be familiar with every class or subject, but they are able to provide valuable help from the perspective of an interested and careful reader as well as a serious and experienced student-writer.

Schedule your appointments with enough time to think about and use the feedback you’ll receive. To schedule a Face-to-Face, Written Feedback by Email, or Online Appointment, visit [www.depaul.edu/writing](http://www.depaul.edu/writing).

- [University Center for Writing-based Learning](#)
- [SNL Writing Guide](#)
- [Dean of Students Office](#)

Instructor Brief Bio
Deborah Wood Holton is an associate professor at DePaul University’s School for New Learning (SNL). She received her BFA in Theatre and Drama with an emphasis in playwriting from Howard University; her MA in English with a concentration in African and African American literature from Atlanta University; and, her PhD in American Theatre Studies from the University of Wisconsin – Madison, with joint foci in Literature, History, Criticism, and Theory and African American History; and, Scene Design and Art History. While Holton’s scholarly work explores a range of topics such as African American culture and literature, her own creative endeavors re-envision African and women-centered folklore, myth and culture. A fiction writer and poet, Holton holds a Creative Writing MFA from Solstice at Pine Manor College. Her creative work and critical essays have appeared in *Essence, Jump Up and Say*, the *Eugene O’Neill Review*, *Staging Difference, Black Theatre*, and *Adult Education and Theological Interpretations* among other collections. A Black Earth Institute Fellow Emeritus, she is a recipient of a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute Fellowship on the Black Aesthetic (2014). She has taught courses on Zora Neale Hurston at SNL over the years as well as at Chicago’s Newberry Library. Holton’s own speculative fiction novel that draws from ancient Egyptian mythology and the Black Aesthetic, “The Amen Prophecy,” is currently in progress. “Little Sparrow,” a short story developed from that work, appeared in *Heart of the Sun: An Anthology in Exaltation of Sekhmet* (2011). A recent publication, “Musings on Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*,” in *About Place*, a literary online journal (2014), reflects a merging of Holton’s ongoing Butler research and her NEH work on the Black Aesthetic.