

Dear Dr. Nia,

I am currently struggling to form the right words to convey what my experience in the Black Feminist Alchemy course was like, even though I have many feelings and thoughts on the profound impact the class had on me. Last semester, when you introduced me to the Black Feminist Alchemy course after discussing my declaration to minor in Education and my overall experience as an I.C. student, I was intrigued and quite ecstatic to say the least. I, a young black woman, was beginning to truly fall in love with my melanin, trying to learn how to (re)define my blackness, and reclaim my magic. I was becoming more knowledgeable of my roots and concerned about the social issues that affected people that looked like me. I was lost navigating my own personal experiences of intersectional discrimination of racism and sexism. I was searching for a way to channel all of my fiery rage eloquently. I was yearning for positive and fulfilling black relationships in a safe and inclusive community. And I thought that BFA would be the perfect stepping stone in learning how to take my knowledge and passion and turn it into greatness by finding the magic and beauty in my own struggle as a black woman and reflecting inward.

**‘I woke up this morning with my mind set on loving me
I’m not on lonely, I’m alone.
And I’m *Holy* by my own’ – Jamila Woods**

As I woke up every Friday to the words of Jamila Woods as my alarm clock for the last seven week, I never dreaded going to class 8:30 in the morning even if I was exhausted. I couldn’t wait to enter the safe and freeing space of the ALS room because our BFA class felt like the only time this semester where I was able to find my voice, honestly speak what was on my heart and mind, and have soul-filling honest conversation that inspired growth and learning. Class felt like a form of black girl therapy sessions where I was not forced to embody the dehumanizing ‘strong black woman’ stereotype and allowed to be vulnerable. But more importantly, I felt respected in the circle of sisterhood. I felt welcomed to voice my pain, frustrations, issues with college, life and relationships and wasn’t encouraged to simply push through but instead taught to reflect, learn, and grow. This class awakened my inner warrior.

I often spend a lot of time alone reflecting within myself and thinking through situations and relationships I have been in, but I believe it is so very important to hear others perspectives, especially the ones of your black sisters who can fully relate. Black sisterhood is so important and valuable and it is something I have always desired like the friendship shared between the black women in ‘Waiting to Exhale’ or ‘Girlfriends.’ I enjoyed being forced to dig deep and

write honest reflections, but I enjoyed even more being able to discuss what we wrote and seeing how we related a lot to each other. I think it is so very important to hear others' perspective.

The entire experience of BFA has been really amazing for me but what makes me sad is that I didn't have the chance to experience the course for the entire semester. I regret not being able to be involved from the very beginning because the lost time definitely hindered my experience. I feel like I could of discovered more about myself, built stronger bonds with Tamara, Mollie, Wo, and Aaliyah, and especially had better off-campus experiences.

Whether it was brunch at your house, dance class with Harmony, helping Mollie at the Southside after-school program or attending the Dollar Dance Showcase, I noticed the high level of comfortability and felt a strong sense of community but I wasn't a part of it, even though I really wanted to be. One of the perks (and downsides) of being a wallflower is being able to notice connections everyone has with each other and in the midst of it all I felt alone, invisible, and uncomfortable. I loved every single one of those experiences for it is what I dreamed of having in Ithaca and will probably look to go to more off-campus events but I know that I was prevented from fully appreciating them because of my severe anxiety.

Accountability. All of entries we wrote forced us to take accountability in some way for who we are and what we have done. This made journaling challenging because all of the entries we wrote made us not only reflect on the external causes of our pain (and other feelings) but also the internal workings that cause us to continually feel or react a certain way. Admitting one's pain or flaws isn't easy and looking deep within yourself doesn't make it easier. The class where we wrote the apology letters and made a list of things we need to forgive ourselves for was particularly a tough one to do. I remember feeling a high level of anxiety and not feeling ready to deal with the pain and heartache I caused myself. It opened up old wounds and brought back up forgotten memories that rather be forgotten, but what made it ever more difficult was actually admitting that I hurt my ownself. I caused my own self grief. And I think we don't ever look to cause ourselves hurt but sometimes we do in the midst of trying to love others and trying to fit into a world that doesn't accept us. I also apologized to myself for what others have done to me, which was freeing, because I know I won't ever get that apology from them but I got the closure from me.

Especially after the conversation we had during our last week of classes, I have realized there will always be work needed to be done on ourselves. We are all multifaceted women, which we learned when discussing which various fragmented and toxic lover identities we saw ourselves in. There are so many different emotions and personalities running through are veins and how others interpret that can deeply affect relationships. I would love a stronger sense of community - it is something I'm still searching for. I want black brothers and sisters, but I want ones that

respect me and don't judge me or hurt me. I don't only want romantic partners, but friends and family as well, to look beyond the surface and see my spirit. I know that I wear my emotions on my face, but I wish that people saw beyond that. I want real people who love me to fight for me. To understand I am not perfect but I am worth it.

'I need somebody who loves me naked. Someone who never asks for love but knows how to take it. Are you somebody that somebody who sees a wall and breaks it? *Are you ready to fight just to see what's lost behind my flaws? Can you love me naked?*'– Ella Mai

Real connections with other people is a great desire and it will be something that I continue to work on and figure out how to achieve. I will constantly evaluate what I bring to the table and what others bring and why that does or does not make us compatible. But I think the biggest lesson that I learned from this class is the importance to fight for ourselves, especially when there is no one else to fight for us. Especially because of the battles I have encountered this semester, I have realized that I have to find strength in myself. I have to continuously learn to love on myself and push myself to grow and evolve into a better version of me. I have to take care of myself. I have to learn to love me naked as I continue this journey of healing the broken little girl that I discovered is still inside of me. In time, with the words of Jeanine Staples and conversations from BFA, I believe that a powerful warrior will blossom.

Sincerely,
Sydney Augustine