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ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW
of the
Department of Africana Studies
University of Maryland, Baltimore County
Baltimore, Maryland

September 13-15, 2020

Academic Program Review Committee:

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I. BACKGROUND

Historical Context. The academic enterprise of Black Studies, known today as Africana Studies, first appeared on the campus of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County in 1971. Indeed, the UMBC Africana Studies Department has been a forerunner in the efforts to infuse U.S. Higher Education with the systematic scholarly investigation of people of African descent. The Department graduated its first B.A. class in 1975 and among the initial cohort of Black Studies academic units to offer graduate work. During the 1980s and 1990s, UMBC's Africana Studies Department enjoyed a robust ten-member, full-time faculty, vibrant student support and regional prominence. As the result of a confluence of multiple factors, including organizational restructuring, new metrics of organizational evaluation, a changing higher education landscape and budgetary shortfalls, the Department's stature, capacity and impact significantly dissipated in the early decades of the new millennium. As such, the 2020 Academic Program Review represents a critical juncture for the Department of Africana Studies at UMBC to leverage its rich legacy and continue moving forward.

Academic Program Review Committee (APRC) Engagement with the UMBC community.

During September 13-15, 2020, members of the Academic Program Review Committee (APRC) conducted an evaluation of UMBC's Africana Studies Department. APRC members were Charles E. Jones, Professor, Department of Africana Studies, University of Cincinnati; and Anthonia Kalu, Professor, Comparative Literature & Foreign Languages; Gender & Sexuality Studies, University of California, Riverside. During the two-day virtual visit, the APRC members interfaced with multiple individuals from the UMBC campus. In addition to meeting with the Chair of the Department of Africana Studies, staff as well as faculty (2 full-time and 2 adjunct), APRC members met in group format with approximately ten (10) students affiliated with the Department. Finally, Jones and Kalu also met with key UMBC administrators, such as Kimberly Moffitt, Interim Dean, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Sarah Shin, Associate Provost for Academic Affairs. The review process concluded with an exit meeting that included the following UMBC administrators: Antonio Moreira, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs; Philip Ross, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs; Associate Provost Sarah Shin and Interim Dean Kimberly Moffitt. We wish to note that an opportunity to speak with the Department's affiliated faculty could have proved useful. We also commend the Susan Mocko-led team for the superbly organized and executed virtual academic program review.

Document Review. The extensive interactions with representatives of the UMBC campus were further augmented with a thorough review of relevant documents, such as the Department's self-study report, course syllabi and the curriculum vitae of Africana Studies' faculty members. We found the strategic planning materials to be well-prepared and informative with data that provided useful insight on the strengths, challenges and future trajectory of the Department.

II. FINDINGS

The Department of Africana Studies at UMBC is an interdisciplinary academic unit devoted to the scholarly investigation of people of African descent. It offers an engaging curriculum that meets disciplinary standards and an undergraduate major with a concentration that addresses the history, issues and policy concerns of contemporary black communities in the US and globally. Department goals are aligned with the strategic plan of the University and its contributions to the overall mission of UMBC cannot be overestimated. Indeed, the Department of Africana Studies' annual W. E. B. DuBois lecture is the College's longest ongoing Distinguished Lecture series.

Currently, the Department has a small but dedicated and accomplished faculty. However, in August 2020, one of its tenure-track faculty members accepted a position at another university, leaving UMBC's Department of Africana Studies with three (3) full-time faculty members (a lecturer and 2 full professors), one of whom serves as the Department Chair. This three-member faculty cohort is augmented by two (2) adjunct professors and four (4) affiliated faculty members. Needless to say, across US Higher Educational institutions, the faculties of small academic units like UMBC's Africana Studies are often encumbered by high service and mentoring demands that burden their instructional and research activities in ways that can adversely impact the overall efficiency and effectiveness of those units. Students affiliated with the Department with whom we spoke during the review process were laudatory about their UMBC's Africana Studies' experience. They highlighted faculty's commitment to mentoring, fostering critical thinking as well as helping them develop a strong sense of self and community. However, regarding instructional and curriculum issues, the students voiced the need for a broader variety of pedagogical strategies utilized by the Africana Studies faculty. In that regard, students' observations and request offers additional evidence as the need for an increase in the number of faculty in this Department. Finally, we are pleased to report that strong collegiality exists among the faculty and the absence of discord concerning the intellectual direction of the Department.

We applaud the Department's recent efforts to expand its reach among the undergraduate population. Since the 2017-2018 academic year, the Africana Studies faculty has undertaken several initiatives (Model African Union; Taste of Africa; altering the Du Bois lecture format to extend its reach and impact across the UMBC campus; enhancement of the Community Involvement concentration; the adoption of new certificate programs and the signing of an articulation agreement with the Community College of Baltimore County) to raise the visibility and relevance of the major among the UMBC student body. The impact of the aforementioned initiatives is beginning to materialize. As an example, the current numbers of majors (16) and minors (20) represent the "highest number that the Department has seen since 2006" (Self-Study Report, p. 50). While the APRC members are pleased to note the positive trajectory of the Department, we emphatically underscore that the academic unit's full potential will not be realized efficiently and effectively if the Department is not supported in ways that will build upon and maintain its newfound momentum.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to sustain the Department's current positive trajectory, we make the following recommendations:

- **Elevate the Community Involvement concentration.** The Community Involvement concentration represents an unmined jewel for the Department and College. To continue to capitalize on the Department's current momentum in the areas of curriculum and instruction, we recommend that greater attention be given to elevating the Community Involvement track. The current social and political climate across the country brings much resonance to the idea of enhancing and elevating the Department's Community Involvement concentration.
- **Maximize available resources.** Given the University's budgetary constraints in the pandemic era, we suggest the Department should seek ways to maximize all its available resources in order to achieve optimal efficiency and effectiveness. We encourage the Department to explore opportunities to expand the roles of its adjunct and affiliate faculty beyond that of deploying them solely for course delivery. However, we are not suggesting that the Department sacrifice discipline integrity, autonomy or governance. Rather, we suggest the Department should work to fully utilize available resources to maximize its existing capacity. For example, the identification of additional potential affiliate faculty across the University would better permit the Department to effectively deliver its current curriculum. The successful expansion of the roles of adjunct and affiliate faculty would not only enhance departmental capacity but also contribute to fostering an intellectual community among the faculty who engage in the Africana Studies enterprise at UMBC. This, undoubtedly, would benefit the Department. Maximizing available resources also requires the Department to make tough decisions that conform with budgetary realities. For example, given the Department's small size, it seems inefficient to expect the Department to cover adequately all areas of the African world (Africa, North American and their Diasporas, including the Caribbean and South America). Given the lean budgetary realities, the Department should carefully consider whether allocating resources towards this aspect of its curriculum endeavors will yield an expected payoff in terms of increased Department majors and/or credit hours. Finally, the effort to maximize resources calls for the Department to consider raising its 30-student enrollment cap per class. High student enrollment in Africana Studies classes offers another important metric for program viability rather than solely relying on the number of majors.
- **Strengthen the relationship between the Department and students.** An important key to a vibrant and robust Africana Studies Department is its relationship with students who serve as effective ambassadors and advocates of the academic unit. Multiple benefits ensue from a strong nexus between the Department and its students. We encourage UMBC's Africana Studies Department to build upon its impressive array of

activities (Model African Union, funding scholarships and undergraduate research opportunities) to galvanize students' interest and engagement in the Department, College and University. Our discussions with students affiliated with the Department revealed they would welcome greater engagement with the academic unit. We suggest utilizing the Africana Council to assist in strengthening the relationship between the academic unit, students, the College and the larger University community. An effective assessment process could prove beneficial to this endeavor. We encourage the Department to give further attention to developing stronger assessment measures. In the case of the lower-division courses, the survey indicator may not accurately capture the acquisition of specific learning outcomes. Similarly, the simple pass rate in the upper-division course is equally lacking in that it does not fully measure the acquisition of specific skills. Strong assessment indicators have the potential of providing invaluable data for the Department's on-going strategic plans.

- **Acquire adequate Departmental facilities.** Adequate Departmental facilities is an essential element undergirding a strong linkage between Africana Studies Departments and students. At campuses of predominantly white institutions of higher education, Africana Studies academic units often assume some of the roles of Student Services for students of African descent. Presently, it does not appear that UMBC's Africana Studies department has sufficient space to facilitate necessary and effective department-student interaction. For example, Africana Studies currently shares a conference room with another department. Both Africana Studies' faculty and students complained about the lack of a venue to host basic Department activities. The absence of a viable communal space precludes the development of the vibrant culture necessary for the development and maintenance of an exemplary Africana Studies unit at UMBC.
- **Enhance linkages between the Department and the broader community in Baltimore.** While we acknowledge the Department's noteworthy internship requirements, it does not appear that the Department has a strong presence in the broader Baltimore community. From its inception in the late 1960s, the discipline of Africana Studies has stressed the dual objectives of academic excellence and social responsibility across US Higher Education. Early architects of the discipline envisioned cross-fertilization of relationships between Black Studies academic units and the broader (and host) community. In that regard, there has been uneven attention paid to the social responsibility objective of the discipline by UMBC's Africana Studies Department. We urge the Department to develop a systematic approach to creating linkages to educational, cultural, and business institutions in the broader Baltimore community. We envision numerous potential benefits emanating from this recommendation, including student recruitment, service-learning and internship placements, and faculty/student research opportunities. Prospects for external funding are also gained from strong external relationships. Focused activation of the Department's alumni would also be beneficial to this endeavor as it has the potential of providing a potential revenue

stream for the unit via systematic fundraising efforts.

- **Allocation of critical resources.** A modest increase of additional resources is required to sustain the Department's current growth and provide the necessary foundation for the development of an exemplary Africana Studies unit at UMBC. We strongly suggest that the College and the University invest resources for strategic faculty hires. It would be especially beneficial for the current faculty and the Department if the position of the faculty member who departed in August is replaced. That position in Africana literature contributed significantly to the Department's burgeoning resurgence in the last few years. We strongly endorse hiring a tenure-track faculty member with expertise to staff courses comprising the Community Involvement concentration. These additional faculty lines will help to solidify the foundation of the Department. One possible avenue for acquiring additional faculty is the University's Postdoctoral Fellows for Faculty Diversity program.

IV. CONCLUSION

The UMBC's Africana Studies Department's efforts to maintain and advance its curricular mission and goals during the last few years are laudable. Faculty productivity in teaching, professional activities and service showed significant growth despite the unit's small size and limited space availability; and will likely record more successes with adequate support from the College and University. Ongoing and positive collaborative endeavors between affiliated students (majors and minors) and faculty (full-time, affiliate and adjunct) indicate that the unit will continue to thrive with additional and adequate support from the College, University and relevant communities. The recent upswing indicated in the numbers of the Department's majors and minors support the ongoing and growing interest in the Black Experience nationally. The Department's multi-disciplinary curriculum indicates inherent vision and resilience, with possibilities for continued academic growth that will enable the College and University to maintain the academic leadership potential envisioned at the inception of this unit in 1971.