

EXPOS 20  
HARVARD WRITING PROGRAM  
Fall 2021



## DOMESTIC LABOR

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### COURSE OVERVIEW

Domestic work, according to labor activist Ai-jen Poo, is “the work that makes all other work possible,” yet the people who clean, cook, and care are so often invisible and undervalued. Because domestic labor takes place within the home rather than the factory or other industrial sites of labor, what are the consequences of the erasure of boundaries between home and work, for both the employer and the employee? To what extent do domestic workers possess agency when their very occupation is to serve their employer? In addition to physical and mental labor that are required, what forms of emotional labor are also expected? What are the individual and societal ramifications of this labor force being largely unregulated, underpaid, and unappreciated? This course considers the complex forces of classism, racism, and sexism that have contributed to the subjugation of domestic workers and the labor they perform.

In the first unit, students will closely read the popular British television series *Downton Abbey*, Zora Neale Hurston’s short story “Sweat,” and Maya Angelou’s biographical fiction “What’s Your Name, Girl?” to consider how the text illustrates servants possessing or lacking agency. In unit two, students will use sociologist Arlie Hochschild’s theory of emotional labor as a lens through which to examine Alfonso Cuarón’s film *Roma*, which features the perspective of an indigenous housekeeper and the blurry boundaries between work and family. In the final unit, students will develop their own interpretive framework alongside the scholarly work of others by focusing on a text of their choosing. By thinking about how domestic labor is imagined in literature, television, and film, students will unpack paradigms of privilege and power and develop arguments about exploitation, identity, and the care economy.

## REQUIRED COURSE TEXTS AND MATERIALS

- A subscription to Netflix will be required for Units 1 and 2 (please see me if you have any concerns about accessing this platform)
- All other course texts will be made available to you via Canvas

## HOW THE COURSE WORKS

The main goal for the course is for you to produce an original, compelling, and analytically sound essay for each of the three units. Such essays are not written on the fly; they take time, continual re-working, and critical reflection. The writing requirements outlined below are designed to provide you with the techniques for constructing effective essays.

Class time will be split between grappling with the course readings and in-class work directed at improving some aspect of your writing. You should come to class with the relevant readings completed and ready to participate actively in discussion.

## WRITING AND REVISION

*Response Papers:* Before you compose an initial draft of each essay, you'll complete one or more assignments that focus on particular writing skills that are important for the relevant essay type.

*Drafts:* You will submit a draft of each of the three essays.

*Draft Cover Letters:* Every time you hand in a draft, you'll include a cover letter in which you provide guidance to your reader about the aspects of the essay you are struggling with in addition to whatever other comments or questions you might have. You will receive more specific instructions about writing cover letters.

*Draft Workshops:* Immediately after each draft is due, we will have an in-class draft workshop in which we work through two student papers (chosen by the instructor) and offer the writers constructive criticism and suggestions for improvement. You will be expected to provide written comments on each draft that we workshop together. You will receive more guidelines on draft workshops.

*Conferences:* The course will include one-on-one conferences with the instructor, where you will receive feedback on your drafts and we'll work together on strategies for revising the essay.

*Essay Revisions:* You should expect to extensively revise each of your drafts before submitting it for a grade.

## UNIT DESCRIPTIONS

### UNIT 1: Close Reading

In Unit 1, we will begin the significant task of defining “domestic labor” as historically and geographically specific. Students will learn how to analyze literary texts (Zora Neale Hurston’s short story “Sweat” and Maya Angelou’s short story “What’s Your Name, Girl?”) and visual texts (episodes 1 and 2 from *Downton Abbey*) in order to consider how domestic labor is imagined on page and screen. The Close Reading essay asks students to locate and analyze a particular moment (e.g., a scene or paragraph) that illustrates the possession or absence of *agency* and discusses what this reveals about the nature of the domestic worker’s identity and labor (including workplace dynamics with co-workers or employers, if applicable).

Unit Assignments:

- Response Paper 1: Scene Analysis (1 page)
- Response Paper 2: Textual Analysis (1 page)
- Cover Letter and Draft of Close Reading Essay
- Revised Close Reading Essay (5-6 pages)

### UNIT 2: Len Analysis

In Unit 2, we will analyze sociologist Arlie Hochschild’s theory of *emotional labor* as a lens through which to analyze Alfonso Cuarón’s film *Roma* (2018). Discussions of workers’ rights and emotional labor will inform our analysis of the film’s deliberate decision to feature the perspective of an indigenous domestic worker, thereby initiating intersectional questions about race, gender, and class representation in film. Some questions students will consider are: How does the film visualize Hochschild’s theory of emotional labor and what does emotionality look like on screen? How is the concept of emotional labor connected to some of the film’s larger themes (e.g., family, motherhood, abandonment)? What are the particular workplace conditions that determine the amount of emotional labor Cleo is expected to perform?

Unit Assignments:

- Response Paper 3: Reverse Outline (1-2 pages)
- Cover Letter and Draft of Lens Essay
- Revised Lens Essay (6-7 pages)

### UNIT 3: The Research Essay

In Unit 3, students will develop an argumentative research paper on the topic of domestic labor. This project will require significant preparation, as it involves a research project proposal and annotated bibliography, in addition to a draft and a revised draft of the essay. In this project, you will be developing your own interpretive framework alongside the scholarly work of others and will develop a project which expands our discussion of domestic labor by focusing on a text of your choosing (an archive of potential texts will be made available to you). Each project will be organized around the broad themes of exploitation, identity, or the care economy.

Unit Assignments:

- Response Paper 4: Research Proposal (3-4 pages)
- Response Paper 5: Annotated Bibliography (3-4 pages)
- Cover Letter and Draft of Research Essay
- Revised Research Essay (8-10 pages)

## **GRADE BREAKDOWN**

I will grade only the revisions (that is, the final version) of your essays, not the drafts. Course grades will be determined as follows:

Unit 1: 25%

Unit 2: 30%

Unit 3: 40%

Participation: 5%

Certain course activities will not be graded directly, but are nonetheless required (e.g., response papers, drafts, cover letters, in-class discussions, conferences, responses to fellow students' writing). These activities and assignments are required because the quality of your work and your level of engagement in these areas will have a direct bearing on the effectiveness and success of the final revisions of your essays.

## **COURSE POLICIES**

TBD