

**Strategic Plan for**  
**The Department of African American Studies**  
**At The College of New Jersey**  
**March 2015**

African American Studies (AAS) at The College of New Jersey is an interdisciplinary, inclusive and dynamic learning community dedicated to preparing students for a lifetime of critically engaged learning, multicultural awareness, and global citizenship. Through our exercise of analytical rigor in various disciplines and sub-specialties we and our students: critically engage multidisciplinary perspectives informing approaches to the African Diaspora and the world; thoroughly examine global constructions of race; utilize multimedia literacy to explain the experiences of people of African descent; and seek to understand the diversity of Africa and its Diaspora.

TCNJ's African American Studies program serve students across the College's seven schools. The department currently offers a minor, a self-designed major, and is currently in the process of developing a major. It also offers two interdisciplinary Liberal Learning concentrations in African American Studies and Global Studies that afford students the opportunity to fulfill their TCNJ Liberal Learning requirements while pursuing sustained study in a particular subject and/or theme. AAS courses are also a popular choice for students who wish to satisfy their Liberal Learning Civic Responsibility academic requirement for race and ethnicity. A campus leader in promoting interdisciplinarity, African American Studies interfaces with a broad range of scholarly disciplines in the arts, humanities, social sciences as well as other fields of interdisciplinary studies.

#### OUR MISSION

The African-American Studies department of The College of New Jersey is an interdisciplinary teacher-scholar community whose faculty embodies professional excellence, promotes engaged learning, and provides original intellectual contributions to their respective fields. As teachers of the arts, humanities, social sciences, and sciences the department promotes the discovery and creation of knowledge, independent and critical inquiry, professional and scholarly activity, and student/faculty/community collaboration. Student-scholars of the African American Studies department learn theoretical and applied skills central to a liberal arts education. Our community of learners, in the African-American Studies program, exemplifies the college's commitment to diversity by participating in campus, local, state, national, and international activities that train students to anticipate and meet the demands of a multiracial world.

#### EXTERNAL REVIEW

In the Fall 2013 the Department underwent an external review. This strategic plan builds on the recommendations made by the Department's External Reviewer and is organized by three specific initiatives: 1) **Curriculum** (Academic Program and Student Learning, Advising, and Internationalization; 2) **Community** (Department's Community, Intellectual Climate, Faculty development, Alumni Relations, Community Outreach, Leadership and Governance); and 3) **Resources** (Department's fundraising and Development, Technology, and Office and Classroom space).

## STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

In accordance with the School of Humanities and Social Sciences' Strategic Plan, the African American Studies Department organizes its strategic plan by initiatives described below. The faculty will review the initiatives annually to assess progress, reevaluate our priorities and plan implementation.

### **CURRICULUM:**

All of our academic programs promote the discovery and creation of knowledge, independent and critical inquiry, professional and scholarly activity, and student/faculty/community collaboration. The department emphasizes writing skills, the ability to converse forcefully and intelligibly in any setting, critical and independent thinking, and a facility to interrogate silences in the arts, journalism, literature, law, politics, and history. We will prepare students to become informed global citizens trained to anticipate and meet the demands of a multiracial world.

#### **a. Curriculum Development and Revision**

Goal: We will ensure that our academic programs and course offerings reflect the goals of our mission statement and responds to students concerns about the consistency with which core courses are offered for the minor and future major.

Strategies:

1. We will develop a major and expand curricular options for students while enhancing staffing efficiencies.
2. We will develop and assess blended learning options.
3. We will assess the status of our minor focusing on ways to attract more students and encourage higher enrollments.
4. We will engage in regular assessment of the curriculum to determine curricular development/revision.
5. We will investigate enrollment patterns for students who have taken a significant number of AAS courses but have not declared a major or minor to create incentives for students to do so.

## **b. Interdisciplinarity**

Goal: We will enhance and support interdisciplinary curricula and research within the department, the School and across schools, and will work with colleagues to expand interdisciplinary learning, teaching and research opportunities across the campus.

Strategies:

1. We embrace opportunities to offer courses -including team-taught courses- that cross disciplinary boundaries and foster critical thinking and exposure to other peoples and cultures such as First Year Seminars, courses within the Honors program.
2. We will work with the School of Education to encourage Education Majors to consider the African American Studies major (double major) or minor.
3. We will work with the Journalism Program to encourage Journalism Majors to consider the African American Studies major (double major) or minor.
4. We will work with the Interactive Multimedia Program to encourage their majors to consider the African American Studies major (double major) or minor.
5. AAS faculty look forward to collaborating with faculty with an interest in public health to encourage students with that academic interest to consider the study of public health in the African and African Diasporic contexts.

## **c. Signature Experiences**

Goal: We will increase opportunities for experiential learning, including both undergraduate research and internships

Strategies:

1. We will strive to increase opportunities for our students to conduct research and participate in internships under the mentorship of our faculty and to embed these and other experiential learning opportunities in our curricula.
2. In accordance with TCNJ's commitment to Community Engaged Learning (CEL), we will assess offerings in Advanced Community Engaged Learning (ACEL) and consider adding new offerings. New offerings may include community-engaged learning opportunities on the history African-American communities in Trenton, Newark, or Camden.
3. We will consult with the Bonner Center and Career Services to develop opportunities to engage with the surrounding community.
4. AAS value and encourage undergraduate research. As such we will strive to increase opportunities for our students to work with faculty in the summer MUSE programs.
5. TCNJ offers great opportunities for students to study abroad in Ghana, Senegal, Tanzania, Trinidad, and South Africa. AAS will enthusiastically encourage students to consider these options.
6. Additionally, students will be encouraged to study away at sites like the Washington Center which can facilitate study immersed in one of the country's most important African-

American communities (with the possibility of an internship at the Congressional Black Caucus or the national HQ of the NAACP or some other important organization).

#### **d. Advising**

Goal: We will recognize the value of thoughtful student advising and support the professional development of faculty advisors to enhance advising and mentoring of our students.

Strategies:

1. We will follow the recommendations of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences on their advising policies.
2. Since all of faculty members are jointly appointed and have to advise students from more than one department, we will develop creative strategies for advisement that service the needs of our students and minimizes the challenges for our faculty.
3. We will develop advising strategies to respond to our students' growing interests in graduate study and studying abroad.

#### **e. Internationalization**

Goal: We will participate in and support our School's initiative to intensify global awareness and engagement and promote rigorous academic study abroad opportunities for all students.

Strategies:

1. Integrate international components into courses still lacking in this area
2. We will seek and promote study and experiential learning opportunities for our students beyond New Jersey, both in the US and internationally.
3. In order to encourage student participation in study abroad opportunities, we will implement early advising for students and promote awareness among parents about the importance of study abroad in a liberal arts education in Open Houses, recruitment events, and Accepted Students Day presentations.
4. We will collaborate with the Center for Global Engagement to identify opportunities for international internships (for example in Morocco or Tanzania) for students studying abroad.
5. We will continue to support International Week and all international initiatives (e.g. International Film Festival).

#### **f. Assessment**

Goal: We will develop and implement assessment measures for our academic programs, evaluate the data and utilize the findings to improve our programs

Strategies:

1. Develop tools for assessing student achievement in core concepts of the Major.
2. Evaluate syllabi of AAS courses that serve multiple purposes (Liberal Learning, majors/minors); establish common course descriptions and some common readings for each, document these in checklist/rubric form to be made available to instructors and to serve as a basis for assessing individual syllabi. Reduce repetition of readings, define common content across sections, and define differences between courses.
3. Evaluate non-AAS courses that are cross-listed with AAS in relation to the standards of intensity and rigor, in collaboration with faculty from the courses' home departments (for example AAS 240/MUS 245 'History of Jazz')
4. Develop and administer alumni surveys designed to determine the extent to which our graduates believe that their undergraduate major in African American Studies has helped to prepare them to pursue their career objectives.

**g. Strategic hiring in support of the Department's curricular goals.**

Goal: We will develop a plan for strategic hiring in support of the major and the expansion of our Department's curriculum.

Strategies:

1. The Department of African American Studies will conduct a careful review of its future hiring requests in light of recommendation of the External Reviewer's report for program review, expressed student interest and its own assessment of needs for growth and the development of the Major.
2. The Department of African American Studies will prioritize its staffing needs in light of the above.

**COMMUNITY:**

The Department of African American Studies supports the School of Humanities and Social Sciences' assertion to be a culturally and intellectually diverse and welcoming community of faculty, staff, students and alumni who value knowledge and the free and responsible exchange of ideas.

**a. Affirming our Identity**

Goal: Because the Department of African American Studies is a constantly evolving, dynamic discipline, our department engages in ongoing discussions and debates about our identity. In order to more accurately reflect the diverse disciplines and sub-specialties of our faculty along with developments in the field of African American Studies we will consider whether the present name of the Department of African American Studies accurately reflects our comprehensive and complex identity, or if another name more accurately conveys our essence.

Strategies

1. We will examine the extent to which our current name, the Department of African American Studies, genuinely reflects our multi-disciplinary and global focus.
2. We will do a survey of what other programs and departments around the country call themselves and what their academic focus is.

### **b. Intellectual Climate**

Goal: We will continue to participate in enhancing the intellectual climate at TCNJ by creating opportunities for conversations around diversity, social justice and race.

Strategies:

1. We will continue to host two public lectures each year, one in the fall and the other in the spring (Gloria Harper Dickinson lecture) where guest speakers are invited to discuss events and issues related to diversity.
2. We will continue to host the Gloria Harper Dickinson lecture each spring where guest speakers will discuss issues around race, gender and society.
3. We will coordinate such lectures, as well as exhibits, performances, and films as much as possible with courses taught in our department in order to enhance the academic impact of these special events for our community.

### **c. Faculty development**

Goal: We will support the professional development of faculty from their hiring through their retirement, through existing and new practices

Strategies:

1. In accordance with the department's external review and self-study, we will increase the numbers of faculty in the department through new fulltime and joint appointed hires.
2. We will reduce dependency on adjuncts and enhance department offerings through new fulltime hires
3. We will implement the revised AAS disciplinary standards document
4. We will develop strategies that complement School-based mentoring programs to extend mentoring to all departmental faculty.
5. We will support faculty in developing new knowledge and skills, e.g., facility with new technologies for research and pedagogy

### **d. Alumni Relations**

Goal: We will improve and strengthen alumni relations

Strategies:

- 1) We will continue to develop our Department's Facebook and twitter pages and use these as a way to maintain communication with our alumni.

- 2) We will develop a graduate database to help maintain closer relationships with the department's alumni. We will also develop a post-graduate survey to be administered one year after graduation.
- 3) We will maintain a record of graduates' success stories and publicize them on the department's website.
- 4) We will continue to invite alumni to campus events and to present on topics related to their specializations, jobs and careers.
- 5) We will explore opportunities to co-sponsor networking events with TALANT, Career Services, and other relevant alumni constituencies.

#### **e. Community Outreach**

Goal: We will improve our engagement with the larger community both within and outside the boundaries of our campus.

Strategies:

1. We will call on current AAS minors to assist in the recruitment outreach of students to the minor.
2. We will invite non-minors and non-majors who do well in AAS courses to consider the minor and, later, the major.
3. We will work closely with the Admissions office to ensure they are aware of what African American Studies has to offer and that they have the most current and relevant materials.
4. We will continue to participate fully in Admissions events.
5. Host campus wide events (lectures, etc.) to include more departments and students into campus wide conversations on various issues.
6. We will develop community-engaged learning classes that engage students in responding to community needs and interests, and classes that provide opportunities for students to enhance their skills while helping the school understand the needs and interests of community organizations and residents.
7. We will explore the best ways to participate in college-wide outreach efforts such as the 'Trenton Works' satellite office.
8. We will reach out to local communities in publicizing AAS events such as guest lectures and events during African American History month.
9. Invite guest lecturers from the region.

#### **f. Leadership and governance**

Goal: We will continue to participate in the governance structures and processes

Strategy:

1. Continue to encourage faculty and staff to take roles in school- or college-wide governance, and support and recognize colleagues in these roles.

## **RESOURCES:**

### **a. Department's fundraising and Development**

Goal: The Department will work closely with the School and the Office of Alumni Affairs and Development as appropriate to find new revenue streams.

Strategies:

1. We will engage alumni, faculty emeriti, parents, friends and corporate and civic leaders through our community programming events.
2. The department will explore grant possibilities in support of our mission and teaching.
3. We will pursue the possibility of securing administrative support for advanced community engaged learning initiatives connected to the implementation of the major.

### **b. Technology**

Goal: We will improve the technological literacy of our students, faculty and staff.

Strategies:

1. The Department will continue to participate in the School's Information Technology Roundtable.
2. The department will continue to investigate and incorporate software that enhances our instructional efforts and to ensure that our students graduate with technological literacy.
3. The department will continue to explore ways to incorporate technology in the curriculum to facilitate engagement with local and global communities

### **c. Office and Classroom space**

Goal: We will strive to employ our classroom and office space in the most efficient, productive and fair manner.

Strategies:

1. We will continue to schedule our classes across the grid and ensure that some classes meet during under-utilized time slots.
2. Our Program Assistant will participate in the annual discussion of concerns and issues related to the use of office and classroom space.