

Executive Summary.

The committee recommends that African American studies eventually achieve the status of a department. To thrive, the new unit needs to exploit the great wealth of resources represented by faculty not currently affiliated with AAWS who have an interest in revitalizing the program. The successful transition will best be achieved through a series of stages.

The reformation of African American studies should parallel other initiatives that invigorate the study of African American life and culture at the UI. The committee recommends the creation of a Center for Midwestern African American Life and Culture, to be administered by a university-wide advisory committee. The Center will serve as a focus for research, scholarship and programming, a locus for visiting faculty and a home for a post-doctoral program, and, by focusing on an underemphasized aspect of the African American experience, serve as a foundation for a research initiative that would be unique to the University of Iowa.

The Iowa Promise, the 2005-2010 strategic plan of the university, emphasizes diversity and its significance to educational excellence, the need for undergraduates to obtain global competency, and the need for the UI to effectively engage with its local, regional and global community members. Curricular and research units focusing on African American studies should be a catalyst for UI efforts on these fronts. The committee recommends a closer collaboration with various UI constituencies, including the UI cultural centers and student, faculty and staff organizations, as well as local and regional institutions to help create a beneficial climate.

A. Committee Composition and Charge

The African American Studies (AAS) Advisory Committee was appointed by Dean Maxson in fall 2004 and began its work in January 2005. Committee members were:

Chair: Lauren Rabinovitz, Professor, American Studies
Loyce L. Arthur, Associate Professor, Theatre Arts
Venise T. Berry, Associate Professor, Journalism and Mass Communication
Marcella David, Professor of Law & International Studies and Office of the Provost
Ed Folsom, Carver Professor of English
Michael E. Lomax, Associate Professor, Health and Sport Studies
Raymond A. Mentzer, Krumm Family Chair of Reformation Studies, Religious Studies
Salome Raheim, Associate Professor, Social Work
Leslie A. Schwalm, Associate Professor, History
Brooks Landon, Professor and Collegiate Fellow, English (ex officio)

The committee was charged with advising the College on "how to achieve a visible, vital presence in African American studies in order to meet the needs of the University's students and faculty and to promote academic vitality and diversity on our campus."

B. Process

The committee gathered information from a variety of sources. To provide a basis for understanding the range of program types, the committee collected information about African American studies programs at a range of institutions, including well-known programs and programs at peer institutions. The committee also met with various constituency groups, including AAWS core faculty, students pursuing AAWS BA and MA degrees, faculty teaching AAWS cross-listed courses and/or courses about African American life and society or race more generally, the Dean of the Graduate College, the chair of the African American Council, student groups, and the cultural house administration.

In meeting with AAWS core faculty, Brooks Landon (DEO of English, where AAWS is currently being administered) was absent to facilitate free and open discussion. Certain interviews were conducted by two-person teams of Committee members. In order to promote consistency, interviews were conducted pursuant to a set group of questions distributed to interviewees before their interviews. Individuals unable to attend scheduled meetings were given an opportunity to submit written responses.

C. Observations

- 1. The committee unanimously agrees that a vibrant program in African American Studies is important to the University; it is an important component to an institution of the UI's stature; it contributes to the diversity and quality of the educational experience; it can play an important role in the recruitment and retention of diverse students, faculty and staff; it is important to the professional development of faculty; and it has the potential to beneficially contribute to the climate of the UI, Iowa City, state and region.*
- 2. The committee recognizes that many view CLAS's recent change in AAWS's administrative status and reduced monetary support by the Graduate College as signaling that the UI does not appreciate the quality or significance of African American studies scholarship, and to a lesser extent, the UI does not value the contributions and cultural traditions of African American students, faculty and staff. Many of the people we interviewed expressed outrage that the situation has deteriorated to the extent that it has.*
- 3. The committee is excited by the genuine interest in African American studies voiced by faculty, students and staff from around the university. This interest underscores the need for a vibrant African American studies department, which has significant potential impact on the UI. Historically, Iowa's unique approach made us a national leader, and we still have the capacity to offer a unique African American studies program.*
- 4. The committee unanimously agrees that an African American studies unit must serve an essential institutional and community role in a non-urban university setting for promoting both African American identity and diversity. Unlike programs in urban settings that have many other African American community-based and cultural institutions, such an academic unit at the UI carries a broad mission.*
- 5. The current status of AAWS cannot be sustained. There is lack of cohesion in the unit and insufficient curricular vitality. The faculty has not implemented recommendations from the last two external reviews. The current faculty has failed to increase affiliated*

participation in order to expand and enrich the curriculum and the program. The College needs to embrace a plan for advancing the program, and new leadership is needed to assume responsibility for the advancement of a department in African American Studies.

6. *Our plan to reinvigorate an African American studies area will require a commitment to funding. We note that the Iowa Promise, the 2005-2010 strategic plan of the University, emphasizes diversity and its significance to educational excellence, and a unified plan to reinvigorate African American studies should be a top College and University funding priority central to achieving the goals of the Iowa Promise.*

D. Recommendations

General guidelines: Establish a clear timetable for stages of changes to the current unit; establish a clear set of benchmarks that should be reached if changes are to continue; establish a clear commitment of resources in support of this timetable and these benchmarks. Use these steps in conjunction with and/or support for whatever intellectual goals, specializations, or structures are set so that African American studies can achieve the status of a department.

These recommendations follow a three-stage process whereby African American studies will achieve the status of a department.

1. Within CLAS, a department should exist that focuses on the study of African American life and culture.

STAGE ONE:

- a. Begin in 2005-06 to build a new unit. No new unit will be formed until at least six faculty at UI agree to 25% appointments in the new African American studies unit, with every faculty member having a full vote in unit decisions. Additional faculty who wish only 0% appointments should also be encouraged to participate fully in unit decisions.
- b. Maintain current curriculum for BA and MA programs and guarantee that majors and current grad students can complete their degrees.

STAGE TWO:

- a. Identify a Program Coordinator from the group of affiliated faculty.
- b. Under the direction of the Program Coordinator, write a Manual of Operations for the new unit, with final approval from CLAS.
- c. Upon achievement of STAGE TWO, begin searches to hire a minimum of 3 faculty with 25% appointments in the new unit and 75% primary appointments in a home department. Searches are to be conducted by primary appointment department, with search committee representation from the new program unit.
- d. If at least two of the searches are fulfilled, repeat process with three more searches in 2008-09 under same procedures.

STAGE THREE:

When the new unit reaches FTE of 5, consider changing program status to Department.

2. **An expanded faculty base of core and affiliated appointments who share in governance of the unit.**

STAGE ONE:

- a. Build a faculty base of affiliated appointments of 0% or 25%.

Rationale: If the Dean wishes, this committee will invite in fall 2005 a wide range of current UI faculty to consider these appointments, subject to approval by appropriate DEOs and Deans. We believe the structure and nature of the "invitation" process is crucial if there is to be any success in expanding affiliated faculty participation. Start with interested faculty who have cross-listed courses or courses that focus on African American issues. Resources should be used to offer incentives (i.e., research assistance, travel, buy out for course release). Incentives are critical for success: although the burdens on cross-listed faculty may seem lessened by the clearer, contracting procedures now in place, there is nonetheless a perceived burden to junior faculty, in particular, in being affiliated with two units.

- b. If at least 6 faculty accept 25% appointments in 05-06 and 06-07, invite tenured faculty to apply for Program Coordinator in 2007-08.

STAGE TWO:

- a. At the Program Coordinator's invitation and College/primary department approval, as many as 5 of the affiliated faculty might be invited to change their African American studies appointments to 50%, starting in 2008-09.
- b. [In concert with the Center -- #4 below]: For 2007-08, advertise a nationwide postdoc competition for PhDs in any Humanities or Social Science disciplines relevant to African American studies. Posts would be for 2 years, would require the teaching of 1 course per semester plus participation in annual seminars. Stipends would have to be attractive/competitive, and include a research budget. The Program recruits 2 postdocs each year, and they would be supervised/mentored by program faculty and Program Coordinator.

Rationale: A post-doc program is a significant way to recruit minority faculty to campus; it is a way of infusing new intellectual vitality to the program; it is a way of putting the program "on the map," as it would be advertised widely in academic publications, etc.

- c. [In concert with the Center -- #4 below]: Institute a distinguished visiting professor in the program for one semester or one year. Rank would be at associate or full, with highly competitive salary.

Rationale: This program is important as a counterpart to the post-doc program, since the latter will attract new talent and invest in the future, while we are also in immediate need of additional senior scholars and mentors. The committee recommends that, for Iowa, it is impractical to consider multiple searches at these ranks since we will not only be competing with the top, richest private schools in the country but also that senior-level recruitment as the single solution to achieve long-term stability of African American studies programs has not been nationally successful. An attractive visiting program is a more feasible alternative for our resources and ability to draw high-profile, top scholars.

STAGE THREE:

When the unit achieves the status of a Department, invite individual affiliated faculty to

change their African American studies appointments to 50% or 100%, subject to approval of DEOs and College Deans.

3. **Re-invigorate the MA program and develop linkages to various PhD programs.**
4. **Create a Center for the in-depth study of a topic in African American studies.**

While the topic is up to CLAS and interested faculty, the Committee strongly recommends a Center for Midwestern African American Life and Culture.

Rationale: The Committee recommends this particular focus as one that is unique nationally, particularly well suited for the University of Iowa, and one that met with much enthusiasm among committee members and interested faculty. Given Iowa's location at the crossroads between major urban African-American centers in Chicago, Kansas City, St. Louis, and Minneapolis, and given its proximity to numerous rural African-American communities, UI would be a fitting site for such an academic focus. Iowa could become known as the university that is helping to re-position African American studies so that East Coast cities are no longer the sole area of interest. In addition to the much-studied Harlem Renaissance, there have also been major flowerings of African-American culture in midwestern cities. Scholarship on midwestern African-American literature, history, and culture is developing quickly, and Iowa has the opportunity to help lead the way. Such a Center would also give Iowa a strong recruiting base in midwestern urban centers, since graduate students could work on dissertation projects focused on midwestern sites, and Iowa's location thus becomes a virtue instead of a liability. (However, if a different topical focus better suits developing research strengths, the Committee is more interested in establishing a unique focus in depth to this program than this particular focus.)

STAGE ONE:

- a. Establish an interdisciplinary unit with strong affiliation to the African American studies academic unit and with a governance structure and board that draws faculty from a range of departments and even colleges.
- b. The College needs to lead in 2005-06 for applying for University reallocation funding and resources to create this center in 2006-07.
- c. Appoint an interim director for the Center from among affiliated faculty in the African American studies unit.

STAGE TWO:

- a. At least one of the searches in 2007-08 needs to be for a senior scholar in either the Humanities or Social Sciences whose research interests fit the Center's focus and who might provide future Center leadership. To insure the longevity of this program, a successful search for this position must be concluded by 2008-09.
- b. The Center shall regularly sponsor speakers, faculty seminars, and other forums, and such interdisciplinary research programs shall be part of its mission and a dedicated part of its funding.
- c. An alternative to the Program, the Center may be the administrative home for the Postdocs, the distinguished Visiting Professor, and the annual faculty seminar of affiliated faculty and postdocs.

STAGE THREE:

When the academic Program achieves the status of a Department, reconsider administrative structure in order to maintain a symbiotic relationship between the Department and the Center.

5. **The Department and the Center need to work together to make connections to the community ("public engagement"). These inter-connected units have an important added burden of a community service mission in a non-urban university setting.**
 - a. The Committee encourages both the academic program/department and the Center to work collaboratively and imaginatively with existing campus and community organizations and institutions, e.g., the Darwin S. Turner Action Theater, the African American Cultural Center, the African American Museum of History in Cedar Rapids.
 - b. The Department and Center need to take the opportunity to lead the community in a number of activities that could include such important services as: a central website on African American culture and life in the area, co-sponsorship of the Black Culture Network, readings groups that might involve both UI and area residents.