

# African Studies Program

College of Letters and Science  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

## Assessment Plan

June 2006

African Studies (ASP) is not a degree program. As such, ASP is not strictly required to have a Learning Assessment Plan in place. ASP does manage an undergraduate certificate program, a graduate certificate program, and a Ph.D. minor, and very occasionally helps motivated undergraduates construct coherent individualized majors in African studies. For these reasons, ASP has developed an Assessment Plan, but has kept it simple.

### 1. Program Overview.

ASP is one of the campus's stronger interdisciplinary programs. It provides a bright and vibrant second home for 80 UW faculty members who work on Africa in a range of departments, 100 Africanist graduate students, and many motivated undergraduates who came to the UW with Africa interests or (more commonly) developed them here.

ASP's research funding, fellowships, and events and activities impinge indirectly on a host of degree programs at the UW, but most of its work is outside the scope of this degree-focused Assessment Plan. Four elements of ASP's work affect degree progress and learning more directly: the interdisciplinary 277 course (which ASP manages), the undergraduate and graduate certificates in African Studies, and the Ph.D. minor in African Studies. Over each of the last three years, we have served, on average, the following number of students:

- Interdisciplinary course, Africa: An Introductory Survey (277): **560** students.
- Undergraduate certificate in African Studies: **24** certificates.
- Graduate certificate in African Studies: **4** certificates.
- Ph.D. minor in African Studies: **5** minors.

### 2. Learning Objectives

Our main goal at the undergraduate level, whether students are simply taking the 277 course or working toward a concentration, is that they gain a capacity to think about Africa (and through it the human condition) from multiple historical, scientific, and cultural perspectives. The 277 course has been constructed to foster precisely this interdisciplinarity. The undergraduate concentration is intended to complement the student's major and provide additional breadth of disciplinary perspective on Africa (most students come into the concentration after taking the 277 course). The requirement is 15 credits (normally four or five courses) from the ASP core curriculum, with no more than two courses counting from any one department.

Our secondary goal at the undergraduate level is to diffuse the study of Africa across the university's undergraduate curriculum. ASP faculty members in a number of L&S departments teach survey courses in their own disciplines, as well as cross-disciplinary survey courses not wholly about Africa (e.g., Global Cultures). We have actively encouraged ASP

faculty to continue teaching survey courses because in those courses they can inspire students who have not settled on an academic path to consider the African aspects of disciplines such as history, political science, geography, anthropology, art history, communication arts, and journalism.

At the graduate level, our certificate and our Ph.D. minor formalize Wisconsin's commitment to leading the nation in advanced disciplinary training in African studies, and its tradition of promoting disciplinary training that is informed by developments in cognate fields. Since 1960, the UW-Madison has trained about three times as many Ph.D. specialists in Africa as any other university, and they are known for the breadth as well as the depth of their Africa education. The graduate certificate and Ph.D. minor both require that students take a minimum of four courses or seminars on Africa in departments other than their own.

### 3. Assessment

As a non-degree-granting program, ASP's assessment of the effectiveness of the training/learning that it fosters must be different than that of departments. We collect student evaluations only for the 277 course; we are not subject to formal peer ranking; and the job placements of our graduates cannot readily be compared with those of other campus units or national programs. Rather, we regularly assess the effectiveness of our training in the following ways:

1. **External review.** Our most recent 2001 evaluation, conducted by Africa specialists from Rutgers University and UCLA, was overwhelmingly laudatory (this is the nation's premier center for African Studies), but included pointed recommendations on helping the Department of African Languages and Literature ensure staffing and effective learning in a sufficient array of African language courses. These recommendations we have followed, in a manner familiar to the College. We have scheduled our next external review for 2008.
2. **Alumni tracking.** It is impossible for a small unit such as ASP (with 2 FTEs) to track undergraduate concentrators and all Africanist graduate students systematically after graduation, but we make a concerted effort to follow, detail, and quantify the career progress of as many as we can. The results are less systematic than we would desire, but some things we know. Among them is that remarkable numbers of our undergraduate concentrators work eventually in Africa, whether as Peace Corps volunteers or in their careers, and that our graduate student alumni lead the field of African studies nationally: Of the six most recent presidents of the African Studies Association, four have Wisconsin Ph.D.s.
3. **Title VI Competition.** Every four years, ASP reapplies to the U.S. Department of Education for designation as a National Resource Center (NRC) for Africa (a status we have had continuously since 1962). In these lengthy applications, all available data on program performance and impact are marshaled in the increasingly quantified manner expected of applicants. This process, and the peer evaluation of NRC applications, amounts to de facto national ranking of program effectiveness every four years. During the past decade, ASP has received greater NRC funding than *any other* of the 123 centers in the country, covering all world regions. We take this success as a statement of recognized training effectiveness, and we strive to maintain it.