

**Academic Program Review External Review Report for the
Program of Africana Studies at
The University New Mexico**

Review Team

James Stewart, Professor Emeritus, Labor Studies and Employment Relations, Pennsylvania State University

Ula Taylor, Associate Professor, Department of African American Studies, University of California, Berkeley

Irene Vasquez, Professor and Director, Department of Chicana/o Studies, University of New Mexico

Procedural Summary

At the invitation of the Academic Program Review at the University of New Mexico (UNM), a review team of three scholars visited the program of Africana Studies on April 15-17, 2015. The team members were sent a Self-Study Report as well as the UNM *Academic Program Review: Policies, Principles, and Procedures*. After a series of meetings and conversations with faculty, students, and staff in the program, past Directors of the Africana Studies program, members of the senior academic leadership team at the UNM, including Peceny, Associate Dean Diane Marshall, Associate Provost Greg Heilman, and Provost Chaouki Abdullah, the review team formulated this report which represents the collective assessment of the program, the quality of instruction, faculty and student performance, the resources and facilities of the program and suggestions for strengthening the overall program in Africana Studies.

Assessment of the Program

Formally established in 1969, the program in Africana Studies at the UNM has positioned itself as an evolving unit characterized by engaged faculty and intellectually passionate students within the context of a public research university. This is the first review of the program despite the fact that over the past forty years Africana Studies has matured as an interdisciplinary field of study evidenced by the 12 Ph.D., 17 MA, and approximately 60 degree-granting departments. In fact, one is hard pressed to identify a leading research one institution in this country (outside of the Institutes of Technology) that does not have a well grounded, self-determining, Africana Studies department.

As in any dynamic field, Africana Studies draws upon multiple schools of thought and methods; advancing interdisciplinary scholarship across the humanities and the social sciences. Noted for its long-standing intellectual tradition of examining the experiences of people of African descent from the perspective of their own agency, Africana Studies is deeply anchored in a critical recovery of archival evidence and submerged histories which allow an exploration of how subjectivity shapes and informs political activism, literature, philosophy, economic capital, cultures of health, education, artistic

expression, and creativity. Fully invested in the lives, languages, and empowering experiences of people of African descent across space and time, scholars of field have ignited new frameworks, constructs, theories, and categories of analysis.

Invested in elaborating cutting edge epistemologies that can both apprise and revise other disciplinary traditions, Africana Studies has generated unending possibilities for collaboration and knowledge production. The Africana Studies program at UNM is poised to leverage such collaboration with other programs and departments within the College of Arts and Sciences, particularly the Department of English Literature, School of Education, Department of History, Peace Studies, and the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies. This intellectual constellation offers unique opportunities to develop a model of Africana Studies that serves as a hub of research and learning innovation in the Southwest. By bridging academic and community divides, Africana Studies at UNM can be a leader in providing much needed expertise on issues facing societies across the globe.

Unfortunately, the impression that has emerged from the extensive external review is that the program has been marginalized by a culture of disregard and indifference towards Africana Studies. While acknowledging that there have been budget limitations and university leadership transitions, the review committee has noted the lack of a strong administrative champion. The minimal efforts undertaken by the administration have hampered the growth and expansion of the unit and appear to have had the goal of preserving the status quo at best or, at worst, to blatantly disregard the evolution of a vibrant academic discipline.

Faculty

The faculty is committed to teaching courses that stimulate critical thinking among students, providing exceptional service to the diverse student body, and publishing scholarship that advances the field and interdisciplinary knowledge. Despite having little to no resources for professional development and research support, teaching faculty in Africana Studies have demonstrated a remarkable ability to contribute to the academic and scholarly community at UNM. Uniquely positioned to create and cultivate novel approaches and perspectives on Black peoples and cultures in the Southwest, the Africana Studies full-time faculty largely represents the fields of Law, English Literature and Education. The faculty members have demonstrated a strong and admirable commitment to Africana Studies; however, none of the faculty is formally trained in Africana Studies, per se. Some of them have turned down opportunities to move to other campuses to remain at UNM to strengthen the unit. A few of the faculty stated that they would consider transferring their lines 100% to Africana Studies if it became a strong and viable department. Yet, structural limitations stemming from the long-term status as an interdisciplinary program have affected the morale of some of the faculty. The lack of professional development and research support, including opportunities to engage Africana Studies specialists at conferences and in other professional settings, has forced regular faculty members to seek out informal mentoring and rely upon themselves to identify resources to support their scholarship. The lack of communication and transparency in regards to tenure and promotion has caused stress for some tenure-track faculty members. Moreover, some spoke of a climate on campus that minimized the

contributions of African American faculty or of being overlooked in regards to opportunities for professional development and academic support.

Given the exceptional university service of Africana Studies faculty members the university has looked to key members of the faculty to serve on committees and lead campus-wide initiatives. Furthermore, some of the most dynamic and committed faculty members have been recruited into leadership roles that serve the university. Rather than investing in leadership to become a permanent stable presence in Africana Studies the university has shifted this energy to the service of the larger campus. For example, Sonia Rankin served as the Associate Director of Africana Studies for three years and is now the Associate Dean for Curriculum and Program Development in University College. And, the five year period when Dr. Finnie Coleman served as an Acting Dean for University College directly led to instability in program leadership forcing the appointment of a series of interim Africana Studies directors.

The overreliance on part-time faculty has also hindered the stabilization of Africana Studies and its course offerings. Similar to all part-time faculty at UNM the Instructors contracts are directly linked to class enrollment and there is frustration around the issuing of contracts and late salary payment. Extremely marginalized in the larger scope of professional development and support for their research activities, part-time faculty live on the periphery of the academic life of the campus but clearly are the most needed to execute the program's mission. In the case of Africana Studies, the Swahili language course is crucial to the execution of its curriculum yet its offering is hampered by what appears to be a lack of cooperation of other departments that forces the program to rely upon part-time faculty.

A distinguishing characteristic of the Africana Studies faculty is their dedication to the historic commitment to service learning and community engagement. African Americans and African diasporic peoples humanity and struggles root the interdisciplinary academic charge, which makes the program unique in its relationship to students and the broader community. The faculty members engage in heroic efforts to provide a range of extra curriculum activities. From taking the lead on Albuquerque, New Mexico's legendary Black History Month Brunch Kick-off, providing a Distinguished Speaker Series, "Soul Food" dialogues linked to contemporary issues on campus and beyond, speaking at public and charter schools, to providing teach-in's on campus hate crimes, the faculty's extra-curriculum efforts are extraordinary.

Instruction and Students

The high quality of the undergraduate academic program was underscored by the most inspiring comments shared by a number of Africana Studies majors—intellectual liberation! The reviewers met with approximately twenty students (majors and minors) both one-on-one and in a large group setting. The students reported being engaged and supported by Africana Studies faculty. Several contrasted their experience in Africana Studies with their experiences in other programs and departments on campus including those housing their first and second majors. Not only had the major transformed them intellectually but, in some cases, gave them the desire to continue their matriculation at the UNM which supports the strategic initiative to boost graduation rates and time to degree. Students praised the accessibility of the faculty and their interest in student success. Individual faculty members were

praised as both teachers and mentors. Majors and minors emphasized that they have gained advanced-level critical thinking and communication skills in Africana Studies classes. The recent addition of Africana Studies 101 and Africana Studies 109 within the Core Curriculum will no doubt further enhance the program's exposure to UNM undergraduates. The students praised the innovativeness of the teaching approaches and course content. Yet, they also shared that the demands on the Lecturers and the lack of tenure-track faculty created hardships and diminished the potential strength of the program.

From the vantage point of students, they articulated a general consensus that Africana Studies has not been valued at UNM. The lack of institutional support, a permanent Director, and a stream of part-time faculty have limited the growth and expansion of Africana Studies. Student stakeholders in particular spoke to a lack of visibility of Africana Studies outside of Mesa Vista. Although one student spoke directly to being attracted to UNM because of the Africana Studies program, many of the students reported that they were not aware that the program was a self-standing degree-granting program until they encountered the program through a cross-listed course. Students also shared their experiences with advisors, with the exception of those located in the African American Student Services, who were unfamiliar with the program and its benefits.

Given the size of the program, enrollment rates are more than appropriate. In fact, one has to be impressed with substantial increase of credit hours generated by the Africana Studies program. A detailed 2012 document prepared by Sonia Rankin, former Associate Director of African Studies and current Associate Dean for Curriculum and Program Development in the University College evidences that during the 2008-2009 academic year the program generated 1549 credits and by 2011-2012 the numbers had increased to 2263. Unfortunately, more than half of these credits were given to other programs and departments (American Studies, Anthropology, English, History, Languages, Political Science, and Women Studies). These conditions have discouraged cross listing of courses by some faculty; which has ultimately impacted enrollment. Overall, the numbers of majors and minors are solid and compare favorably both with units within the college and with similarly situated Africana Studies units across the country. This is a particularly notable accomplishment given the lack of regular FTE appointments in Africana Studies at UNM.

As stated in the UNM Africana Studies Program Strategic Plan, "An education in Africana Studies at UNM is vital because it provides students with a unique opportunity to apply the study of history, philosophy, sciences, economics, politics, art, music, psychology, sociology, language, and education of African people as a practical force for social change."¹

Resources and Facilities

Africana Studies facilities fail to accommodate its entire faculty with departmental offices. The program is located on the fourth floor of Mesa Vista. Africana Studies faculty members have been creative with limited space. The close association between the research and library facilities positively contributes to

¹ Africana Studies Program Strategic Plan at UNM 2011[Draft Document prepared by the Institute for Africana Studies Planning Group]

the intellectual and social needs of students and faculty. Yet, there are several key limitations that also stifle the potential for a fully vibrant academic culture.

The primary form of access to the fourth floor is an elevator. Thus, students can only access the facilities when the elevator is unlocked. The door from the stairway leading to the program is frequently locked to ensure security for the valuable art that decorates the offices and walls of the Africana Studies program. Furthermore, students complained about the lack of space to allow networking which would enhance the overall success of students and the morale of Africana Studies.

Fortunately, the positive relationship between Africana Studies and the African American Student Services, under the stellar leadership of W. Scott Carreathers has provided a social safety net for some majors and minors as well as a space to assist students in navigating the UNM. Given Carreathers ability to spearhead the successful summer bridge program the shifting of the STEM program away from Africana Studies and into the African American Student Services unit is a good move that will certainly benefit the students.

Many Africana Studies classes are held in the Morrissey Research Hall. Morrissey lacks appropriate technology and given its size small group work is impossible. When compared to Kent State (one of the external reviewers has been there twice to review Departments), which houses its Africana Studies Department in a state of the art facility, UNM is sorely lacking.

Africana Studies faculty members utilize their limited space and facilities to provide services that strengthen the academic achievement of students. In particular, the Morrissey Research Hall in Africana Studies provides students with critical access to materials related to the discipline. Students who use the library space appreciate being able to meet with faculty in the Africana Studies while they are consulting the library.

Recommendations

Faculty

The faculty must put together a final version of its strategic plan as they aspire to departmental status. In fact, the faculty, as well as the former Directors, with whom the review team met fully embrace the goal of departmental status. The advantages and disadvantages of such an elevation in status are explored in a March 2011 document entitled “A Call for Systems Change in Program and University Climate for Effective Leadership in Teaching and Learning of Africana Studies.”

The goals of Africana Studies articulated in its self-study are correctly aligned with a general understanding of field; nevertheless, they need to be tailored to the specific strengths of the program. Moreover, fully defining the intellectual and institutional meaning of Africana Studies at UNM and clearly communicating this message to the broader university to ensure that academic leadership are able to persuasively speak about that intellectual and institutional identity to various stakeholders, will go along way. We recommend that university administrative resources are provided to enable the program to complete a comprehensive strategic plan.

We want to encourage the faculty to pull from its diasporic strength. Although it is light years ahead of many Africana Studies departments in its language offerings, by honing in on the experiences of Blacks in the Southwest and elsewhere in the Diaspora, the faculty can contribute to advancing Africana

Studies scholarship in a novel way. This evolving scholarship can produce an intellectual distinction for the program and has the potential for broader and more robust development with the interdisciplinary model that moves across the arts and sciences, humanities, and professional schools in education, law, and public health.

Faculty academic potential is currently underdeveloped and hindered by the extensive service commitments of its tenure-track faculty and lecturers. A comprehensive program of faculty renewal, which can include but are not limited to, departmental workshops on internal development and strategic publishing, encourage and support the research projects of faculty (perhaps co-authored pieces) in order to elevate the research culture of the program to a standing commensurate with its dedicated teaching culture, all of which will enhance the overall standing of the entire university.

The current Director, Dr. Robert Jefferson, has only been on board for less than one year, and given the circumstances of having an Interim Director in Africana Studies for five years prior to his appointment he is still learning how best to navigate the UNM terrain along with the robust Albuquerque, New Mexico's Black community. Jefferson has not yet developed appropriate relationships with community stakeholders and has yet to secure the full support of faculty. His absence during the second and third day of the campus review was notable, and disappointing, for some faculty. However, the reviewers have confidence in Jefferson's ability to move Africana Studies forward by clearly articulating his vision to his colleagues.

One way to bridge the divide between Africana Studies and the larger Black community is to better situate Africana Studies majors and minors research projects in collaboration with community organizations. By developing internship or introducing local oral history research projects, Africana Studies majors and minors will fully comprehend service learning that is so important to the UNM's strategic initiative.

Administration

The University must provide a clear road map on what is required to shift the Africana Studies program into a department. One of the major critiques articulated by faculty and all of the former Africana Studies program directors is that the university continually reconstitutes its requirements. A moving target is not only a poor reflection of the university leadership but makes the transition impossible.

Operational investments to transform Africana Studies structurally from a program to a department are needed. A hiring plan that includes at least four tenure-track faculty, one of which should have a Ph.D. in African American or African Diaspora Studies, will stabilize the growth, solidify its academic program, and position it to strategically pursue its goals. As the faculty is on the brim of realizing its intellectual aspirations, as a unit that moves across and beyond the university in enhancing the academic experiences of students, there must be university support to make this happen.

Renewal will require investment in faculty with appropriate resources to advance and highlight their research programs. We want to advocate that the university revisit its plan to transition black faculty to tenure-track and other regular appointments. Additional cluster hire opportunities which build on the

distinctive strengths of Africana Studies and the University and which facilitate cross-institutional collaboration are also encouraged. While the number of faculty of color increased in the College of Arts and Sciences as a result of a College of Arts and Sciences hiring initiative none of these directly benefitted Africana Studies. The increase of African American faculty is critical to a university striving for excellence through diversity; however, this has not or does not have a benefit for Africana Studies. Faculty appointments need to be made from within the program. A critical mass of tenure-track faculty will not only strengthen the academic program but also advance the ranking of the university in the assessments of Africana Studies units conducted by the National Council of Black Studies and independent scholars. We advise that the administration revisit the recommendations regarding conversion of non-tenure track appointments into tenure track appointments presented in the document titled “African American Tenure/Tenure-track Faculty” (June 24, 2011).

The university should also re-invest in post-doctoral funding to support the academic and research strength of the program and to accelerate diversification of its faculty generally. The establishment of a distinguished visiting faculty program should also be explored as a means of invigorating the culture of research in the unit. The hiring of a tenure-track faculty member trained specifically in Africana Studies should be prioritized in the college’s hiring plan.

The problem of class scheduling could be addressed by the provision of additional part-time staff at the beginning of each semester. More generally, there is a need to improve coordination of offerings with other academic units and review protocols for assigning credit for cross-listings to academic units so that the role of Africana Studies in generating offerings is appropriately recognized.

The problem of limited space and student access to the program’s offices should be addressed expeditiously. It is the understanding of the review team that plans have been developed to make structural modifications to the existing space that could ameliorate some of the most critical problems.

The university should formally acknowledge and commend the work of the past Directors of the Africana Studies program and their oral histories should be deposited in both the Morrissey Research Hall and the UNM main library.

Conclusion

Despite the institutional indifference the commendable efforts of the faculty and staff has produced an excellent education for UNM’s most deserving students. Given their structural limitations, the faculty has sought to promote a solid research environment for students and themselves. The review team believes that with a critical alignment of institutional resources Africana Studies at UNM will enable the unit to fully realize its potential and become a leading department in the nation.