

## **FEASIBILITY OF AN AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES MINOR AT TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY**

Provost Gene Bourgeois charged a working group composed of representatives from Texas State's nine colleges to explore the feasibility of an African American Studies Minor at Texas State University. In determining feasibility, the working group was to answer the following questions:

1. Is a minor worthwhile? Meaning:
  - Would it be academically meaningful?
  - Would it add value to a degree?
  - Would it enhance career opportunities?
2. What will it be called?
3. If the degree is feasible, do additional classes need to be added?

### **1. Is a minor worthwhile? Meaning:**

#### **Would it be academically meaningful?**

We feel that the minor would be academically meaningful. The minor would be interdisciplinary, so students could select the minor no matter their major field of study. There are currently 17 courses in the Texas state curriculum that have as their primary or exclusive focus the African American or African experience. An additional 26 courses address the African or American experience along the experiences of other racial/ethnic groups – bringing the total number of courses to 43. The course offerings represent 18 different academic departments and academic units and 6 of 8 Colleges (Liberal Arts, Applied Arts, Education, Fine Art and Communication, McCoy, and Honors). A total of 17 of the of the 43 courses are located in the College of Liberal Arts.

The African American Studies group sees existing curriculum as being centered around history and culture, which adds to the breadth of educational opportunities offered to all students. For students with little exposure to racially or ethnically diverse experiences, an academic course of study in the form of an African American Studies program offers the opportunity for deep understanding of issues.

In terms of its meaning for some specific programs, the Bachelor of General Studies (BGS) is an interdisciplinary degree program. Adding an interdisciplinary minor choice to the BGS student's opportunities would be highly desirable. Students in the Honors College (and non-Honors students) seem to be hungry to learn about the past history and culture of the African diaspora. Students also can make contributions to their understanding of the African diaspora through

research and creative projects, while facilitating in-depth discussions of the diaspora and history (cultural, social, and political) of Americans of African descent. Students in the College of Health Professions are preparing to serve the healthcare needs of the general public. Therefore, learning about the African/African American experience can better prepare students to identify, understand, and meet the needs of African/African American clients.

Students would also benefit from intensive study about a population that, regardless of discipline, they can expect to work with, for, or on behalf of. Students would learn multicultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes that would be transferable to other populations. The curriculum for this minor would be multi-disciplinary, allowing for complex exploration and academic rigor. The minor also opens the opportunity for cross racial mentorship, especially since Texas State is a majority-minority institution.

### **Does it add value to a degree?**

Value would be added to any major field of study with the selection of this minor. The exposure of students to the histories and experiences of the African diaspora is invaluable. An understanding of the different experiences can be a tool in dispelling myths and stereotypes. This minor will contribute to students' ability to understand who we are as a nation and how that understanding relates to the world. Students with this minor should be able to write well, think critically, and work with others with sensitivity and appreciation. The opportunity to engage in meaningful interdisciplinary study about topics of relevance to living in a diverse society would be truly life changing for many of our students and would help many be more engaged with academics.

Specifically, in the College of Applied Arts, especially social work and consumer sciences, jobs are heavily client based and practitioners in these disciplines engage with diverse populations. With an African-American studies minor, students would be better equipped to serve and understand diverse clients. The field of Education is faced with the increasing phenomenon of student bodies being more diverse than faculties. In Curriculum and Instruction, for example, teachers with an African-American studies minor could better serve and understand the experiences and struggles of their increasingly diverse students.

Additionally, an effective way in which companies seek to attract minority consumers is through multicultural marketing, a type of marketing that caters to those in a specific nationality or ethnic group. Coupling a marketing degree with, for example, an African-American studies minor, would provide marketing firms with the human capital to create marketing campaigns that attract African-American and other ethnic consumers. An African American studies minor would be an asset to any of the Health Professions degrees. One of the most fundamental principles of providing health care is to do so with awareness and respect for the patients' values. An African American Studies minor may provide health professions students with a broader understanding of their patient's values and experiences. In addition, obtaining a minor of this nature may better prepare our health professions students to treat

patients of all cultural backgrounds, as their awareness of the impact of culture on healthcare may improve overall.

Developing an understanding of the complex fabric of history, culture, and contributions of Africans and African Americans to our society would potentially enable our students to be major contributors to the betterment of society. Finally, this type of interdisciplinary minor provides a strong basis for graduate and professional work.

### **Does it enhance career opportunities?**

A deeper understanding of the African diaspora would certainly contribute to a student's picture of the world by widening it and making the student see farther. Students who have successful careers are those who work well with others, have an interdisciplinary understanding of how the world works, and who appreciate others' backgrounds as they see their strengths. One only needs to explore job listings on monster.com or other major recruiting venues to see that cultural competencies and the ability to work with a diverse group of team members and a diverse public are skills sought after by employers. In addition, the transferrable skills gained through interdisciplinary work (strong communication skills, the ability to read and synthesize, and the ability to understand and solve complex problems, etc.) are valuable to employers.

As stated above, employees, both public and private, continue to desire employees who have a background in diversity. It indicates an ability to understand and work with others. The Bureau of Labor Statistics documents a need for employees in fields where diversity knowledge is important as well as an increase in the need for these types of jobs. A sampling of job titles includes Diversity Manager, Global Diversity Strategist, Diversity Recruitment Program Manager, Diversity and EEO Specialist, and Workforce Diversity Director. The website Matching Diversity Studies with Jobs lists 70 different career areas in which diversity is an important element. MatchingDiversityStudies.com lists 70 different career areas in which diversity is an important element.

An African American studies minor will make students more marketable, especially given the growing number of culturally diverse workplace settings. Employers who are hiring employees to work in culturally diverse workplaces and serve culturally diverse clients will recognize the value of employees who have the knowledge and desire to understand diverse perspectives and experiences.

## **2. What will it be called?**

The working group recommends that the name of the program will be African American Studies and the scope will be the African diaspora. The name and scope of the programs is consistent with many other programs around the country. Making the scope the African Diaspora also allows us to pull a greater number of existing courses into the minor. It also provides the

opportunity for a great number of faculty to be affiliated with the minor via existing or new course offerings.

**3. What will be the structure of the minor? Do additional courses need to be added?**

The working group recommends that the minor be 18 hours with two require courses (6 hrs.) with an AAS prefix (course to be determined and created). The working group also recommends that courses that have the African diaspora as their primary or exclusive focus be cross listed. This will facilitate affiliations with other faculty and departments.

**FURTHER SUGGESTIONS/REQUESTS/ DIRECTION OF WORKING GROUP'S TASKS**

1. The assignment (hire) of a faculty program coordinator, to manage putting the minor in place and working on the development in collaboration with a standing African American Studies Advisory Council (Interdisciplinary).
2. We request that the existing Feasibility Working Group be continued as the Implementation Working Group. The group is engaged and committed to seeing an African American Studies minor come to fruition at Texas State.
3. Members of the group will meet with interested faculty prior to spring break. The purpose of the meeting will be to facilitate support and identify faculty who which to creates course for the program. After spring break the group will meet with interested student groups to inform them on our work and get feedback.
4. The working group is moving ahead with putting together the program form for the degree.

Sincerely,

Audwin Anderson (chair), Liberal Arts  
Rose Pulliam, Applied Arts  
Sidney (Sid) Anderson, McCoy Business  
Kristen Duncan, Education  
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