

**The Chicago Seminar: Themes in Communities and Cultures**  
**Chicago Center for Urban Life and Culture**  
**Syllabus, Spring 2008**

**INSTRUCTOR:**

Mitch Covic, M.S. Cultural Foundations of Education

**ASSIGNED READINGS**

- Free Burning, Bayo Ojikutu
- The Guardians, Ana Castillo

- selected articles relevant to class events, activities, guest speakers and resource persons
- daily *Chicago Tribune* or *Chicago Sun-Times*

**OBJECTIVES:**

In this course students are introduced to the social, political, economic, media and cultural strata that constitute a major urban center in order to investigate and analyze how these multilayered institutional and personal forces fit into the context of the broader American experience and into the campus learning experience. Using the wealth of diverse human, institutional and documentary resources at our command, the seminar offers students a solid understanding of the joys, aspirations, tensions, fears and contending values that characterize the lives of urban residents in their constant daily interactions.

An appreciation for the immediacy of urban realities and the diversity of responses to these issues will be gained by listening to the many voices of the city and by exploring forms of expression outside traditional academic avenues. A major objective of the seminar is to extend the traditional text to include First Voices, accomplished by meeting with informed resource people throughout the city and visiting their communities and organizations.

Multiple points of view will be considered with the goal of enlarging the context for understanding the complexities of any important urban issue.

**DESIGN:**

Seminar days combine discussion of assigned readings and events, meetings with guest presenters and directed visits to communities, museums, urban happenings and cultural activities deemed relevant to course objectives. Each seminar day investigates a theme which is part of the urban fabric.

A weekly schedule of activities and events is posted on the CCULC community webpage with an outline of the goals for each seminar session, along with required reading and/or other assignments. These schedules constitute the organized content of the course and the student is responsible for all information included in the weekly schedule.

The seminar is scheduled for every Thursday. The time between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. is allotted to seminar activities in order to flexibly accommodate guest presenters, though the actual class duration is considerably less. Cultural events related to seminar objectives are often assigned on other week nights or occasionally on weekends. There is generally a minimum 1 week notice for these scheduled events.

## REQUIREMENTS:

### 1. Engaged Participation

This is the most critical aspect of the seminar since most scheduled events are one-time-only learning opportunities which cannot be "made-up." In addition to attending all classes and events, the student is expected to be prepared for discussion by completing assigned readings and other exercises as indicated in the weekly seminar schedule, and to be an engaged participant in discussions. The skill of active dialogue with the instructor, other students and guest presenters is considered an essential part of participation.

### 2. Academic Journal

The primary individual tool for reflection is the academic journal. This is a record of the student's response to speakers, scheduled events, readings and the internship, as well as current events affecting the student's interactions with the life of the city. In the journal the student integrates various aspects of their experience and finds the links among them. The journal is used by the instructor as a basis for evaluation of the student's ability to grasp the content of the seminar in understanding the themes and issues involved.

The best journal writing is objectively DESCRIPTIVE, logically ANALYTICAL and personally REFLECTIVE. It should encompass the entirety of the student's learning experience, with focused entries on each seminar meeting, discussion, class event and the assigned readings. The journal also incorporates the internship and its ongoing experiences.

Three questions should guide journal writing: "What is going on here.", "What does it mean?", and "How does it affect me?" The idea entry is a combination of personal reaction with academic reflection.

Journals are due three times throughout the term, dates to be assigned. The instructor interacts with the journal through written comments which guide the process of developing the journal to meet the learning goals of the seminar.

### 3. Contracted Options

Throughout the term many opportunities exist for exploring the city independently. To encourage a relationship to city resources which express the student's interests, you will elect to attend four events/activities beyond those already required. These should reflect the learning goals of the seminar while simultaneously representing each student's different personal interests.

A written report on each of these four electives is required. A set of approved categories from which to choose will be distributed when the term is under way. The parameters of the written report will be issued at the same time.

### 4. Group Project

The instructor will assign a project/verbal presentation which is due near the end of the term. This will entail a creative response to themes which have arisen during the seminar. Written details will be issued around midterm.

### 5. Media Watch Assignment:

Each student will elect to follow a Chicago-based media voice or media source (print or broadcast) in order to track its issues, perspectives, concerns and tonalities over a period of time. A verbal report is due near the end of the term. Details to follow around the midterm point.

## EVALUATION AND GRADING

The seminar grade is weighted on evaluation of the above requirements as follows:

**GradingScale**

A=90/100

B=80-89

C=70/79

D=60/69

Participation	30%
Journal	40%
Contracted Options	10%
Group Project	10%
<u>Media Watch</u>	<u>10%</u>
Total	100%