

# IDS 2935 Passing & Politics of Identity



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Aren't we all passing? Moving between identities daily, changing our personalities, hiding behind masks and presenting ourselves to be different than who we are? In some cases, passing between identities help us adjust to certain demands of a mainstream culture. In others, passing allows individuals to gain access to opportunities and benefits that are only available to a different group. However, there are forms of passing that seem acceptable and understandable, and ones that are considered taboo and frowned upon. Why do we have this need to pass, and if we're all passing, how do we know if and when we've pass too far?

Looking to answer these questions, we will start the course by defining passing through its racial American roots, learning about the extreme stakes of African Americans, passing as white at the turn of the 20th century, and then continue to seek manifestations of the phenomena in contemporary realities. The second part of the course will review passing as a global phenomenon, utilized by international communities around the world. Focusing primarily on transnational Jewish identities, we will try to reevaluate our own negotiation of identity/difference.

## **Required & Recommended Course Materials (to purchase/rent):**

Required: Larsen, Nella. *Passing*. Penguin Classics. ISBN - 9780142437278

Recommended: *The Little Seagull Handbook*, ISBN-13: 978-0393911510

Recommended website for writing support: OWL // Purdue Writing Lab @ [www.owl.purdue.edu](http://www.owl.purdue.edu)

**Books are available to purchase at the bookstore. I will provide you with all other readings through the course site. These texts must be printed and brought to class. Failure to print the material will result in removal of student from session.**

**Movies and Documentaries:** Students will view a number of films during the semester. Some films will be screened in class. Otherwise, students will need access to streaming services such as Netflix to view some of the video resources. Students must see required films no later than they are assigned.

## Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

### Humanities (H) SLOs:

- Students will explore the histories, narratives and experience of *passing* in a national/global scale, with an emphasis on how Black/Jewish identities define and present themselves (in regard to race, ethnicity, religion, class and gender) in the US, Europe and Israel.
- Students will reevaluate assumptions regarding fixed identities and race as biological/social construct. We will critique the visibility of race, visual racial biases and the feasibility of being “color-blind,” and our own negotiation of identity/difference.
- Students will engage with contemporary accounts of passing, exploring how alignment with mainstream identities affect the realities around them.

### International (I) SLOs:

- Students will explore and apply a unique African American phenomenon in relation to global communities, to better understand the intersection of transnational Jewish/Israeli and Palestinian identities.
- Students will connect the complex relationships between how unique models of international identity structures (black/Jewish) are perceived and enforced—culture/ethnicity/race/class and gender—and the interpretation of ideas on which they are based through a comparative lens.
- Students will Review how passing between identities help people around the world adjust to certain demands of a mainstream culture and/or gain access to opportunities and benefits that are only available to a different group.

## Requirements:

**Attendance and Participation:** Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>.

- Attendance: will be taken daily and recorded in the Canvas gradebook. You are allowed four “personal days” for the semester, after which each absence that does not meet university criteria for “excused” will result in a two-point deduction from your final grade.
- Participation: Consistent informed, thoughtful, and considerate class participation is expected and will be evaluated using the rubric below. The instructor will inform you of your participation grade to date when mid-term exams are returned and schedule a conference if you are earning below 70% of the possible points.
- NOTE: If you have personal issues that prohibit you from joining freely in class discussion, e.g., shyness, language barriers, etc., see the instructor as soon as possible to discuss alternative modes of participation.

**Class Etiquette.** To make this class as enjoyable and collaborative experience as possible, there are a few in-class policies: Cell phones silent. No laptops. Class notes can and should be taken the old-fashioned way. You are required to print all texts and bring them to class on the assigned days. I expect you to attend all classes (see attendance policy below). If you need special accommodations due to a disability or other health-related issue, inform me as soon as possible.

### List of Graded Assignments:

Assignment	Description	Requirements	Points
Reading Journal	The reading journal entries will be available on the course website. For each entry you will provide a self-reflective or critical response, based on assigned readings of the week.	100 words weekly	200 – 20%
Short response paper	A 2-page response paper to show your understanding and basic implementation of <i>passing</i> in a critical framework.	500 Words	100 – 10%
Analytical Essay	Comparative, 6-page paper analyzing course themes through literary analysis of two texts from syllabus, of different global cultures. Students will use a given question bank or a topic of their choice.	1500 Words	200 – 20%
Recorded Final Project	A class collaboration on a course podcast + written project introduction.	Recorded interview/narrative accompanied with a 200 word review	250 – 30%
Participation	Class discussion and group work.	Active participation	200 – 20%

### The Writing Requirement (WR):

Written work submitted in this course will be thoroughly evaluated, and students will receive their papers with extensive feedback in respect, but not limited to: grammar, punctuation, clarity, coherence, and organization. Feel free to contact me, or the UF's Writing Studio ([www.writing.ufl.edu](http://www.writing.ufl.edu)) for further instruction and consultation in regards to effective writing.

- The Writing Requirement (WR) ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning.
- The instructor will evaluate and provide feedback, on all of the student's written assignments with respect to grammar, punctuation, clarity, coherence, and organization.
- WR Course grades have two components. To receive writing requirement credit, a student must receive a grade of C or higher and a satisfactory completion of the writing component of the course.

<b>WR Grading Rubric:</b>	<b>SATISFACTORY (Y)</b>	<b>UNSATISFACTORY (N)</b>
<b>CONTENT</b>	Papers exhibit at least some evidence of ideas that respond to the topic with complexity, critically evaluating and synthesizing sources, and provide at least an adequate discussion with basic understanding of sources.	Papers either include a central idea(s) that is unclear or off-topic or provide only minimal or inadequate discussion of ideas. Papers may also lack sufficient or appropriate sources.
<b>ORGANIZATION AND COHERENCE</b>	Documents and paragraphs exhibit at least some identifiable structure for topics, including a clear thesis statement but may require readers to work to follow progression of ideas.	Documents and paragraphs lack clearly identifiable organization, may lack any coherent sense of logic in associating and organizing ideas, and may also lack transitions and coherence to guide the reader.
<b>ARGUMENT AND SUPPORT</b>	Documents use persuasive and confident presentation of ideas, strongly supported with evidence. At the weak end of the Satisfactory range, documents may provide only generalized discussion of ideas or may provide adequate discussion but rely on weak support for arguments.	Documents make only weak generalizations, providing little or no support, as in summaries or narratives that fail to provide critical analysis.
<b>STYLE</b>	Documents use a writing style with word choice appropriate to the context, genre, and discipline. Sentences should display complexity and logical sentence structure. At a minimum, documents will display a less precise use of vocabulary and an uneven use of sentence structure or a writing style that occasionally veers away from word choice or tone appropriate to the context, genre, and discipline.	Documents rely on word usage that is inappropriate for the context, genre, or discipline. Sentences may be overly long or short with awkward construction. Documents may also use words incorrectly.
<b>MECHANICS</b>	Papers will feature correct or error-free presentation of ideas. At the weak end of the Satisfactory range, papers may contain some spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors that remain unobtrusive so they do not muddy the paper's argument or points.	Papers contain so many mechanical or grammatical errors that they impede the reader's understanding or severely undermine the writer's credibility.

### Participation Grading Rubric:

High Quality (20 pts)	Average (15 pts)	Needs Improvement (10 pts)	Not Good (5 pts)
Responsible: Arrives on time. Shows evidence of having done the assigned work.	Not more than 5 minutes late. Most of the assigned work has been done.	Over 5 minutes late. Poor preparation to class.	Significantly late or does not show up. Unprepared.
Thoughtful: Shows evidence of having understood and considered issues raised through relevant comments.	Mostly relevant comments. Understanding might be lacking.	No comments unless asked. No understanding of material.	Disrupting class. Unconstructive attitude to course readings and theme.
Considerate: Listens when others talk. Takes the perspective of others into account and builds off the ideas of fellow students.	Some engagement. Show willingness to work with others in groups and during class.	Not responding to classmates. Lacking participation in group work. Using phone. Texting/online.	Dismissive to other students. Creating negative atmosphere amongst peers.

### Course Grading Scale:

For information on how UF assigns grade points, visit: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

A	94 – 100% of possible points		C	74 – 76%
A-	90 – 93%		C-	70 – 73%
B+	87 – 89%		D+	67 – 69%
B	84 – 86%		D	64 – 66%
B-	80 – 83%		D-	60 – 63%
C+	77 – 79%		E	<60

### Other Policies:

**Students Requiring Accommodation:** who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

**UF Evaluations Process:** Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluer.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

**Academic Honesty:** UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

**Counseling and Wellness Center:** Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>, 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

**The Writing Studio:** The writing studio is committed to helping University of Florida students meet their academic and professional goals by becoming better writers. Visit the writing studio online at <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/> or in 2215 Turlington Hall for one-on-one consultations and workshops.



## Class Schedule:

Week 1 (Aug. 23): **So You Want to Talk about Race?**

Working definition of race, identity and passing. How do we define ourselves, our identities? How do we define others? What are the motives, benefits, costs that are associated with racial passing in the US.

- M. Welcome!
- W. Review Syllabus + Hobbs, *Passing, a Chosen Exile*. Intro.
- F. Baz Dreisinger’s “‘Passing’ and the American Dream” + Robert Fikes, “The Passing of Passing”



Week 2 (Aug. 30): **Passing. A Chosen Exile.**

Reading Nella Larsen's novel *Passing*, class will discuss whether identities are fixed/fluid, looking at fictional and real narratives of passing between race, gender and class. We will reevaluate assumptions regarding race as biological/social construct, discuss the visibility of race and the feasibility of being color-blind.

- M. Langston Hughes, "Passing," from *The Ways of White Folk* (1934) (Pg. 1-4)
- W. Nella Larsen, *Passing*. (Part I, One + Two)
- F. Larsen, *Passing* (Part I, Three + Four)

Week 3 (Sep. 6) **Passing. Cont.**

- M. No Class
- W. Larsen, *Passing* (Part II)
- F. *Passing* (Part III)

Week 4. (Sep. 13): **Assimilating/Covering/Passing**

Is passing a term that fits every case of changing or adapting one's identity? We will examine various degrees of passing, the differences between temporary and permanent passing, discussing whether passing is a chosen or forced endeavor.

- M. Kenji Yoshino, *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights* (2007) (pg. 3 – 31).
- W. Langston Hughes, "Theme for English B" (1949) (Pg. 1-2).
- F. Response Paper Workshop.

Week 5 (Sep. 20) **Trading Races**

Looking at documented cases of race swapping, discussing how prejudice and racism look when one crosses the color line. Can walking a mile in someone else's shoes help us understand each other's lifelong experiences?

- M. Ice Cube's *Black. White.* Screening.
- W. *Black. White.* Discussion.
- F. Katrina E. Bell-Jordan, "*Black.White.* and a Survivor of *The Real World*: Constructions of Race on Reality TV" (Pg. 354 – 370) + **Response paper due**

Week 6 (Sep. 27): **"Papa Can You Hear Me?"**

Utilizing our familiarity of passing in the American context, we will work to identify other forms of passing as they occur in international cultures. We will establish understanding of Jewish life in the diaspora and explore the reasoning behind passing in gender-segregated societies.

- M. Discussion. Barbara Streisand. *Yentl* (1983).
- W. *Yentl*. Cont.
- F. A.B. Yehoshua, "Who is a Jew" (2013) (Pg. 1-4).

### Week 7 (Oct. 4): **The Passing of a Nation**

Zionism did not just move Jewish people to Israel, but also wished to recreate the Jewish body, and produce a new “race” of Jews. Thus, immigrants to Israel had to change their identities, erasing past lives to become New Hebrews.

- M. Haim Hazaz, “The Sermon” (1942) (Pg. 233 – 249)
- W. Chaim Halachmi, *Oded the Wanderer* (1932) (Screening, 10 min)
- F. No Class

### Week 8 (Oct. 11): **Passing of a Nation, Part II**

Looking at more personal narratives of Jewish switching of identities, we will examine how our knowledge of one culture can help us better understand another. What is comparable, what isn’t? Can African American passing shed light on Jewish-Israeli identity?

- M. Midterm Paper Workshop.
- W. Dahn Ben-Amotz *To Remember, To Forget*, (1968), (pg. 3-10, 26-59)
- F. Discussion.

### Week 9 (Oct. 18): **2<sup>nd</sup> Generation to Passing**

We will focus on experiences of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation to passing parents and examine issues that come up such as reclaiming lost heritage and reckoning with forced mainstream identity.

- M. Orly Castel-Bloom. “Umami Fi Shurl.” (Pg. 259 – 261)
- W. Sami Shalom Shitrit, “Who is a Jew and what kind of a Jew”
- F. Adi Keissar, “Black on Black” (poem, 1 pg.) + Roy Hasan, “The Language of my Parents” (poem, 1 pg.) + **Midterm paper due.**

### Week 10 (Oct. 25): **A Pretty Pass**

This section will look at experiences of non-Jewish minorities in Israel, specifically the Arab-Israeli population, raising questions of self-definition as a racial/religious minority in a nation state.

- M. Bouzaglo, *Fictitious Marriage* (1 hour 30 min).
- W. *Fictitious Marriage*. Discussion.
- F. Hillel Kogan, *We Love Arabs*. (2016) Screening.

### Week 11 (Nov. 1): **A Pretty Pass. Cont.**

- M. *We Love Arabs*. Discussion.
- W. *Yossi and Jagger*. Screening
- F. Discussion.



Week 12 (Nov. 8): **Black and Jewish**

W.E.B. Du Bois described African American “double consciousness”: “One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body.” In a sense, Israeli Ethiopians live in triple consciousness, Israelis, black, Jewish. This section will focus on the experiences of Beta Israel, what it means to be black in Israel today.

- M. Podcast Workshop.
- W. *Red Leaves* (2014) (Film, 90 Minutes). Discussion.
- F. Cont.

Week 13 (Nov. 15): **Black and Jewish. Part II**

Passing in academia is oddly widespread. We will begin the week by viewing selections from the adaptation of Roth’s *The Human Stain*, in which an African-American passes as a Jewish professor, and wrap up by discussing the case of the GWU professor Jessica Krug, a Jewish mid-westerner who passed as an Afro/Latinx.

- M. *Little White Lie*. Screening
- W. Discussion.
- F. Lauren Michele Jackson, “The Layered Deceptions of Jessica Krug” (opinion column, New Yorker) + **Podcast Script Due.**

Week 14 (Nov. 22): **Passing and the Black-Jewish Alliance**

Coming to a closure, we return to the States, leaving the theoretical comparisons and focusing on concrete examples of the African American and Jewish connection. Reading narratives of black Jews, examining cases of Jews passing as black and vice versa, we will discuss identity making and identity politics in context.

- M. Spike Lee, *Blackkkklansman*. Discussion.
- W. No Class.
- T. No Class.

Week 15/16 (Nov 29 + Dec 6): **Final Project Showcase!!**

Students will share and present their final projects, recorded projects (interviews, personal narratives) which will be edited into a class podcast.