

The Department of Afro-American Studies

May 2008 Curricular Retreat

Report (filed by Kevin Quashie; in attendance: Adrienne Andrews, Riche Barnes, Daphne Lamothe, Louis Wilson)

Curriculum

We discussed our curriculum in terms of what we ask of students, in terms of the identified student capacities approved by the faculty in Fall 07, in terms of pathways through our major, and in terms of our staffing.

Our current requirements asks students to take four required courses—a cultural studies/interdisciplinary course (Intro to Black Culture), an interdisciplinary methods course (Methods of Inquiry), a history survey (History of Afro-American People to 1954), and a capstone seminar (Classic Black Texts). Besides this, we require that students take two courses in the Diaspora.

We asked the following questions of those requirements: Is this the right sequence of required courses—does it reflect the idea of a student's development over the four years? Do these courses link to the capacities in explicit ways? Are these courses reflective of our expectations of research/information literacy—that is, are we asking particular tasks of students in these classes, beyond the content, that is instrumental to a student's intellectual trajectory? Are there other ways to think of the required courses for the major and, by extension, how they/we advise our majors? (For other questions we explored, see Appendix A.)

We agreed that these requirements seemed to be appropriate and successful, though we thought it important to renumber the following course sequences so that they would make more sense to our students:

*AAS 112 Methods of Inquiry would become **AAS 201** Methods of Inquiry

*AAS 237 Twentieth Century Literature would become **AAS 114 African-American Literature 1900 to the Present**

*AAS 348 Black Women Writers would become **AAS 249** Black Women Writers

We also decided to give permanent numbers to our regularly offered seminars:

*AAS 366 Literatures of the African Diaspora would become **AAS 336** Literatures of the African Diaspora

*AAS 366 Toni Morrison would become **AAS 360** Toni Morrison

*AAS 366 Black Feminist Theory would become **AAS 354** Black Feminist Theory

*AAS 366 Classic Black Texts would become **AAS 345** Classic Black Texts

We agreed that we would have five concentrations in the major for the purposes of advising: the first four are disciplinary—history, literature, social science, cultural studies—while the fifth is Diaspora studies. Other disciplinary concentrations, for example in the fine arts or in the sciences, might be approved as a result of classes taken in other academic units or in the Five Colleges. These five would serve as meaningful and self-explanatory pathways through the major. (In Diaspora studies, we agreed to recommend that a student would study a language and travel abroad.) Given the small size of our department, providing other pathways is both difficult and unnecessary. We do plan to identify internship and co-curricular opportunities for majors, as a way to complement their curricular work (on the agenda for fall 2008).

We discussed the “Essential Student Capacities,” especially the places in our classes where students do presentations (mostly seminars, but also some 200-level courses), and where they are introduced to structured information about research/information literacy.

We also agreed to require the completion of the Latin Honors sequence for honors in our department, starting with the class of 2011 (for classes of 2009 and 2010, this will be strongly encouraged). This is part of our effort to increase student interaction with math, science and language courses (see Appendix B).

Finally, looking at our course offerings, we agreed that we would work to maintain the balance of course offerings (see Appendix C) as well as to work toward a thoughtful plan to regularly offer that body of courses.

The revised catalog copy would include a list of expectations, and a slight revision to the major (changes/additions italicized):

The Major

Requirements for the Major

An Afro-American Studies major will have experience

**Studying closely one classic text or figure or period or movement*

**Considering the aesthetic principles undergirding 19th and 20th century African American culture*

**Engaging a text or movement or event from many disciplinary standpoints*

**Considering the impact of gender, class, nation, sexuality on African American culture*

**Thinking intellectually about the Diaspora*

A major is also strongly encouraged to study abroad as well as to take courses in all seven areas of Latin distribution.

The major consists of eleven (11)

four-credit courses as follows:

1. Three required courses: 111, 117 and 201.

2. General concentration: four 100- and 200-level courses at least one of which must have a primary focus on the African Diaspora.

Courses at the 300-level may also be used when appropriate.

3. Advanced concentration: three courses *organized in one of five areas: history, literature, cultural studies, social science, or Diaspora studies*. Of the three courses, at least one must be at the 300-level; and at least one must have a primary focus on the African Diaspora.

4. The designated capstone seminar in the junior or senior year. The course is required of all majors including honors thesis students.

The Minor

Requirements for the Minor

The minor consists of six (6) four-credit courses as follows:

1. Two of the three required courses: 111, 117, 201.

2. Four elective courses, at least one of which must be a seminar or a 300-level class; and at least one of

which must have a primary focus on the African Diaspora.

Staffing, Present and Future

Currently, AAS is 5 FTE but in reality we are at 4.25 FTE given Paula's Meridians commitment. If we add in Adrienne's .25 FTE for the Methods course, we are at 4.5 FTE.

In 09-10, we will gain at least 3 courses from Elizabeth Pryor in HST and at least 3 from anticipated hire in the Black Atlantic in ENG.

As a result of the recent cuts to the faculty, sometime in the future, when a retirement happens in the department, we will lose .5 FTE (this is in connection with AMS, who will also lose .5 FTE). This reduction will come in history and is contingent on 2 things—one, that Paula will teach one more course for AAS, and that we will have an annual course replacement to be used in history—most likely 20th century. In this sense, we don't really lose teaching power—the number of courses are the same, but we do have to think about the challenge of having .5 of an FTE.

The question, then, is what should we do with the .5 FTE. We discussed the possibility of a joint hire with AMS (for example, in early American history—encounter and racialization) which would also help us keep in mind History's needs (given their losses and the movement toward collaborative attention to the American history curriculum). We also discussed the possibility of a joint hire with some other unit where we have need and where they have a partial hire, or a Five College hire housed in AAS, or a permanent non-tenure track half-time position in history (ala position in PHI).

There was some concern about music and the arts, especially considering the recent cuts to the Music department. We discussed the need to and challenges related to regularize our music curriculum. In addition to thinking about "encounter and racialization," there was support to think about either visual arts and dance, or "African-American performance practices." There was a general sense that a visiting position in the arts—every other year or every third year—would be more successful than a similar position in history.

Information Literacy Initiative

We developed an early draft of the AAS library page, see appendix D.

Appendix A: Additional Questions from the Agenda

On the Curriculum:

One thought about required sequence is to think about areas of knowledge: one course before 1800; one course on the 19th century; three history courses; two literature courses; one social science; one on gender and/or sexuality; two Diaspora; three courses in a concentration, for example? (in such a model, one course could count for more than one requirement)

Should we require a student complete all seven areas in the Latin distribution?

Should we have a senior statement? A one-credit class that meets for 6 lunch hours in the fall of a senior's graduation that helps students to help student's draft the intellectual biography that will become their senior statement (and that could be useful to students as they prepare applications for jobs and/or graduate school)?

Should we develop an early "seminar"—a mid-level requirement for all our majors, encouraged for the sophomore year? Could this be the methods course, renamed? Or a writing-based course that is an early seminar? Could we develop this course jointly—with SWG, CLT, ENG, AMS? Part of this is a larger question about a major requirement at the 200-level? (We seem to have sufficient participation at the entry-level in FYS—one from Adrienne and one from Daphne, with Kevin likely to develop one in the next three years.)

Should we develop a course specific to the junior year, a way to coalesce the experience for those who stay at Smith? Do the Presidential Seminars meet this objective sufficiently for our department?

Should we think about the careers our students pursue and think about our major in those terms (meaning how we articulate the rationale for the major, not so much what we require)?

On Staffing:

Another set of questions related to our staffing, especially as we think about the social science hire (though I think we should think about this in relationship to all of our courses): could we be more attuned to how to address historical (but not necessary history) gaps in our curriculum? For example, could we have a course on the sociology of the 19th century? A theory class that focuses on the materials of early black America? The theory of slave narratives? Are our courses too emphasized on the present, and do we rely too much on the history curriculum (ours and in other departments) to do work that our interdisciplinary curriculum could do?

Appendix B: Honors Guidelines

Guidelines for Honors in Afro-American Studies (for class of 2011 and beyond)

A student interested in honoring in the department of Afro-American Studies must complete all the major requirements and a thesis. The thesis consists of an 8-credit honors course, pursued over one or two semesters and during which the student completes a long document of original research, followed by a public presentation and an oral examination. The credits for the thesis substitute for one or two of the elective courses in the major.

Eligibility: A student must have at least a 3.5 GPA for all courses in the major, and at least a 3.3 GPA for courses outside the major through the junior year. A student must have fulfilled the requirements for Latin Honors distribution by the time of graduation, and must otherwise fit the College's criteria for honors eligibility, as defined by the Subcommittee on Honors and Independent Programs (SHIP). Documents that contains these terms are available from the Class Deans' Office (<http://www.smith.edu/classdeans/guidelines.php>, under "How Do I...Apply to the Honors Program").

Application: A completed application consists of all the required forms from SHIP (available from the Class Deans' Office), including the "Application to Enter Departmental Honors" and a 2-3 page proposal that describes the topic. This proposal should include the organizing questions, methods of analysis, and a short bibliography, and should have received the approval of the thesis adviser. The proposal should also discuss the student's preparedness to undertake the topic (including a discussion of coursework).

The student may also be required to attend a meeting with faculty to answer questions about her proposal. The department will vote on the proposal and then forward a recommendation to SHIP for final approval.

The application is due by 12 noon on the last day of classes of the final semester of a student's junior year. This application will be reviewed by the department, and returned to the student with comments for clarification, revision, and consideration. The student must submit a revised and final application in the fall semester of her senior year, due by 12 noon on the first Friday of the semester. The application should be submitted to 130 Wright Hall to the attention of the director of honors. A student who is intending to graduate in December should contact the director of honors for application guidelines.

Adviser: Any regularly appointed faculty in the department can serve as an adviser to the thesis. A student should contact the director of honors for the department if there are questions. Early in the thesis writing process the adviser, in consultation with the student, will choose a second reader. This reader can be outside of the department.

Calendar: The specific deadlines for the thesis can be established by the thesis adviser but must fit within the overall guidelines put forth by SHIP. A student must complete a significant draft of her thesis by the first day of classes in spring semester of her senior year. The final revised thesis is due the first day of April of that semester, and a student will schedule two presentations: one to her committee to take place before the start of final exams, and one open to the public. The dates and procedures for final submission of the thesis are outlined in the SHIP document and are the responsibility of the student.

Evaluation: The thesis should be at least 40 pages in length, or the equivalent if a creative project. In calculating the honors designation, the thesis counts 60%, the public presentation 10%, and the average of all courses taken in the department counts 30%.

For questions, a student should contact the director of honors in the department or the Senior Class Dean.

Appendix C: Courses regularly offered in AAS (does not include courses from allied academic units)

100 level

- 111 Introduction to Black Culture
- 113 Survey of Afro-American Literature: 1746-1900
- 114 African-American Literature 1900 to Present
- 117 History of Afro-American People to 1960
- 148 [FYS] Black Culture and Identity in Motion
- 124 [FYS] African-American Folk Culture

200 level

- 201 Methods of Inquiry
- 202 Anthropology of African Diaspora
- 202 Death and Dying in Black Culture
- 211 Black Cultural Theory
- 209 Feminism, Race and Resistance: History of Black Women in America
- 212 Culture and Class in the Afro-American Family
- 218 History of Southern Africa (1600 to about 1900)
- 222 Introduction to African American Music: Gospel, Blues and Jazz
- 243 Afro-American Autobiography
- 245 The Harlem Renaissance
- 249 Black Women Writers
- 278 The '60s: A History of Afro-Americans in the US from 1954 to 1970

300 level

- 335 Free Blacks in the U.S. before 1865
- 336 Literatures of the African Diaspora
- 345 Classic Black Texts (capstone)
- 354 Black Feminist Theory
- 360 Toni Morrison
- 366 Black Women, Work and Family
- 370 Modern Southern Africa

Appendix D: Early Draft of AAS Library Page

All majors in Afro-American studies are expected to be capable of doing research in three major areas—literature, history, and social science—as well as to bring those and other methodologies together in interdisciplinary efforts.

Writing Intensive Classes

A student should have experience with basic research skills in her writing intensive class, including [***]

Of particular interest are the writing intensive courses offered by faculty in the department: FYS 124 African-American Folk Culture and FYS 148 Black Culture and Identity in Motion.

Beginning Afro-American studies majors

Two of the four required courses for the major are introductory, and both provide a chance to learn particular research skills. In AAS 111 Introduction to Black Culture, students focus on major debates, aesthetics and turning points in black culture. This class is interdisciplinary and introduces students to textual close reading (of written, visual and sound texts), and culminates with an annotated bibliography assignment.

The other course is AAS 117 The History of Afro-American People to 1954, a broad historical survey that introduces students to primary documents and secondary historical sources. [Louis, can you add another sentence here?]

Intermediate-level study in the major

Because Afro-American studies is an interdisciplinary major, students have to become familiar with the research practices of at least three disciplines. At the intermediate level, students get the chance to hone specific disciplinary skills in history, literature and social science, while extending the introduction they had to interdisciplinary work in AAS 111. This is also where students are introduced to doing presentations.

The primary course at the intermediate level is AAS 201 Methods of Inquiry. The course is designed to introduce a student to the history and practices of various disciplinary methods used in Afro-American studies. A student in 201 will learn how to propose a research question, as well as how to pursue it to completion. This course is the gateway to further research practice in the major.

Research in literature

In courses like AAS 113 Survey of Afro-American Literature 1746-1900, AAS 114 African-American Literature 1900 to the Present, or AAS 245 The Harlem Renaissance, students learn the specific methods of literary inquiry. [Daphne, can you say something more about this here]

Research in history

In courses like AAS 209 The History of Black Women in America and AAS 278 The Sixties, students engage primary documents and explore the methods relevant to historical documents. [Louis, say something more here]

Research in social science

Our social science courses focus in two areas—sociology and anthropology. In courses like AAS 202 Anthropology of the African Diaspora or AAS 212 Culture and Class in the Afro-American Family, students learn how to engage qualitative and quantitative research material to interpret and analyze human behavior. Additionally, students learn how to read and interpret social scientific explanations of culture and identity, and how to use census and survey data, semi-structured interviews, and genealogical research.

Interdisciplinary research

Some of our intermediate courses are grounded firmly in interdisciplinary methods. In courses such as AAS 211 Black Cultural Theory or AAS 202 Death and Dying in Black Culture or AAS 243 Black Autobiography (and soon, AAS 202 Black Music and Literature), students are required to do close reading of various kinds of texts, but also to conduct research using historical, literary and social science methods. Assignments will require students to use library databases; visual, written and sound texts; as well as to create original arguments applying philosophical/theoretical concepts introduced in class.

Seminars/Capstone

At the advanced level, Afro-American studies students are expected to be expert in doing research in at least one discipline, familiar with the other areas, and able to engage interdisciplinary projects. Students are expected to be strong writers, to be familiar with using library databases to find scholarly and popular references, and to be able to critique and cross-reference sources.

These research skills are highlighted in the capstone seminar, AAS 366 Classic Black Texts. This course is intended to encourage students to revisit texts from earlier classes, but with a greater attention to research excellence. In this course, a student might be asked to trace a writer's research (that is, to look at some of the sources he/she used for the work), or to chronicle the intellectual reception of a work. The expectation in this course, as in all seminars, is a finer and deeper exploration of ideas based on strong research skills. Finally, in all seminars, students are expected to give presentations.

We are currently working to create a workshop for all seminar students. More to come soon.

Basic sources: [include list of resources from Riche]

Background:

Oxford African American Studies Center
Encyclopedia of African American Culture & History

Books:

Five College Library Catalog

Journals/Articles:

Journal locator (for finding journals/articles in full-text, print or via interlibrary loan)
Academic Search Premier
JSTOR
ProjectMuse

Preferred style manual:

MLA, Chicago, APA

Intermediate sources:

Some of the sources below are specific to Afro-American studies, but some are more general. In many cases, a student might be successful searching a general source for a specific topic or writer or concept.

Background:

Encyclopedia of African American History 1619-1895
Encyclopedia of the Great Black Migration
Encyclopedia of African and African-American Religions
Greenwood Encyclopedia of African American Literature
Writing African American Women: An Encyclopedia of Literature by and about Women of Color
etc.
Diaspora Encyclopedia?

Books:

WorldCat

Journals/Newspapers/Articles:

G.K. Hall index to Black Periodicals
The Kaiser Index to Black Resources, 1948-1986
Ethnic Newswatch
African American Newspaper: The 19th Century
Chicago Defender Historical

Dictionaries:

Juba to Jive: A Dictionary of African-American Slang

History: America: History and Life, Historical Abstracts

Literature: MLA International Bibliography, ABELL

Social Sciences: Sociological Abstracts, ASSIA: Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts, Abstracts in Anthropology Online, Anthropology Plus, AnthroSource

Some core journals:

African American Review
Afro-Hispanic Review
Callaloo
The Journal of African American History
Journal of Black Psychology
Journal of Black Studies
Journal of Negro Education
Race and Class
Review of Black Political Economy
Slavery and Abolition: a Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies

*Include some that are not particular to African Americans

*William and Mary Quarterly

*American Historical Review

*Transitions

*ASA journal

*Transforming Anthropology

*Journal of Marriage and Family

[also see attachment from Riche Barnes]