Africana studies is an interdisciplinary program designed to bring the scholarly approaches and perspectives of several traditional disciplines to bear on an understanding of black life. Emphasis is placed on the examination of the rich and varied cultures, literature, and history of black people in Africa and in the African diaspora from sub-Saharan Africa—including the United States, the Caribbean, and Latin and South America. Such a systematic interdisciplinary approach captures the historic, multifaceted quality of African American scholarship, and allows the student to integrate effectively the perspectives of several academic departments at the College.

The Africana Studies Program is Bowdoin's oldest interdisciplinary program and offers both a major and a minor in Africana studies. Academic emphasis is placed on the examination of the varied cultures through the anthropology, sociology, literature, history, music, dance, and art of black people worldwide.

Africana studies offers a unique vantage point from which to view humanity—its accomplishments, and the persistent existence of racism. Courses in Africana studies with an interdisciplinary perspective give the student a unique lens through which to view the black contribution to the world, and this learning experience is a fundamental part of a liberal arts education.

The Major

The major in Africana studies introduces students to the breadth of the African diaspora and to concentrated study of a particular dimension of the experience of people of African descent. Requirements for the major include five core courses, a concentration of four additional courses, and a one-semester research project, for a total of ten courses.

The five core course options have been chosen to give the student a thorough background for the study of the black experience and to provide an introduction to the varied disciplines of Africana studies. These courses come from Africana studies (Introduction to Africana Studies, Performing Race: Blackness in America, or Race and American Political Development); English (African American Fiction: (Re)Writing Black Masculinities, African American Poetry, Staging Blackness, or Post-Colonial Literatures); history (The History of African Americans, 1619-1865, The History of African Americans, 1865 to Present, or The Civil Rights Movement, and Africa and the Atlantic World, 1400-1880 or Conquest, Colonialism, and Independence: Africa Since 1880); and sociology and anthropology (Race and Ethnicity).

The four-course concentration allows the student to bring the methodologies and insights of several disciplines to a single problem or theme. Some possible concentrations are Race and Class in American Society, Cultures of the African Diaspora, Political Economy of Blacks in the Third World, and The Arts of Black America. Appropriate courses to be taken should be worked out by the student and the director of the Africana Studies Program.

The research project, normally undertaken in the senior year, allows students to conduct research into a particular aspect of the black experience. Students may complete their research project as part of a 300-level course or as an independent study project under the direction of one of the program's faculty members.

The Minor

The minor in Africana studies consists of five courses in the Africana Studies Program, including one introductory course and one research course (a 300-level seminar or an independent study project). In order to ensure that the minor will be multidisciplinary, no more than three courses can be taken from within the same department.


Africana Studies

Independent Study

Advanced students are encouraged to do an upper-level independent study project or an honors project. Each student works with a faculty mentor over several semesters to present a research paper. Honors projects are typically reviewed and critiqued by various members of the faculty within the student's area of study.

Lectures and Events

Under the auspices of Africana studies, the College provides support for the Boothby and Russell warming lecture series. These series underwrite the appearance of speakers, artistic performances, writing workshops, and scholarly lectures. These have included talks by Wangari Mutu Maathai, Kenya's deputy environment minister and winner of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize; Nigerian novelist Buchi Emecheta; the activist and writer Angela Davis; the philosopher and professor of religion Cornel West; the art critic David Driskell; the women's vocal group Sweet Honey in the Rock; and several conferences and workshops dealing with Africana studies.

Faculty

The program is administered by the Africana Studies Program Committee, while courses are taught by members of departments throughout the College. Faculty members who are also members of the Africana Studies Program Committee are noted below with an asterisk.


Jarrett H. Brown, lecturer in English and Africana studies, B.A. (University of the West Indies), M.A. (Clark), teaches a course on writers of the Caribbean.

Guy MacEachern*, professor of anthropology, B.A. (Prince Edward Island), M.A., Ph.D. (Calgary), teaches about the peoples and cultures of Africa.

Daniel Levine, Thomas Brackett Reed Professor of History and Political Science Emeritus, A.B. (Amioch), M.A., Ph.D. (Northwestern), pioneered the teaching of African American history, starting a course at Bowdoin in 1965.

James W. McCalla, associate professor of music, B.A., B.M. (Kansas), M.M. (New England Conservatory), Ph.D. (California–Berkeley), teaches courses on the history of jazz.


Elizabeth Muther*, associate professor of English, B.A. (Welllesley), Ph.D. (California–Berkeley), specializes in African American literature and culture.

Seth Ovadia, assistant professor of sociology, B.A. (Swarthmore), M.A., Ph.D. (Maryland–College Park), teaches courses on race and ethnicity.

H. Roy Partridge Jr., visiting assistant professor of sociology, B.A. (Oberlin), M.S.W., M.A., Ph.D. (Michigan), M.Div. (Harvard), teaches courses on racism.

Patrick Rael*, associate professor of history, B.A. (Maryland–College Park), M.A., Ph.D. (California–Berkeley), teaches African American history, focusing on slavery and emancipation and the Civil War era in particular.

Jennifer Scanlon*, professor of gender and women's studies, B.S. (SUNY–Oneonta), M.S. (Delaware), M.A., Ph.D. (Binghamton), specializes in gender, race, and ethnicity in the U.S.


Margaret Hanéthia Véité-Congolo, assistant professor of Romance languages, B.A., M.A., Ph.D. (Université des Antilles et de la Guyane), teaches courses on Caribbean history and sociology.

After Bowdoin

The Africana studies major at Bowdoin represents the essence of a liberal arts education, preparing its graduates for a wide range and variety of careers. Law and legal studies are popular choices for Africana studies majors and many have gone on to law school and are now practicing in fields such as environmental law and corporate law, as well as litigation.

Recent Africana studies majors have gone on to graduate studies in other fields, including the study of religion at Harvard and Princeton, political theory at Yale, economics at Stanford, biochemistry at UCLA, education at Columbia, and public health at the University of Michigan. Several majors have gone into business for themselves, in such fields as financial advising and multicultural services. Others have chosen to teach in independent and public schools.

Recent independent study projects have included:

- Spatial Distance, Social Distance: White Reactions to an Informal Settlement in Hout Bay, Cape Town, and the Politics of Exclusion in Post-Apartheid South Africa
- White Female Accountability in the Work of Alice Childress
- Afrocentric Schools in Theory and Practice
- Step-Dancing in Historically Black Sororities and Fraternities
- Neo-Colonialism, Paternalism, and AIDS in Kenya

For more information, visit bowdoin.edu/africana_studies/