A publication for the alumni and friends of the Department of Africana Studies

UC SANKOFA

IN THIS ISSUE
Africana Studies Honored
Minority Health Certificate
Community Outreach Poetry
Black History Studies
New A&S Diversity Position
2013 Record PR1ZE Graduates

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Dear Africana Alumni and Friends,

This year has been our department’s proudest yet as we continue to develop new opportunities for our students, grow our faculty and establish new partnerships with the community.

The prize we are focused on this academic year is twofold. First, we are reconfiguring our undergraduate curriculum into 3 tracks: Diasporic Literature Diasporic History and Social Policy.

Second, we are looking forward to development of a MA and Ph.D. program. At this point, we are moving smoothly through the college process. We are trying to have the program ready by 2014-15 at the earliest and 2015-2016 at the latest.

In our 2014 newsletter, you will have a chance to read about the many ways that we as a department have been improving the lives of our students and community. I invite you to read, visit and get involved.

Terry Kershaw
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The National Council for Black Studies (NCBS) recently awarded the University of Cincinnati’s Department of Africana Studies its Sankore Institutional Award for outstanding contributions to the development of Africana studies. The award was presented in March 2012 at the organization’s 36th annual conference hosted in Atlanta, Ga.

The NCBS lauded UC’s Department of Africana Studies for its financial support of the professional organization’s 2011 annual conference in Cincinnati and the department’s housing of the NCBS national office. NCBS President Sun-diata Cha-Jua, a specialist in African-American history at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, noted UC’s commitment to the dual mission of Africana studies – academic excellence and social responsibility – and called the scholar-activist model, which undergirds the department’s proposed Ph.D. program, a cutting-edge framework for the field of study as a whole.

Africana Studies Department Head Terry Kershaw, Ph.D. was the editor of the NCBS’ refereed journal, International Journal of Africana Studies, and served as the organization’s vice president from 2010 to 2012. Kershaw says the NCBS honor enhances the department’s national reputation and further promotes its innovative contributions to the discipline.

“This award further promotes our department as an attractive destination for faculty and grad students who are interested in Africana studies in general and the scholar-activist approach in particular,” Kershaw says.
Joseph Takougang, Africana Studies History Professor, has a new publication, Cameroonian Immigrants in the United States. Although Cameroon’s image as a stable nation with a strong economy may have mitigated against any large-scale migration by Cameroonians following independence, the economic collapse beginning in the mid-1980s and the coerced implementation of democratic reforms in the early 1990s exposed fault lines in the nation’s economic and political institutions. As a result, thousands of Cameroonians have left the country in search of a better life abroad. While Europe remains the favorite destination for many of these migrants, a significant number have also come to the United States. Cameroonian Immigrants in the United States examines the increase in the population of Cameroonians in the United States in the last two decades, the difficulties that many of them must endure in order to come to America, and the challenges they face adapting their new environment.


New Certificate Confronts Minority Health Issues

By: Tom Robinette

Collaborative project between A&S and CECH will use hands-on experiences to teach undergraduate students how to address healthcare disparities in minority populations nationwide.

Edward V. Wallace, Ph.D., MPH Assistant Professor and Undergraduate Minority Health Certificate Coordinator, Public Health

A collaborative effort between colleges at the University of Cincinnati will help train a new generation of public health advocates to smash cultural barriers preventing minority populations across the country from receiving critical care tailored to their unique needs.

Ed Wallace, assistant professor of Africana studies, is helping lead the charge. Wallace and Amy Bernard, associate professor of Health Promotion and Education, spearheaded the formation of the new Undergraduate Minority Health Certificate. The joint project from the McMicken College of Arts & Sciences and the College of Education, Criminal Justice, and Human Services will train students to assess the health needs of minority and vulnerable populations such as African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asians and Pacific Islanders.

“If we’re able to train students and people in the community how to design, implement and evaluate health programs that address these disparities, then ultimately we’d like to take it a step further to impact health policy,” Wallace says.

“We can then show politicians that we need to change laws and implement policies because clearly there’s an equity issue that is not being addressed.” Wallace said disparities exist in health care for a variety of ailments including heart disease, stroke, diabetes and asthma. In some cases, the inequity is severe. Statistics from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health show that:

- **Native American men and women are twice as likely to develop and die from stomach cancer and liver cancer as non-Latino whites.**

  “We want to train our students to understand health disparities and how to design programs to address these health disparities,” Wallace says. “Ultimately that will help them become advocates for a population in order to influence and change health policy.”

One of the strengths of the certificate, which will be available starting fall semester, is its emphasis on hands-on experience. For example, Community Health and Minorities: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow, a required course for the certificate, is designed to take students off campus and into the community to interact and work with community members, schools, churches and politicians. Many employers look to hire graduates with practical, hands-on experience, and Wallace says the certificate gives students the applied type of research necessary for them to be successful professionals.

Wallace says public health professionals are also encouraged to take the certificate. It’s a great way for someone already in the field to gain additional training, new skills and unique insight into specific minority communities’ health concerns without pursuing a master’s degree or PhD. For the 18 credit-hour certificate, students must complete 12 hours of required courses and six hours from 23 available elective courses. As an added convenience, the certificate is a hybrid, meaning courses can be taken in a traditional classroom setting or an online format. All of the required courses are available online as are many of the electives, giving students the option of completing the entire certificate online.

Many students have already expressed interest in taking the certificate to Wallace, and he’s excited about the attention being given to the interdisciplinary nature of the Department of Africana Studies.

“Students are beginning to realize there are so many different things they can do with the Africana Studies degree,” Wallace says. “The fact that A&S and CECH were able to come together and share a vision is a positive for the university as a whole.”
The Next Verse:  
**A&S Poetry Outreach Speaks the Language of Youth**

Professor and her students share their passion for poetry with local high school students to inspire the teenage writers and encourage them to continue their education.

By Tom Robinette

The late author and poet Maya Angelou once said, “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

At Cheli Reutter’s recent poetry workshop for local high school sophomores, there were things said and done that will be long remembered but then eventually dissolve into the fog of time. Yet Reutter knows how those students felt that day will never be forgotten.

That’s what has motivated her to do the workshop for the past four years – the chance to leave an indelible mark on a young person’s soul. Reutter, assistant professor educator in the English, helps coordinate the outreach program with McMicken College of Arts & Sciences alumna Marsha Jenkins and Western Hills High School teacher Jenifer Ray. At least once a year, they take a small group of UC students from diverse majors to local high schools in an effort to bond with the young English students and inspire them to pursue poetry as an outlet for creativity and self-expression.

“This ‘poetry connection’ in all its forms was amazing to me, as I got to witness young people who had grown up with a white-washed literature begin to find themselves and their poetic legacy through the program,” Reutter says. “The first year, when one of the students said, ‘I had never thought about college, but now I want to go to UC,’ I knew we had a mission beyond just exposure.”

The idea for the program came from a conversation Reutter had with two of her poetry students after an open-mic event. The students, both mothers, implored Reutter to reach out to the youth in the community and expose them to the work of significant African-American poets, such as Paul Laurence Dunbar, Etheridge Knight and others. With help from faculty and administration, Reutter coordinated the first event on campus for students from Hughes and Purcell Marian high schools, and the program eventually expanded to middle schools. Starting next academic year, Reutter hopes to conduct one poetry workshop each semester. The success of the workshops has emboldened Reutter to create a spin-off program. She’s working with Jenkins and Ray to establish an after-school mentorship program at Western Hills. Her plan calls for UC students to meet with sophomore English students at Western Hills once a month to give them consistent support and encouragement. Reutter wants these interactions to not only show the teenage mentees that an excellent college education is attainable but also encourage them to actively pursue it.

“Many students don’t put it together how poetry and spoken word became what they know as hip hop,” Jenkins says. “Being able to make that connection is important because poetry laid the foundation for today’s hip hop. African-Americans have a very rich history in writing, and oftentimes we don’t learn that about our culture until we reach college. Allowing these students to get some of that exposure is wonderful.”

Reutter says her team’s community outreach is yet another example of the prevailing ethos in A&S – compassionate scholarship.

“I’m so proud to be a part of A&S with administrators, faculty and staff who are constantly finding ways inside and out of the classroom to bridge gaps and build a sense of community for our students, from the first year and beyond,” Reutter says. “I’m exceedingly proud of my colleagues’ commitment to our students, and I’m especially proud of the students, who are so very willing to reach out to the high schoolers and the middle schoolers as well as to each other.”
Jana Braziel is Professor of Africana Studies at the University of Cincinnati. Braziel’s scholarly and pedagogical interests are in American hemispheric literatures and cultures, Caribbean studies, Haitian studies, and the intersections of diaspora, transnational activism, and globalization. Braziel is the author of four monographs: Duvalier’s Ghosts: Race, Diaspora, and U.S. Imperialism in Haitian Literatures (U of Florida P, 2010); Caribbean Genesis: Jamaica Kincaid and the Writing of New Worlds (SUNY, 2009); Artists, Performers, and Black Masculinity in the Haitian Diaspora (Indiana University Press, 2008); and Diaspora: An Introduction (Blackwell, 2008). Braziel is currently finalizing revisions from her new book “Riding with Death”: Precarious Life and Creative Production in the Streets of Port-au-Prince, which addresses urban ecology, art, and political and human rights in Haiti.

Guy-Lucien Whembolua’s research interests include exploring health disparities, behavioral health and global health. He obtained both his bachelor’s degree in Vertebrate Physiology (Biology) and his doctorate in Biobehavioral Health from the Pennsylvania State University. He was the recipient of the Ardeth and Norman Frisbey Award for outstanding contributions to International understanding as well the Emerging Scholars Interdisciplinary Network Fellowship in Applied Multi-Ethnic Research. Before joining the faculty at the University of Cincinnati, he was a Post-Doctoral Associate in the Program in Health Disparities Research (PHDR) and in the Center for Health Equity (CHE) at the University of Minnesota.

Professor Whembolua has co-authored several peer-reviewed articles and presented at several national and international conferences. His research agenda is currently divided into three broad areas: U.S. minority health, African/ Afro-Caribbean immigrant health worldwide and public health on the African continent.
Thabiti Asukile says teaching Black History will "make America a better place.")
If someone stopped you on the street and asked you to name 10 contemporary black intellectuals, could you do it?
What if they spotted you President Barack Obama and U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder? Could you come up with another eight?

Assistant professor Thabiti Asukile knows that few Americans could. That’s why he feels his work in Africana Studies in the McMicken College of Arts & Sciences is so important.

"If you talk about diversity, then the history of African-American people needs to be taught," he said. "If you really want to have students who are well-rounded and know about American life, then the classes I’m teaching, the type of research I’m doing, would only make America a better place."


"It’s a race novel that dealt with defending the humanity of black people during that era because during that era many black people were written out of history," Asukile said. "And you had a lot of pseudo-scientific scholarship and things in popular culture that dehumanized black people."

Asukile says stereotypes about black people that existed in 1917 have been filtered through the generations and the lese-sons of “From Superman” remain relevant today. Terry Kershaw, head of Africana studies, agrees. He said two of Rogers’ lessons are of particular importance: there is only one race – the human race, and accepting racism is a detriment to what America can become.

Asukile’s concern is that today’s youth don’t know enough about historic black intellectuals such as Rogers. Asukile became interested in Rogers while pursuing a dissertation topic at the University of California, Berkeley. He pored over old newspaper articles, scanned microfiche and studied the works of Rogers’ contemporaries. Now Asukile wants to reintroduce Rogers to his students.

“A lot of the young students don’t know about African-American history or the African Diaspora, period," Asukile said. "But they really don’t know anything about these guys who wrote history."

There are other influential black figures Asukile wants students to know. His class, "20th Century Black Internationalism," deals with obscure and known blacks who’ve had an influence on global politics and social events, including Willis Nathaniel Huggins, Claudia Jones, W.E.B. Du Bois and Angela Davis. Among them are two of Asukile’s favorites: Paul Robeson, an early 20th century singer, scholar and civil rights activist; and Huey Newton, who co-founded the Black Panther Party in 1966.

"(Robeson is) like the precursor to Michael Jackson. He’s making all the money, except he’s not Michael Jackson in the sense that he’s a serious intellectual," Asukile said. "(Newton) is probably one of the greatest African-Americans to ever live because of the odds he had to overcome early in his life in a school system that essentially set him and other black students up for failure; the courage he showed against openly challenging police brutality; and his intellectual insight into institutional racism among other things."

All of these individuals discussed in the class made significant contributions to American history. Yet they often remain in the shadows of more famous black cultural icons such as Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. What makes these individuals so well known and more acceptable for study, Kershaw says, is that they are known quantities and therefore less threatening to average Americans.

Asukile attributes the fade from prominence of Robeson, Newton and others to insufficient education at the kindergarten through high school levels. He said K-12 teaching on black history follows a predictable progression, starting with slavery and then moving to Abraham Lincoln, King and Obama. Asukile said this leads to a broader problem in society, where black males are predominantly perceived as athletes, entertainers and criminals—not as great thinkers.

Part of what drives his research is the desire to counter those images. He knows there was a time when people wished for the chance to go to college and study African history and to live in an era where they would see a black president.

“Asukile’s work stands out because he is looking at people who are central to the struggle for social justice and social change,” Kershaw said. “It helps to show the link between those whose shoulders we stand on, who stands on them and why it is important to understand the connection.”

And like Rogers, Asukile hopes his message appeals to a broad audience.

“The stereotype is that all black people think one way or two ways and that’s it,” he said. “But there are so many different voices about black people who have worked things out in this country.” There are so many, but can you think of 10?
Marilyn Kershaw Named A&S Director of Diversity and Access

New position aims to expand the commitment to diversity within A&S through enhanced planning, data analysis, collaborative training and more.

The University of Cincinnati’s McMicken College of Arts & Sciences recently promoted Marilyn Kershaw, current director of graduate enrollment initiatives, to the new position of director of the Office of Diversity and Access for the college.

Kershaw, who has been at UC since 2009, sees her new title as an expansion of her current role. As the director of graduate enrollment initiatives, she assists in recruiting graduate students for the college and helps current graduate students succeed. She has led diversity initiatives throughout her career, including piloting a mentorship program for graduate students at UC with the help of a grant from the Diversity Council.

“I would like to have open communications and advocate for diversity interests across the college for our students, faculty and staff,” Kershaw said. “They are at the center of this diversity plan.” Kershaw’s goals in her new position include:

- Completion of a McMicken Strategic Diversity Plan and individual department diversity plans.
- Collection and analysis of data related to recruitment, retention, graduation, promotion, tenure and appointments.
- Determination of best practices in terms of recruitment and retention to take the lead on expanding diversity
- Collaboration on training and professional development around diversity issues.

Kershaw believes that everyone on campus can assist with expanding diversity and enhancing UC’s inclusive environment, but she views students as the best ambassadors.

“UC students are aware of the diversity here, from fellow students, faculty, staff and administrators,” Kershaw said. “They are a crucial part of this diversity plan.”

“With A&S being the largest and most diverse college, it is only natural that we take the lead on making the University Diversity Plan a living document at the college level,” Kershaw said. “This position can be a model for other colleges for what can be done. We have diversity in terms of our curriculum, so it’s time to expand that further to our students, staff and faculty.”
“The department also partnered with the Taft Center to bring in a variety of scholars from other institutions. Visit the Africana Studies homepage for details on events planned for this year!

www.Artsci.uc.edu/africanastudies
The University of Cincinnati spring commencement ceremonies over the past two years included 25 students who were members of the Putting Retention 1st in the Zest for Excellence program.

PR1ZE is a faculty and administration support initiative for historically underrepresented minority students, particularly focusing on African-American students in the McMicken College of Arts & Sciences. The program was founded in fall quarter 2008 by associate professor of Africana studies Kenneth Ghee and Associate Dean Carol Tonge Mack.

“The PR1ZE faculty and staff mentors are a vital part of the wind beneath our students’ wings, giving them guidance and showing genuine interest in them as students but more so as valued human beings with great potential,” Ghee says.

The primary goal of PR1ZE is to retain and graduate African-American students, and Mack says seeing this many students from the program ready to graduate validates the support she and Ghee have received over the years from former Dean, Valerie Hardcastle, faculty, staff and the extended PR1ZE family.

“Students worked diligently to get to this place in their academic career,” Tonge Mack says. “They kept their eyes on the ‘PR1ZE.’ For many of them, there were personal struggles which could’ve impeded graduation. However, with a phone call, email, text, kind word and additional encouragement from their mentor, they made it.”

For more about the program, visit http://www.artsci.uc.edu/students/undergrad/pr1ze.html
We rely on support from loyal alumni and friends like you to fund research experiences, provide scholarships and fellowships for deserving students, and build the McMicken Experience for future generations of Bearcats.

To support AFST online, you can visit: On.uc.edu/givetoAfricanaStudies you can also call 513-556-0862.

You can visit UC’s Alumni Association’s website at https://webapps.uc.edu/Alumni/Records/ChangeInfo.aspx to update your contact information, or direct any updates directly to the department via the College Office of Development.


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