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To: Su Swarat, Associate Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness

From: Dr. Sheryl Fontaine, Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences and Associate Dean of Student Relations, Dr. Jessica Stern

Date: July 28, 2023

Subject: Dean's Summary and Evaluation of the BA in Ethnic Studies, African American Studies

The Department of African American Studies celebrated its 50 year anniversary on campus during the pandemic. This is a critically important department in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences and, moreover, the university. They are currently home to five tenure/tenure-track faculty and two more joining the department in Fall 2023. The department offers a BA in Ethnic Studies, African American Studies Concentration, as well as a minor. As of the Spring 2023 census they have 10 majors and 22 minors. In that same semester, they filled 1162 seats in their courses, a testament to the essential role they play across the General Education curriculum.

The African American Studies department is also a leader in engaging students in High Impact Practices through events that bring artists, scholars, and community members to campus, and our students into the community. Some examples of this is the 2018 Black Disability Symposium and the 2019 event, "Stay Woke: Diversity, Leadership, Donald Trump, and the Future of America." The commitment to intellectual growth and civic engagement is epitomized by the department's collaboration with the Institute of Black Intellectual Innovation.

Dean Sheryl Fontaine, Associate Dean Jessica Stern, and chair Siobhan Brooks met on April 26 to discuss the Self Study, External Review Team (ERT) report, and Department's response to that report. In the remainder of this memo we record and build on that discussion about the department's short and long term priorities.

### **Major Courses and GE**

Most of our April 26<sup>th</sup> discussion surrounded the important question of whether the African American Studies department can have a curricular identity outside of its General Education offerings, a question the department has been discussing and that the External Review Team asked as well when probing the mission and goals of the program. When departments are limited to teaching GE courses only, faculty can feel detached from their more specialized area of research,



lose the opportunity to be a scholar teacher, and have no place in the curriculum to engage in the in-depth discussions that occur in major courses, which, in turn, robs their major students of a key element of a BA. Associate Dean Stern, Chair Brooks, and Vice Chair Graham had a follow-up meeting in June to discuss strategies. The main takeaways were:

1. The Department can review its commitment to other GE categories outside of Area F and revise its GE offerings to better align with current faculty interests. In other words, the department can replace currently-approved GE courses with those that feel more aligned with faculty research interests. This suggestion also aligns with the ERT recommendation that the course offerings be reviewed. We note that the department was very creative in developing its Area F courses. Instead of moving existing courses into Area F, the department created courses like AFAM 280: Black Creative Expression and AFAM 260: Black Lives Matter, Creative and Critical Ideas. This provides an example of how GE courses can be creatively cast.
2. Raising the caps in high-demand courses (without risking class quality) will allow the department to have lower caps/fill rates in other classes, making sure that department targets are met while protecting more specialized courses from being cancelled for low enrollment.
3. Based on the data related to enrollment/target/budget, without any changes, the current number of majors and minors can sustain 1-2 non-GE courses.
4. Changing the major requirements would create better pipelines for specific courses and make it more likely they will fill (ie instead of requiring 12 upper-division AFAM courses the program can specify 3 of those units be at the 400-level).
5. The department can follow the lead of American Studies and Geography who have used promotion in GE classes and connections with Community Colleges to grow their majors and minors.

When the Department is ready, they will hold a curriculum retreat to discuss these topics. Dean's office has offered to support by presenting at the retreat.

### **Mission and Identity**

Discussions about curriculum are interlaced with discussions about a program's mission and identity. Though the External Review Team suggested that the department hire more faculty with PhDs in African American Studies and adopt a less local, Orange county focus, the department disagrees. They see the benefit of having an interdisciplinary faculty, with degrees from a variety of disciplines. Moreover, this strategy has paid off. The department boasts an innovative and accomplished faculty who are prepared to help students master African American Studies from the perspective of music, poetry, sociology, history, ethnography, and more. At the same time they are



committed to grounding their department identity in expanding knowledge about black culture, art, community, and history in Orange County. This emphasis allows them to fulfil their mission of connecting broad intellectual growth with civic engagement. The Dean's Office supports the department in these decisions, and believes they can gain both local and national recognition by inhabiting this stance. One example of the way the department is grounding a broad intellectual experience in local history is their plan to engage with national professional organizations in African American Studies by taking a group of students to the national conference on the Study of African American History, Life, and Culture.

### **Budget and Staff**

Area F Allocation: Each year the College receives \$900,000 in baseline dollars to support the Ethnic Studies requirement. That money, according to the Chancellor's Office, is meant to offset the cost of the "instructional, administrative, and one-time Associate Degree for Transfer review activities" required to offer an Ethnic Studies course to every CSU student (Coded Memo B, 2021-02). In discussion with the three department chairs in late Summer/early Fall 2021 (when we were first made aware of these funds) we identified space and staff as the two major areas where we needed to build capacity in order to serve the Area F demand. To ensure that funds are available when the campus identifies space to the ES departments (CSUF traditionally places the majority of renovation costs on the colleges/departments) \$600,000 per year will be placed into an account marked for these purposes until we have collected \$1M (a guestimated cost for anticipated renovations). Once this goal has been reached, the baseline dollars will be available for the departments. Currently, the remaining \$300,000 is tagged as Area F funds and distributed equally to the three departments to use in ways they identify as necessary to offer quality Area F courses.

To date, Area F funds have supported curricular development, advising, and programming. As the student demand and (we hope) the major grow, we anticipate it will be needed in the future for tenure track lines to expand instruction and the curriculum. The deans office will continue to provide each of the three departments will details on the funds that are available and encourage conversations within and among the departments and the deans office around most efficient and impactful use of the baseline dollars.

Staff: The Dean's office agrees that the department needs more staff support, and we have been working deliberately over the last year to identify the best structure for the administrative support: separate ASCs for each department or one ASC for the the three departments and an ASA for each program, or something else. After the long-term ASC in that office accepted a position in Pollak Library, long-term planning was delayed as we sought short term support. Unfortunately, both short and long-term administrative positions have been very difficult to fill. The deans office was able to bring a retired annuitant in to help, and, this summer, we were able to hire a permanent ASCII who will now be trained by the retired annuitant. We are hopeful that having this position in



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place (and the perspective of the retired annuitant and a new HR Manager in the DO, we will have a long-term staffing plan finalized by the end of the Fall semester.

We close this memo by noting the heroic efforts of the African American Studies department has taken since the last review. It is no easy feat for a small department to grow in such a short period of time. The African American Studies leadership team has assembled a group of innovative scholars, deeply committed teachers, and public intellectuals/champions. They have created Area F courses, intellectual spaces, and community partnerships that will nourish and inspire students across the campus for the next 50 years and beyond.