

EDUC 203: Racial/Ethnic/Cultural Autobiography –
Due: Finals Week – 20 Points Possible

Use the following questions to write a well thought out Racial/Ethnic/Cultural Autobiography. **There are six categories, each with a series of related questions – try and treat each section as separate paragraphs when writing your paper.** Try and answer each question, while realizing that some questions or parts within might not be applicable to you at this time. To begin, go through and read each question carefully. Next, go through and jot down responses. Only after going through this initial phase should you begin to formulate your paragraphs. Please do take some time to reflect about each question before you commit to a final product; don't just skim through these questions once – answer the questions in draft form first and then revisit the questions. Talk with your relatives (if this is possible), your friends, and yourself ☺. If questions were difficult for you to ask, please discuss this as well. I will be looking at grammar and other elements of technical writing here – but I won't concern myself with run-on sentences and paragraphs. You can be wordy here if you like – this is a conversational paper – it can read as such – however, we don't want typos and/or poor grammar anytime we write☺.

When you are ready to turn in a final product, make sure that you:

- Have a typed, edited paper
- Have complete, well thought-out responses for each category (paragraph form)
- Are happy with your paper – that you feel proud of your good work ☺

The questions are very general; please tailor them to meet your unique situation. Some of you were raised by two parents, some have step-parents. Some of you may not have been raised by parents, but rather by grandparents, or others. Please describe your experiences clearly and with detail. I am very interested to learn more about you. There is no judgment here! No one else but me will ever see this paper.

1. Family:

Are your parents from the same racial or ethnic groups? Are your brothers and sisters? What about your extended family -- uncles, aunts, etc.? Would you say your family is middle class? Upper class? Lower class? These are economic designations. Explain your answer. Do you think your 'class' has helped or hindered you? Explain Where did your parents grow up? What exposure did they have to racial or ethnic groups other than their own? How about exposure to homosexuality? Did they go to school with any students with severe disabilities? What ideas did they (your parents/guardians) grow up with, regarding race relations? How about sexual orientation? Does your family practice a certain religion? If so, is it an 'accepted' religion in this country? Explain your answer.

Do you think of yourself as White, Black, Asian-American, Hispanic, Native American? Do you really think of yourself as a member of a racial or ethnic group? Why or why not? Do you think your racial/ethnic designation(s) help or hinder you? Explain.

Do you think anyone in your family has negative stereotypes about any specific groups of people? If so, please explain (you need not name the person in your family directly, just describe the feelings or behaviors). If not, please explain why you don't think any negative stereotypes exist in your family.

2. Experiences Outside of School:

What was the racial and ethnic makeup of the area you grew up in? If you lived in several areas, describe them all. Did you grow up in a middle class environment? Were your neighborhoods safe, clean, well-kept? Did people own their own homes? How many cars did you have while growing up? Did your parents own a home? What differences do you think these conditions make for people overall?

What was your first awareness of race/ethnicities -- that there are different "races and ethnicities" and that you are one? What about different sexual orientations?

Can you remember your first encounter with someone from another race, ethnicity, and/or sexual orientation? Describe the situation(s).

Have you ever heard someone say the word "nigger, fag, retard", or similar discriminatory slur? Describe the situation(s). How did hearing those words make you feel? What did you do?

What messages do you recall getting from your parents or others about race, ethnicity, economic class, religion, sexual orientation? Be specific.

Think about the television programs you watched over the years. Were any of them racially or ethnically diverse? Did you see people with physical or mental disabilities? How about different religions? What kind of music do you listen to? Are the messages about different 'types' of people generally positive or negative? What color is God? What gender? What color is Jesus? How does his hair look? What about angels? What color is Santa Clause? If you had toys that resembled people, what color were they, were they able-bodied, obese, thin, White, Black? Think back; this is actually quite important.

3. **Elementary and Middle School:**

What was the racial/ethnic makeup of the students in your elementary school? Of its teachers? Did you know of any openly gay or lesbian students or teachers? Did you have any friends with disabilities? Think about the curriculum: what Black Americans did you hear about? How about Latinos, Asians, Gays or Lesbians? Others? How did you celebrate Martin Luther King Day? Did you celebrate any other culturally diverse holidays? What were they? How did you celebrate Thanksgiving? What was the story told about the first Thanksgiving? What was the role of the Native Americans? Were the Pilgrims kind to them? Did your teachers ever talk openly about different races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, religions? If so, what was said? Did your school serve many poor families? Did you know any children from poor families? Was your school safe? Was it in a 'nice' neighborhood? Do you think you received a quality education? Why or why not?

4. **High School:**

What was the racial/ethnic makeup of students in your high school? Of its teachers? Were there any opening gay or lesbian students or teachers? Were there any teachers or students with severe disabilities? Any obese teachers or students? How were they treated? Was there interracial-interethnic dating? Any racial slurs? Any conflict with members of another race/ethnicity? Any same-gender dating? How was that received? Have you ever felt or been stigmatized because of your race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or ethnic group membership? Because of your sexual orientation, social class, or physical appearance? Do you think you were advantaged or disadvantaged because of your race, ethnicity, physical appearance, social class? Explain. Do you remember any teachers teaching about different races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, religions? Do you remember any teachers discriminating against any students because they were 'different' from the school norm? What else was important about your high-school years — maybe something that didn't happen in high school but during that time? Was your school primarily composed on middle class children? Explain. Did you know any students from very poor families? If so, were they treated any differently? Do you feel that you received a quality education? Explain.

5. **Present and Future:**

Why did you choose Drury University? Were you interested in attending a diverse school? Why or why not? Do you have friends who are of a different race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or religion from yourself? Can you reflect on your answer? Close your eyes and imagine your life ten years from now. What do you see? What do the people around you look like? Would you ever consider starting a family, with or without children, with someone of a different race, ethnicity, or religion? Why or why not? Would you like to live in a diverse or homogenous area? Why? Would you like to work with people from different backgrounds? Why or why not?

6. **Conclusion:**

Looking back at your answers, were you more advantaged or disadvantaged thus far because of your race, ethnicity, physical appearance, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, religion? Explain your answer in detail.

*Adapted by Rebecca Denton from: *Courageous Conversations* (Singleton & Linton, 2006).