

Department of Afro-American Studies Preliminary Assessment Report

During the 2007-2008 academic years, the Department of Afro-American Studies completed the initial cycle of the assessment process approved in April 2006. The assessment process took place in two tiers. The first of those tiers involved surveying students in intermediate and advanced level courses. The numerical results of those surveys are included below. The second tier involved narrative comments solicited from a randomly selected group of recent graduates. A faculty committee has been charged with submitting a formal report on the results of the assessment to the Chair by September 15, 2008. Although the first assessment cycle won't be completed until that report is considered by the faculty as a whole, the materials we have collected to date have allowed us to reach some clear conclusions, and were crucial to instituting a significant change in the structure of the Department's curriculum.

Preliminary Results

The major conclusions indicated by the materials the assessment committee is processing are as follows:

1. Students majoring in Afro-American Studies express a very high level of satisfaction with the content of individual courses.

Both the results of the quantitative survey and narrative comments indicate that majors believe that individual courses within the Department do a good job at fulfilling our basic learning objectives, which are, as stated in the assessment plan, "to familiarize students with the historical, cultural and social experiences of African Americans in the United States, with particular attention to the way these experiences relate to the broader African diaspora." They praised the quality of lecturing in the foundation courses, including those which have been taught by Lecturers on short-term contracts, but were particularly enthusiastic about the smaller advanced courses. Consistently, they pointed to the way the Department encourages open dialog on sensitive issues. A summary of the responses to the quantitative survey are attached.

2. They express a high level of frustration with the Department's inability to offer the courses they need to fulfill their concentration within the major without resorting to course substitution forms and/or independent studies.

While no question on the quantitative survey directly addressed the issue—a problem we will remedy on future surveys—the narrative responses of majors made it very very clear that they have experienced some real frustration with the gap between the course required for their degrees and the Department's course offerings. Because a high percentage of Afro-American Studies majors are double or triple majors, they frequently want to be able to plan their schedules in advance. A combination of circumstances—a death, research leaves, the departure of faculty for other institutions—made advanced planning almost impossible for many students, especially those attempting to fulfill the requirements in the Society (and to a lesser degree History) areas. Students expressed some dissatisfaction with the support system for working out alternative plans, a situation exacerbated by staff turnover. (Three different people occupied the Student Services position on the staff during the period covered by the assessment.)

Department Response

As indicated above, the assessment committee is still in the process of working through the materials, but the first results made the need for more immediate changes clear. With the problems indicated above in mind, we did the following:

1. Redefined staff duties to concentrate student-related issues with one person. When both members of the Department staff retired within a month of each other, we took the opportunity to participate in an experimental “hub” program with SLIS. As part of the redefinition of duties, we reworked the job descriptions of our two staff people so that one of them was in charge of all student and major related concerns (which had previously been divided). While we are still working out some of the details, indications are that the redefinition accomplished its purpose. What remains to be done is developing a system to make sure majors are aware of how the new system operates.

2. Combined the History and Society concentrations. As part of the University’s larger mission of consolidating academic programs in ways that concentrate on areas of strength and maximize resources, the Department voted during the fall 2007 semester to combine our History and Society concentrations. This was done with an awareness that we are unlikely to be able to replace all of the faculty who have left in recent years. Given a smaller faculty and our emphasis on our culture and history areas, it became clear that we would be unable to address the concerns of students in the society area and offer all of the required classes on a regular basis. Therefore, we revised the requirements of the major in the way indicated on the attached form. The new major requirements will be submitted to the proper administrative units during the fall semester 2008, and we hope to have them in place by the 2009-10 academic year. The hiring of two new faculty members in the Culture area for the 2007-2008 academic year, and the approval to search for a new historian next year, provide us with sufficient resources to address the concerns of majors in other areas.

Summary of Quantitative Survey

All questions were asked with a 1-5 response scale, with 5 being the most positive answer. The survey was given to students in all advanced and intermediate classes (not just majors).

1. How well have your courses in the Department of Afro-American Studies familiarized you with the basic facts concerning African American History?

2007 data: 5 (41); 4 (22); 3 (6); 2 (1); 1 (0).

2008 data: 5 (56); 4 (27); 3 (6); 2 (0); 1 (0).

2. How well have these courses prepared you to participate in public discussions of issues regarding race?

2007 data: 5 (39); 4 (42); 3 (14); 2 (1); 1 (2).

2008 data: 5 (47); 4 (34); 3 (9); 2 (3); 1 (0).

3. How well have these courses prepared you to meet the communications (writing and speaking) needs of your future career or educational goals?

2007 data: 5 (22); 4 (17); 3 (12); 2 (2); 1 (1).

2008 data: 5 (30); 4 (21); 3 (4); 2 (1); 1 (0).

One pattern which emerged was a relatively low rate of response for question 3, which we speculate reflects the decision of non-majors to skip the question. The assessment committee is considering ways of rephrasing the question; and has been charge with developing a question on the adequacy of curricular offerings.

Attachment: New major requirements.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison
Afro-American Studies Undergraduate Program

Undergraduate Advisor: Prof. Christina Greene, 4119 H.C. White Hall, 262-4085,
cgreene2@wisc.edu

The Department of Afro-American Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison offers students an opportunity to study those aspects of black history, culture, and society in ideal interdisciplinary models that reconstruct Afro-American life. It challenges students to critically examine facts and issues that are historically and contemporaneously relevant to the Afro-American experience.

Approved by the Board of Regents in 1970, the Department of Afro-American Studies is an outgrowth of the student concern for relevance in higher education which was so dramatically evidenced on many college campuses during the late 1960s. Today, the department offers a wide variety of courses leading to both undergraduate and graduate degrees and is one of the most successful programs in the country.

Major

The major in Afro American Studies requires a minimum of 30 credits. Students majoring in Afro American Studies are required to select one area of concentration. Students concentrating in Areas 1 are required to select one area of emphasis within the concentration.

Area 1: Afro American Culture

Emphasis A: Literature

Emphasis B: The Arts

Area 2: Afro American History and Society

Area 3: Black Women's Studies

Majors specialize in one of the Areas, but must take at least one course from each Area. A maximum of 40 credits will be counted toward fulfillment of degree requirements. Special Topics courses may be repeated as topics vary. At least 15 credits in upper level courses numbered above 300 must be taken in residence at UW Madison

In selecting introductory courses, majors should consult with the Undergraduate Advisor so each student may select those courses which best complement his/her overall program of study.

AREA 1

Required Courses for Area 1 (Culture)

Emphasis A (Literature)

All Area 1 majors selecting Emphasis A are required to take the following:

1) Two (2) courses selected from the following:

155 Race in American Literature
222 Introduction to Black Women Writers
227 Masterpieces of African American Literature
265 Black Autobiography

2) One (1) course selected from the following:

156 Black Music and American Cultural History
225 Introduction to African American Dramatic Literature
241 Introduction to African Art and Architecture
242 Introduction to Afro American Art
367 Art and Visual Culture: Women of the African Diaspora and Africa

3) Three (3) courses selected from the following:

403 Black Music in American Literary Culture
525 Major Authors
602 The Harlem Renaissance
603 The Black Arts Movement
605 Critical and Theoretical Issues in Afro American Literature
662 Selected Topics in Multicultural American Literature
672 Selected Topics in Afro American Literature
675 Selected Topics in Afro-American Culture
677 Critical and Theoretical Perspectives in Black Women=s Writing

Emphasis B (The Arts)

All Area 1 majors selecting Emphasis B are required to take the following:

1) Two (2) courses selected from the following:

156 Black Music and American Literary Culture
225 Introduction to African American Dramatic Literature
241 Introduction to African Art and Architecture
242 Introduction to Afro American Art
367 Art and Visual Culture: Women of the African Diaspora and Africa

2) One (1) course selected from the following:

155 Race in American Literature
222 Introduction to Black Women Writers
227 Masterpieces of African American Literature
265 Black Autobiography

3) Three (3) courses selected from the following:

303 Blacks, Film and Society
316 African American Music in Historical Perspective
366 Artistic/Cultural Images of Black Women
403 Black Music and American Literary Culture
509 Seminar in Afro American Music History and Criticism
540 The Art of Afro American Women in the United States
602 The Harlem Renaissance
603 The Black Arts Movement
669 Interdisciplinary Studies in the Arts
674 Selected Topics on Afro American Artists
675 Selected Topics in Afro American Culture
676 Contemporary Black American Art: History and Criticism
679 Visual Culture, Gender and Critical Race Theory

Additional credits may be taken from any courses offered by Afro-American Studies.

AREA 2

Required Courses for Area 2 (History & Society)

All Area 2 majors are required to take the following:

1) One (1) course selected from the following:

151 Introduction to Afro-American Society
231 Introduction to Afro American History
272 Race and American Politics from the New Deal to the New Right

2) Two (2) courses selected from the following:

233 History of Racial Protest Movements in America
302 Undergraduate Studies in Afro American History
303 Blacks, Film and Society
324 Black Women in America: Reconstruction to the Present

326 Race and Gender in Post World War II U.S. Society
330 African/Afro American Historical Relationships
443 Mutual Perceptions of Racial Minorities
467 Slavery in the American South
628 History of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States

3) Three (3) courses selected from the following:

624 African American Women's Activism
625 Gender, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement
631 Colloquium on Afro-American History
632 Historiography of Afro-American Studies
635 Afro-American History to 1900
636 Afro-American History since 1900
650 Seminar: Racial/Ethnic Identity
671 Selected Topics in Afro-American History
673 Selected Topics in Afro-American Society

Additional credits may be taken from any courses offered by Afro-American Studies.

AREA 3

Required Courses for Area 3 (Black Women's Studies)

All Area 3 majors are required to take the following:

1) 221 Introduction to Black Women's Studies

2) Two (2) courses selected from the following:

222 Introduction to Black Women Writers
302 Undergraduate Studies in Afro American History
323 Gender, Race and Class: Women in U.S. History
324 Black Women in America: Reconstruction to the Present
326 Race and Gender in Post World War II U.S. Society
367 Art and Visual Culture: Women of the African Diaspora and Africa

3) Three (3) courses selected from the following:

366 Artistic/Cultural Images of Black Women
423 Black Feminisms
424 Women's International Human Rights

521 African-American Families
540 The Art of African American Women in the United States
624 African American Women's Activism 19th and 20th Centuries
625 Gender, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement
677 Critical and Theoretical Perspectives in Black Women's Writings
679 Visual Culture, Gender and Critical Race Theory

Additional credits may be taken from any courses offered by Afro-American Studies.

Majors in any of the three areas of concentration may choose additional electives from the following courses. The area of application depends upon the field of the instructor and the topic of the course.

199 Directed Study
681 682 Senior Honors Thesis (Open only to departmental Honors Program majors)
691 692 Senior Thesis
699 Directed Study