

Mellon 23 Faculty Workshop Proposal
Africana/Diaspora Studies in the 21st Century:
Building Community through a Northeast Consortium

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION:

“Africana/Diaspora Studies in the 21st Century” provides participating faculty opportunities to discuss the implications of recent shifts in Africana/Diaspora Studies, to workshop syllabi, share resources, and begin plans for a consortium based on ongoing digital collaboration between programs in small East Coast colleges, as well as between students and scholars throughout the black diaspora.

Although at the inception of the discipline in the 1960s, Black Studies was concerned with the material realities, political and economic histories, societies, and cultures of Africans and peoples of African descent, in practice, most programs attended primarily to the experiences of African Americans. Recently, the field has fundamentally shifted from a national towards a more global orientation that privileges post-colonial discourses and focuses on language studies, oral history, intersubjectivity, and experiential learning through internships and study abroad programs. These transformations have been reflected institutionally at some of the most prominent Black Studies departments, such as at Harvard and Ohio State, which have restructured their departments to accord equal attention to Africa and the U.S. While 14% of Black Studies programs continue to be situated under “Ethnic Studies” with its implied emphasis on a national framework, an equal percentage identify as “African and African American Studies” with its implied global emphasis (Alkalimat 14).

Our faculty workshop will bring together Black Studies scholar/educators to pose and address key questions resulting from these transformations:

If Black Studies departments formed to produce corrective accounts and disseminate marginalized knowledge on black Americans, what are the political, institutional, and disciplinary implications of the shift towards increased focus on Africana/Diaspora Studies? How have smaller liberal arts colleges, with their more limited institutional resources, responded to disciplinary transformations? How are Black Studies programs situated in relation to American, Ethnic, Post-colonial, Area, and Women’s Studies fields, and to what effects?

The global and multi-disciplinary reach of our programs means that our core faculty do not often have the opportunity to confer at disciplinary conferences or professional meetings. This workshop thus provides a much-needed opportunity to bring together geographically proximate programs and departments that have not previously worked together to lay the groundwork for future collaborative ventures.

Our goals will be to:

1. Compare and revise introductory syllabi;
2. Create an online consortium of Africana/Diaspora programs with links to department web pages and a sponsored faculty chatroom to enable:

- a. Sharing resources, especially curricula and syllabi
 - b. Collaborative lobbying for additional faculty lines and support for institutional transformation, such as turning programs into departments or creating minors
 - c. Working with organizations like the Association for the Worldwide Study of the African Diaspora (ASWAD);
3. Discuss how technology might enable diaspora-wide conversation amongst students and faculty.

The day will have three components: (I) a panel discussion amongst Africana Chairs about the future of the field, (II) workshopping syllabi and assignments, (III) a discussion of using technology for collaboration and international outreach.

Work Cited

Alkalimat, Abdul. "Africana Studies in the US." <http://eblackstudies.org/su/complete.pdf>.

LIST OF FACULTY

The one-day "Africana/Diaspora Studies in the 21st Century" faculty workshop will convene faculty from the following colleges and universities to participate in a series of meetings to be held at Barnard College in New York.

"Mellon 23" Participants:

Barnard College (Kim F. Hall, Abosede George, Christine Cynn)
 Haverford College (Tracey Hucks + 1)
 Middlebury College (Darién J. Davis, Jacob Tropp)
 Smith College (Paula Giddings, Kevin Quashie)
 Vassar College (Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert + 1)
 Wellesley College (Filomina Steady, Ophera Davis)

Non-"Mellon 23" facilitators/invitees:

Columbia University: Steven Gregory
 Princeton University: Valerie Smith
 Fordham University: Irma Watkins-Owens
 William Paterson College: Hiram Perez

WORKSHOP PLAN:

Mellon 23 colleges, workshop leaders and invited participants:

The colleges submitting this proposal are at various stages of reflection on the future of Black Studies. Vassar and Smith are perhaps the most established, with department status and faculty lines. Wellesley seeks to secure its status with new lines. Barnard College relatively recently moved from Pan-African to Africana Studies and is proposing a new minor. Middlebury College has had an African Studies major and minor, but is considering the creation of a Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity that would include study of the diaspora. All of these colleges have small numbers of faculty working in diaspora studies, and their teaching and scholarly lives would be enriched by the community created through a consortium.

I. INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE AND THE FUTURE OF DIASPORA

Facilitator: **Filomina Chioma Steady**, Professor and Chair of Africana Studies at Wellesley College. Professor Steady has ongoing research interests in development theories and social transformation in Africa and the African diaspora as well as broad experience in issues of women and international development.

Invited Participants:

Valerie Smith, Woodrow Wilson Professor of Literature and Director of the Center for African American Studies, Princeton University. Professor Smith is overseeing an unprecedented expansion of the Center which the university plans to make the pre-eminent site for the study of race in America.

Irma Watkins-Owens, Associate Professor of History & Associate Chair, Department of African and African American studies, Fordham University. Although Fordham is not a small college, theirs was one of the earliest programs that made the shift from African to African-American Studies (1980s). Professor Watkins-Owens has been invited to discuss the impact of that shift in focus.

Steven Gregory, Associate Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Institute for African-American Studies, Columbia University. Professor Gregory's research interests include urban ethnography, political economy and globalization. His research on African American culture and Dominican cultures gives an international perspective on redefinitions of African-American culture.

II. CHANGING PROGRAMS/CHANGING PEDAGOGIES:

Facilitator: **Darién J. Davis**, Associate Professor of History, Middlebury College. Professor Davis works on race and slavery in Latin America. He teaches both introduction to the Black diaspora and introduction to the Atlantic World. He has a particular interest in incorporating study of the diaspora into a range of courses, as well as in using web resources in teaching.

Invited Participant:

Hiram Perez, Assistant Professor of English, William Paterson University. Professor Perez's work on race, citizenship and sexuality puts him at the intersection of many fields that overlap with black/diaspora studies: post-colonial, queer studies and women's studies. He is invited to this session particularly to offer input and models on introducing issues of sexuality and gender in introductory syllabi.

III. THE DIGITAL DIASPORA:

Facilitator: **Kim F. Hall**, Lucyle Hook Professor of English and Director of Africana Studies at Barnard. In addition to her work on early modern race formation and its imbrications with gender, Kim F. Hall, has both pedagogical and administrative interest in using technology to enhance learning and build community. She has taught a graduate seminar, "Shakespeare Unbound," which examined Shakespeare on film and the web in the context of media theory. As Director of Barnard's Middle Passage Initiative, she recently oversaw the creation of a student website, *Ghana mete wo nne* that documented an historic Omohundro Institute conference on abolition held in Ghana: www.barnard.edu/africana/metewonne.