18 March 2015

Wendy Crone, Interim Dean, Graduate School
Bascom Hall
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Dear Dean Crone:

I'm writing in response to your letter of 2 January 2015 requesting follow-ups to aspects of the L&S Ten-Year Review of the Department of Afro-American Studies. The GFEC specifically asked us to address issues related to student funding, graduate-level course offerings, the bridge programs, and program introduction/resources. I'll address these areas one by one.

1. Student funding. The GFEC asked us to determine whether the current 33.3% appointment level for T.A.s was appropriate. In fact, the appointment level is, and was, 42.5%. We've been clear on this in our appointment letters, so I'm not quite sure where the issue arises. Some graduate students have been disappointed by the reduction from the AOF to the TA appointment levels, but we've always been clear about it.

2. Graduate-level courses. In response to the Ten-Year review, the Department has renumbered four 600-level courses to reflect the reality that they're mixed graduate/undergraduate courses. Each semester, we are identifying one 600-level course as primarily intended for graduate students. Unless L&S officially abandons its policies on low enrollment courses, which are currently in some flux, we can't exclude all undergraduates, but we intend to limit enrollment in the ear-marked course to advanced undergraduate majors.

3. Bridge programs. The GFEC encouraged us to encourage bridge students in English to complete more coursework in literary theory. All bridge students are already taking the theory class required of all English graduate students, so again, it's unclear precisely what's being asked of us. Bridge students typically take half of their eight courses in Af-Am and half in English. Two of the English courses are intended to fulfill period requirements, so it's difficult to see how we could require additional course work in theory without eliminating the possibility for bridge students to work with English faculty in the area in which they intend to specialized.

4. Program introduction. Our graduate committee is developing the handbook to the program as encouraged by the GFEC. It will be available to incoming graduate
students in AY 2015-16. We have cross-checked the Department’s webpage with the Graduate School Catalog and eliminated the discrepancies.

I'll be happy to discuss any of these issues with the GFEC, as needed. We can provide documentation of T.A. appointment levels and bridge students' enrollment in the English Department theory course if needed.

Craig Werner
Chair, Department of Afro-American Studies
January 2, 2015

Craig Werner
Department Chair, Department of Afro-American Studies
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Sent Electronically

Dear Professor Werner:

As you know, an important part of the university’s ongoing review process is the vetting of graduate programs by the Graduate Faculty Executive Committee (GFEC) of the Graduate School. When the College of Letters and Science assembled a review committee to conduct a decadal assessment of the Afro-American M.A. program, Robert Howell was asked to serve as GFEC’s representative on the review committee and was given the responsibility for attending to graduate training issues. Professor Howell led a discussion of the review at the GFEC meeting on December 12, 2014. In this letter, I summarize the committee’s response.

GFEC members were impressed to hear of the Afro-American Studies Department remarkable dedication and diligence in both teaching and research. Committee members were also pleased to learn that graduate students participating in the “bridge” doctoral programs in English or History are highly successful in obtaining tenure track positions at leading universities. Finally, GFEC was glad to learn that graduate students with whom the review committee met expressed a high level of satisfaction with the program.

While the above strengths are noteworthy, GFEC also had some concerns and requests a written update by April 2015 on efforts in the following areas:

- Student Funding – The review committee noted that 33.3% teaching assistantship workloads varied in the department. The GFEC would like the program to audit these appointments to determine whether the current 33.3% appointment level is appropriate given the level of work expected. Furthermore, it was deemed important that the program be transparent with details related to student funding packages. This is particularly critical in instances where funding levels may vary from year to year (i.e. AOF appointment at 50% and TA appointment at 33.3%).

- Graduate-Level Courses – It was noted that courses that would otherwise be graduate level courses become de facto undergraduate courses due to the high number of undergraduate students enrolled. The GFEC recommends that each semester the program identify a course or courses in which enrollment is limited to only graduate students so that the graduate students might have sufficient graduate-level work in their curriculum portfolio. Furthermore, the program should review
its course offerings to make sure that at least 50% of graduate student coursework is in courses that have been accurately identified as graduate-level coursework, as per the new HLC-related policy changes adopted by GFEC and the UAPC in October 2014 (that became effective Fall 2014).

- Bridge Programs – These programs appear to be important pathways for students to continue their work in select doctoral programs on campus. To ensure the future success of these students, the GFEC recommends bridge students who plan to pursue doctoral study in English complete more coursework in literary theory – which has been noted as a critical content gap upon entry into the English doctoral program.

- Program Introduction and Resources -- The GFEC encourages the program to create a formal orientation to all new students ideally involving affiliate faculty as well as core departmental faculty. The program should also create a comprehensive and accurate graduate program handbook and make it available online. A graduate program handbook template is available in the Graduate School’s KnowledgeBase: [https://kb.wisc.edu/gsadminkb/page.php?id=34123](https://kb.wisc.edu/gsadminkb/page.php?id=34123). Also, the information listed on the program website ([http://afroamericanstudies.wisc.edu/programs/grad.html](http://afroamericanstudies.wisc.edu/programs/grad.html)) is not aligned with information provided by the Department as part of the Graduate School Catalog 2014-2016 catalog ([http://grad.wisc.edu/catalog/degrees_afroamer_criteria.htm](http://grad.wisc.edu/catalog/degrees_afroamer_criteria.htm)). The GFEC requests the program not only create a program handbook, but also thoroughly review its policies to ensure consistency between the program’s webpages, new handbook, and the Graduate School Catalog.

The GFEC would like to receive a written report from you on the matters addressed above in April 2015. The concerns raised by GFEC notwithstanding, the Committee commends you on maintaining a strong graduate program with good student outcomes and satisfaction.

Sincerely,

Wendy Crone
Interim Dean of the Graduate School

cc: Karl Scholz, College of Letters and Science
Sue Zaeske, College of Letters and Science
Elaine Klein, College of Letters and Science
Robin Schmidt, Afro-American Studies
Christina Greene, Afro-American Studies
Daniel Kleinman, Graduate School
Kelly Haslam, Graduate School
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Jocelyn Milner, Office of the Provost