

March 3, 2016

To: Dean Sheryl Fontaine

From: External Reviewers

**Jesse Mills, Associate Professor and Chair, Ethnic Studies,
University of San Diego**

**Leigh Raiford, Associate Professor and Chair, African American Studies,
University of California, Berkeley**

**Eileen Walsh, Associate Professor and Chair, Sociology,
California State University, Fullerton**

Re: African American Studies Department External Review

Per your request, we are pleased to present our assessment of the African American Studies Department based on our visit to campus, a review of the self-study, material provided by the department, a teaching observation, and interviews with the Chair, faculty, staff and students. Our visit took place on February 9, 2016, and we would like to thank professors Erica Ball, Siobhan Brooks, Natalie Graham, Tyler Parry, Stan Breckenridge, and Gwen Alexis for generously sharing their perspectives and experiences. We also met with Dean Sheryl Fontaine, Associate Dean for Student Relations Lynn Sargeant, Associate Professor of Chicano Studies Alexandro Jose Gradilla, Associate Professor of Asian American Studies Eliza Noh, Administrative Coordinator Sonia Velez, and students majoring or double majoring in African American Studies.

By any criteria, the Department is a strong academic unit. It does an excellent job of supporting its majors and other students of color as a safe, comfortable place while at the same time challenging them with rigorous courses. The faculty members are first-rate, productive as teachers and scholars, and genuinely committed to student success. There is high collegiality, an incredible commitment to service, and admirable, complementary diversity in the faculty's background and interests.

Although the Department has made great strides under the leadership of Erica Ball, the Department faces a number of challenges. In particular, the level of service by both junior tenure track faculty and lecturers is not sustainable. Second, with no Associate or Full Professors, there needs to be a succession plan for leadership when the current Chair's term expires. Third, the program has the potential to grow, but structural constraints beyond the Department's control limit its ability to serve all students who are interested: classroom allocation, space for staff and faculty offices, a 4/4 workload, and too few tenured faculty.

COMMENDATIONS:

Leadership.

As a unanimous verdict among the faculty and students, Erica Ball has brought much needed leadership to the Department and empowered the stakeholders to build a strong curriculum, a culture responsive to students, and a remarkable collegiality.

Work Ethic.

All tenure track and lecturer faculty work tirelessly to improve the success of students who major in AFAM and those who take AFAM classes. They have revamped the curriculum, including revising the minor requirements, and have offered 12 new or substantively updated courses over the past three years. As is often true in ethnic studies departments, all the faculty pay the cultural tax of being people of color—demands not only from students but from units across the university needing a minority voice on committees and desiring speakers for events, both on and off campus. Some activities that were mentioned include being called on for Black History Month, Pan-African Graduation, and speaking to prospective students, work that is taken on by both tenure-track faculty and lecturers alike. This is all in addition to the advising that all faculty do which goes far beyond advice on what courses to take.

We also want to commend the departmental staff who remain remarkably committed to both the students and the program despite limited resources.

Student Centered Culture.

The faculty are extremely accessible to students well beyond scheduled office hours. Along with staff, they create a welcoming atmosphere that provides a safe place where student-faculty relations are fostered. The review team notes that this is exceptional and good fortune for the department and campus, but is not sustainable. During the teaching demonstration, we saw a fine example of student-centered, critical pedagogy with a well-facilitated excavation of the assigned text that invited and fluidly wove in the personal experiences, reactions, and reflections of the notably diverse enrolled students.

We also had the opportunity to meet with a group of 5 racially and ethnically diverse majors (most were double majors in the department). Our impression was that these students felt intellectually nourished but are also hungry for more classes and more faculty in the Department. Students described the major as “rigorous and theoretical but with the ability for theory to leave the classroom and be applied elsewhere.” And they offered consistently high praise for the faculty: “Professors are personable, available, always find a way to make time for students”; they are “welcoming and inviting, [yet] challenging” professors provide “wonderful advising”; “faculty goes above and beyond” and are simply “a cut above.”

Diversity.

The faculty comprise a diverse set of skills, disciplines pedagogy. As an interdisciplinary faculty, there is a remarkable amount of collaboration and synergy. The result is an approach to the contributions of Black life that is holistic, rigorous, and could provide the center of intellectual inquiry about the contributions of African Americans.

It was abundantly clear during our visit that all of this excellent work is coming at a cost. Everyone—faculty and administrative staff—are all stretched very thin.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Given the excellence of the African American Studies Department, we recommend that the administration facilitate the growth allowing AFAM to become the intellectual center of the study of black life and racialized blackness at CSU Fullerton. Given the importance of diversity within the student body, the university and the nation, supporting this department is the right thing to do. In particular we offer the following specific recommendations:

Recommendations to the Department

- Generate and adopt departmental by-laws to clarify responsibilities, policies and procedures of the Department. By-laws establish a structure for effective departmental functioning that will be increasingly important as the faculty, students, and workload continue to grow.
- Strategic hiring plan. Formalize and present to the Dean plans to hire faculty in areas of carceral studies, visual culture to build up the arts, and black entrepreneurship to support business majors, pre-business majors and communications majors. These areas represent developing trends in the field and will enhance the relevance and effectiveness of the Department moving forward.
- Respond to student requests by continuing to provide enriching activities. Students specifically requested: organize a panel of professionals with AFAM degrees who can present what you can do with the major, “meet your professors” dinners, African American student research programs, BSU and student organization collaboration with the department, and increased community collaboration with students.
- Re-examine course offerings and schedule. Students requested better ability to get the classes they need with increased offerings, especially during the semester, and changing up the days. Students also requested more courses tying in the arts to African American Studies, art history, politics, law, social sciences, and contemporary issues.
- Strategically plan for the ideal institutional situation for the department. We heard a number of opinions: as a standalone department, as part of an Ethnic Studies “division”, or to continue with current structure. It is clear to the reviewers that there are great synergies both administratively and intellectually, and possibly senior hires in both might help with long-term stability of African American Studies and Chicano Studies. This question deserves further study and time as the department grows.
- The department needs to prioritize its financial needs and pursue support from the administration to meet those needs.

Recommendations to the College and University Administration

Faculty Support.

- Build the faculty with two new hires and two replacements.
 - At least one hire needs to be at the associate level
- Better retention efforts for faculty - Recognizing the excellence and substantial contributions of the current tenure-track faculty, especially with few resources, we recommend the Dean research and implement an aggressive retention plan for the department. The hiring of a committed, ambitious, collegial, and complementary junior faculty is a high accomplishment in the academy, and creating conditions that advance and facilitate this group's professional development are appropriate for the longer-term well being of African American students, staff and faculty at CSUF.
- Funding for curriculum changes already done. The current junior faculty have substantially revised the curriculum, innovative new course development, especially around high impact practices and service-learning, and are re-creating the department from the bottom up. This additional burden of teaching and service should be recognized and compensated, including retroactively.
- Move tenure-track faculty to a 3/3 teaching load. The current workload is not sustainable for tenure-track faculty, who are heavily invested and passionate in outreach, programming and teaching. The service load for this department is unlike that of other departments, with increased collaboration with other departments and student centers, increased mentoring, advising, and retention of students of color, innovating and revamping the curriculum, and with increased representation of diversity for on and off-campus events. A 3/3 teaching load would allow the faculty to better meet the uncommon demands placed upon them by the students and university.
- Increased compensation to current external chair in the department chair position. This is a "low-hanging fruit" that will lend important stability and continuity to the department in the short and medium term. Compensation might include course reassignment (reduced load) and office space.
- Complementary hiring - Require all African Americanist hirings in other departments to complement the current expertise within the department and its strategic hiring plan (to be developed by the department). Create formal service structures and acknowledgement/compensation for African Americanist faculty across the college to collaborate and grow professionally with AFAM.
- Equitable treatment of adjunct faculty
 - More permanence for long term lecturers
 - Retirement plan for Stan Breckenridge
 - More lecturers to allow for broader course offerings

Departmental Support.

- Increase support staff. Currently three, highly-active departments share one ASC, a recently added ASA, one student assistant without work study, and a graphic designer. This administrative load includes 14 full-time faculty, 1 Emeritus

faculty member, 25-30 part time faculty, support for a packed calendar of faculty, student, and student center events. As the faculty continue to raise the profile of and demand for the department, this administrative support burden will only increase.

- Increased departmental budgets. Participants reported the O&E budget has not changed since 2002, although the faculty and student numbers, as well as service and administrative workload have all greatly increased. Specifically, increased funding should be offered to support faculty/student events and faculty travel.
- Office/building improvements. The facilities should be expanded and improved to serve as a space for students of color, and additional offices (for the chair and adjunct faculty at least) should be made available.

Curricular Support.

- Revise location within GE. Currently the lower division required courses sit in upper division GE slots. We were unable to ascertain the origin or rationale for maintenance of this GE location, but no faculty members we met felt empowered to change this situation. The counter-intuitive location of the lower division courses minimizes students' access to what majors describe as "life-changing" experiences that "got them hooked" while they still have latitude to determine their major course of study. The appropriate placing of lower division AFAM courses in lower division GE requirement categories represents a zero-cost, "low hanging fruit" that makes coherent sense and would benefit the department and students across the university. Additionally, students requested that more AFAM courses be offered as GE.
- Assign AFAM courses to classrooms with larger capacities. The demand for larger class capacities was made abundantly clear to the external review team during the visit. FTES is considered the single most important criterion for the importance and contributions of a department, and preventing AFAM courses from having access to larger capacity rooms ensures they will never have data to support the abundant evidence that department growth is necessary and good for CSUF.

Recognition and Outreach Support.

- Increase visibility of the department by recognizing faculty and student accomplishments and department-led events through the website and other relevant modes of communication. Support other ways of increasing the department's visibility in the communities surrounding CSUF.
- Work with the African American Studies Department to pursue a stronger commitment from the university for black student outreach.

CONCLUSION

This committee concludes that the African American Studies Department at CSUF has done a remarkable job rebuilding itself in the last few years. It is poised to grow and with proper support can be truly excellent. We are pleased to have had the opportunity to review such a vital and dynamic unit.