UCC Program Review Committee summary of review

Program – Department of African American Studies

This program includes the following degrees, minors, and certificates:

- B.A. African American Studies
- African American Studies Minor

Recommendation

This program is found to be viable, see report for commendations, concerns, and recommendations.

Date of last review – AY 2007

Date of this review – AY 2017

This review has been sent to school director and the dean, their joint response is attached.

The correction requested to the number of faculty has been made to the review.
Department of African American Studies

October 17, 2016

General Program Summary

The Department of African American Studies was founded as the Center of Afro-American Studies (CAAS) on April 25, 1969, making it the second-oldest Black Studies program in the United States. Several years later the CAAS eliminated its position of Dean and established five tenure-track faculty lines. Consequently, this unit was renamed the Department of African Americans Studies (AAS) and invited to join the College of Arts & Sciences (CAS) in 1976. Since its founding AAS has remained engaged and committed to interdisciplinary research and teaching, reflecting an evolving vision for the African American experience both nationally and globally.

In order to bridge the scholarly work of faculty and students to the local community, AAS maintains several initiatives to preserve, record, and disseminate the history, cultural production, and community activism of African Americans and their neighbors in Appalachia. To that end, the Department fosters partnerships in the Ohio Valley that have been developed over the years largely through the community outreach of the Department's African American Research and Service Institute (AARSI).

As a small department the focus has been on overcoming multiple budgetary challenges over the years while maintaining a rigorous undergraduate program. The Department is actively recruiting new majors and minors. Since the last review the position of Department Chair has turned over four times. In addition, AAS faculty offices and media lab were moved to dramatically smaller office space at the beginning of fall term in 2014.

The department was found to be viable by the internal and external reviewers.

Faculty Profile

The faculty profile has changed slightly since the last review due to retirements. Currently the program has 7 faculty members, 1 full professor, 1 Emeriti professor, 2 Associate Professors, 2 assistant professors, and 1 group III visiting lecturer. All faculty lines are in AAS; there are no shared appointments as in years past. Since the last review the School of Film and School of Interdisciplinary Arts (IARTS) eliminated a joint appointment in Film, the IARTS, and AAS; the former joint appointment had no budgetary line in AAS.

Programmatic Practices

The following were identified by the department as their programmatic priorities
Provide quality degrees for students on the Athens and regional campuses

Provide a general foundation in liberal arts and sciences that complement and/or enhance current or future academic, personal, or professional goals.

Provide academic support services for associate degree students

Promote and deliver quality academic advising as the cornerstone of teaching, learning, retention, and career success.

Provide programs and services that foster persistence, retention, and personal growth.

Assist students at transitional points in their educational and career experience.

Conduct assessment of degree programs and services and utilize assessment information for continuing program improvement.

Curriculum

The Department of African American Studies (AAS) offers a curriculum rooted in the history of the African American experience and is committed to providing students with competencies and skills to respond to the contemporary challenges facing a multicultural and globally interdependent society. The required courses for an AAS major provide the foundation for the analysis of African American culture, politics, and economics. The elective course choices allow students to add breadth and depth to an interdisciplinary approach to critical thinking, written and oral competency, and social policy.

AAS contributes to the general education of the university through the regular offering of eight courses that fulfill either the Humanities and Literature or the Social Sciences requirement.

Additionally AAS sponsors events for creative and intellectual connections between students, faculty and the local community. A sample of major events since the last review is as follows:

2008 - The 40th Anniversary of AAS – speakers, scholarships, and symposia
2009 – AAS Speakers Series: Angela Davis and Cornell West
2013 - The Theme of Love & Hate: Panel Discussion of the Empire TV Series
2014 - Race, Medicine, and Social Policy: Historian Rebecca Kluchin Public Talk on forced sterilization
2015 - Emancipation Day in Rendville, Ohio: Community Reunion and Historical Preservation of Family Documents
2016 – Black Alumni Reunion at Ohio University – Open House,
Teaching

Faculty generally teach a 2/2 load in the department. Faculty have the opportunity to negotiate load to engage in scholarly activities. AAS evaluates all courses through course evaluations, classroom observations, and review of learning outcomes regularly. Since the last review the regional campus courses, especially in Pickerington and Chillicothe, have declined as a result of retirement and promotion of faculty. Online courses until two years ago were limited to the summer term; AAS modified its workload policy to allow each faculty member to teach one online course during the regular academic year if they were interested in doing so. Regardless of the delivery mode, faculty members review the courses and evaluations individually and as a department, if necessary, for successful learning outcomes. To support and reward professional development in pedagogy, AAS offers funds for new course development, teaching conferences, and campus initiatives such as faculty learning communities.

While it is noted that the department has a low enrollment, it should be pointed out that in terms of weighted student credit hours, faculty are pulling average loads and compensating for low enrollment. African American studies class are taken by many students and provide a necessary service to the overall University community.

Research

The faculty members in the Department of African American Studies were enthusiastic about and very active in their research endeavors. While many of the faculty who were represented in the previous program review are no longer with the department, the current faculty (including two junior faculty members) have published in both domestic and international peer-reviewed venues. As noted in the self-study, faculty members have published books, book chapters, and journal articles, and participated in multiple conference presentations. Specific works can be reviewed in the curriculum vitae in the appendix of the self-study. In addition, there appears to be a strong emphasis on teaching with a top 25 African American Professor in Ohio (Houston), a Presidential Teacher finalist (Muhammad), and two Bruning Teaching Fellows (Houston and Jeffries).

The department also initiated the African American Research and Service Institute (AARSI) which fosters community partnerships in the Ohio Valley. Since the last program review, the institute has lost its funding and staff; however, the director of the AARSI is committed to initiating and mentoring new projects, encouraging the full participation of the AAS faculty and students. Efforts are currently being made to add a service-learning based course which would be an ideal vehicle for involving students.

Students
Currently the undergraduate program supports 3 majors (all African American women), 3 additional double-majors (listed as secondary majors in the self-study), and 26 minors as well as high student enrollment in AAS courses that meet general education requirements. Faculty reported that many of their majors have been first generation students. Only one major is a male student, but this discrepancy seems on trend with patterns across the country. Although the number of majors and minors is low, it is notable that the retention rate is 100%. Six of the students are male and the rest female. While occasionally undergraduate courses are co-listed as graduate courses, there is no graduate program in the department.

Four student organizations are housed in the Department of African American Studies: Hip Hop Congress, local chapter of the NAACP, FACES Modeling Club, and STARS (Students Teaching About Racism in Society), with membership in the student organizations averaging from 6-12 students. Chair Muhammad indicated plans to begin a more intensive social media campaign for the organizations through Twitter, Facebook, etc.

Recognizing that the low major count was problematic, Dr. Houston, the departmental Advising Coordinator, discussed the efforts that have been made in speaking at high schools, Major Fairs, and other such events with little noticeable results. Difficulties in recruitment were mentioned by professors in each rank with the emphasis being on a lack of awareness and promotion of the program. However, faculty in all ranks recognized that the introductory courses as well as campus activities were the most useful venue for recruiting majors and especially minors.

The department was referred to in the self-study as an “oasis” for some students, and after speaking with a small subset of students (one double-major and two minors) this metaphor was confirmed. Words such as “self-affirming” and “mentoring” were meaningful in their descriptions of the program and faculty. The connections between the students and the faculty are an impressive reflection of the value that the department adds to the Ohio University experience.

The student conversations also yielded confirmation that graduates move into certain fields of study (media, law, and social psychology were mentioned), and that recruitment efforts in courses and campus activities are valuable. These three students were recruited from a student organization (Hip Hop Congress), a Majors & Minors Fair, and a class. The three students were all from urban areas outside of Appalachia.

Alumnae

During the interviews, it was noted that graduates from the program have gone into fields such as law, media, Teach for America, and community involvement/social justice. While some contact is maintained through social media and personal conversations with alumnae, currently there is no departmental mechanism in place to keep in touch with all graduates of the program. Dean Frank indicated that plans are in place for such a mechanism at the college level.
Some notable achievements of alumnae include an instructor of Sociology at the University of Minnesota, an assistant director of Training for the LGBTQ Youth Advocacy and Capacity Center in NYC, an employee at the South Carolina Department of Education, a law school graduate from Capital University, and a Fellowship Coordinator for the Ohio Legislative Service Commission among other accomplishments.

**Adequacy of resources**

The Department moved to smaller office space in 2014 which was mentioned in the self-study in the area of limited resources, but in the interviews the most commonly requested resource was additional faculty and/or staff positions. Limited funding for travel and release time for scholarship were also mentioned.

One faculty member mentioned the need for more scholarships to assist in recruiting students.

The relatively new initiative of the Asset Team which involves a multi-level sharing of staff across four departments seems to provide more adequate coverage of the front office for the department, but the need to make administrative specialist Chris Caldwell a full time employee was mentioned given his list of responsibilities. Staff members also commented on inconsistent funds available for professional development, especially in the area of team building.

The AAS major that was interviewed spoke of a concern about the number of offerings coming from the department. She felt that it was difficult at times to piece together a schedule and graduate on time with the low number of upper division courses. The faculty interviews also reflected a need for more course development.

**Commendations**

While most minors across the University do not meet with minor advisors, the students that were interviewed indicated that they met more frequently with their minor advisor than their major advisors. This additional effort in advising, mentoring, and developing strong lasting relationships is a true commendation of this department. Although the numbers are low, the relationships are built upon a large investment of time and energy and caring on the part of the faculty.

**Concerns**

The greatest concern is the low number of majors. While efforts are clearly being made to recruit new majors, more initiatives need to be attempted and a more successful plan needs to be implemented.
Focus on promotion of the program with an emphasis on the strengths and the need for the department in today’s changing culture is necessary. The focus and attention should come at every level: individual (faculty and students), departmental, college, and university levels.

**Recommendations**

- Revise mission statement to include strengths in partnerships within Appalachia and the Department’s contributions to the University’s general education.
- Increase activity in the African American Research and Service Institute (AARSI), especially with involvement from students.
- Create partnerships with other departments to produce more double-majors, more visibility on campus as a department, and more cross-listed courses.
- Plan more communication and social activities to bring faculty and students together. In the student interviews, it was mentioned that they didn’t know who the other majors and minors were. With such strong relationships between faculty and students, a larger connection between students could also benefit the department. Student relationships could work toward recruitment as well (activities such as “bring a friend” nights, speakers, alumnae visits to meet with majors and minors, etc.).

**External Reviewer:** Mark Christian, Lehman College – City University of New York

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**Commendations**

Clearly, the Department of African American Studies has a faculty component that offers talent that is committed to their students across the campus and within the department. Of the six full-time, there is a balance of senior and junior faculty that cover a range of curricula in African American Studies. There is also an embedded infrastructure that has been utilized since 1969. This should be celebrated and built upon. There is a good camaraderie among the faculty that can be the foundation for the years ahead as inevitable curriculum changes meet with the contemporary times. A strong faculty foundation is evident and this can only benefit the undergraduate students. Furthermore, apart from the major and minor offerings, the Department of African American Studies contributes widely to Ohio University’s general education requirements and broader diversity initiatives. This should not be underestimated by the administration because this is a vital role that the department performs.

**Concerns**

There is a need to reduce the possibility of a “revolving door” in relation to faculty in African American Studies. This is a complex issue but, for example, fundamental to retention, is the need to support faculty adequately in terms of travel funds for research and conference participation. Also, there needs to be a concerted effort to support the development of the African American Research & Service Institute (AARSI) because it could play an important role in the future of the department if it taps into local research relating to Black Appalachia in Athens, Ohio. Currently it seems to be floundering due to a lack of adequate foundational support from the
administration. With greater support the relatively low number of majors (6) could expect to increase to meet the current minors (26).

**Recommendations**
It is recommended that following areas for the positive growth of the department be considered:

- The Introduction to African American Studies courses (AAS 1010 and 1060) should be taught by all tenured faculty to ensure the best outcome in attracting majors and minors to the department. This course should not be left to adjuncts as the number of current majors reflects a need for expansion using the most senior and/or established faculty.

- The AARSI should be utilized by faculty with their research endeavors while integrating undergraduate students into various fieldwork endeavors. This could mean combining faculty research and teaching to establish an organic service learning experience.

- The department website needs updating by maintaining proper info on faculty offices/office hrs and achievements.

- There needs to be a listserv created for majors and minors for collective communication.

- There needs to be a balance between Teaching, Research & Service areas for faculty. Currently there is a greater pull on service related roles for faculty, and research will inevitably suffer.

- Travel research funds should be no less than $1500 per academic year, per faculty member.

- There needs to be an evaluation of the curriculum to meet the needs of contemporary issues in the African American experience.

- The Department needs to maintain its autonomy regardless of the greater push for sharing resources. The “oasis” (AAS) on Ohio University’s campus is regarded as “real” by the students.
Date: November 29, 2016

TO: David Ingram, Program Review Committee

FROM: Robert Frank, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, and Robin Muhammad, Chair of African American Studies

RE: Seven year review of African American Studies

This letter is our joint response as Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences and Chair of the Department of African American Studies to the program review committee report.

Overall, the major findings and recommendations of the review committee are consistent with the self-study and our evaluation of the state of the department and its programs.

There are a few points of clarification or correction. First, the number of faculty is 7 not 6, as reported on page 2 of the self-study. Secondly, staff members receive consistent opportunities for professional development both from AAS and the College of Arts & Sciences. Third, there is a listserv for majors and minors as part of regular communications. Finally, professional development funding for travel and research is part of the departmental operating budget and available to full time faculty on an annual basis. The budget is limited but every effort is made to provide professional development funds to all faculty. $1500 of professional development funding for each faculty is an achievable goal.

We agree that the number of majors is a concern and will continue efforts to increase the number. This being said, the number of majors will always be small. The impact of the department and its programs on the university and region go far beyond the number of majors as pointed out in the self-study and by the reviewers.