Africana Studies

Administered by the Africana Studies Committee;
Olufemi Vaughan, Program Director
(See committee list, page 353.)

Joint Appointments with English: Assistant Professor Tess Chakkalakal, Consortium for Faculty Diversity Pre-Dissertation Fellow and Lecturer Jarrett H. Brown
Joint Appointment with History: Professor Olufemi Vaughan
Distinguished Visiting Professor: P. Gabrielle Foreman

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, including the United States, the Caribbean, and Latin 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.

Requirements for the Major in Africana Studies

The major in Africana studies consists of five required core courses, a concentration of four additional courses, and a one-semester research project, for a total of ten courses. The core courses—Africana Studies 101, 102, or 103; Sociology 208 or Anthropology 233; English 260, 261, 263, or 275; History 236, 237, or 243; and History 262 or 264—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. The four-course concentration is intended to bring the methodologies and insights of several disciplines to a single problem or theme. Suggested 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. No more than one sub-100-level course may count toward the major. Neither courses taken Credit/D/Fail nor courses in which the student receives a grade of D are accepted for the major.

In addition, the research project, normally completed 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 under the direction of one of the program’s faculty. Students should consult with the director concerning courses offered in previous years that may satisfy the program requirements.

Requirements for the Minor in Africana Studies

The minor in Africana studies consists of five courses in the Africana Studies Program, one of which will be an introductory course (one of Africana Studies 101, 102, or 103) and one of which will be a research course (either a 300-level seminar or an independent study) as a capstone course. In order to ensure that the minor will be multidisciplinary, no more than three of the courses can be from the same department. Neither courses taken Credit/D/Fail nor courses in which the student receives a grade of D are accepted for the minor.
First-Year Seminars
For a full description of first-year seminars, see pages 147–57.

   (Same as Sociology 10.)

   (Same as English 14 and Latin American Studies 14.)

   (Same as English 16.)

   (Same as English 17.)

   (Same as English 20.)

   (Same as History 25.)

Introductory, Intermediate, and Advanced Courses

   Introduction to the interdisciplinary field of Africana studies, with a particular focus on African American history, politics, sociology, literature, and culture; course materials also cover the experiences of the peoples of African ancestry in the Atlantic world, especially since the expansion of Europe in the fifteenth century. Material is covered chronologically and thematically, building historically centered accounts of African American, African, and African diasporic experiences. The goals of this course include the following: (1) to introduce students considering the Africana studies major or minor to the intellectually engaging field of Africana studies; (2) to provide a broad sweep of the field in terms of methodological, theoretical, and ideological perspectives; and (3) to provide contexts for the critical analyses of the African American experience in United States history, and the dynamic interplay of African and African diaspora experiences in the modern world.

   Examines the twin themes of love and sex as they relate to poems, stories, novels, and plays written by African American women from the nineteenth century to the contemporary era. Explores such issues as Reconstruction, the Great Migration, motherhood, sexism, group loyalty, racial authenticity, intra- and interracial desire, homosexuality, the intertextual unfolding of a literary tradition of black female writing, and how these writings relate to canonical African American male-authored texts and European American literary traditions. Students are expected to read texts closely, critically, and appreciatively. Possible authors: Harriet Jacobs, Frances Harper, Nella Larsen, Jessie Faucet, Ann Petry, Ntozake Shange, Suzan-Lori Parks, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Gayle Jones, Jamaica Kincaid, Terry McMillan, Sapphire, Lizzette Carter. (Same as English 108.)

   Examines African American literature and culture by reading across genres that include the slave narrative, fiction, theater, and poetry. Principal focus will be the essays of such famous authors and activists as Frederick Douglass, Ida Wells, W. E. B. DuBois, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, and June Jordan. (Same as English 111.)
113c,d - VPA. African Dance and Music. (Same as Dance 113 and Music 113.)

A survey of jazz’s development from its African American roots in the late nineteenth century through the Swing Era of the 1930s and 1940s, and following the great Swing artists—e.g., Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, and Benny Goodman—through their later careers. Emphasis is on musical elements, but includes much attention to cultural and historical context through readings and videos. (Same as Music 121.)

A survey of jazz’s development from the creation of bebop in the 1940s through the present day, e.g., from Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie through such artists as Joshua Redman, James Carter, and the Art Ensemble of Chicago. Emphasis is on musical elements, but includes much attention to cultural and historical context through readings and videos. (Same as Music 122.)

Surveys various musical traditions of the Caribbean, paying attention to the relation between sociohistorical context and artistic practice. Organized by geographic region, but addresses such larger issues as colonialism, nationalism, race, gender, and class. (Same as Latin American Studies 138 and Music 138.)

Examines the coming of the Civil War and the war itself in all its aspects. Considers the impact of changes in American society, the sectional crisis and breakdown of the party system, the practice of Civil War warfare, and social ramifications of the conflict. Includes readings of novels and viewing of films. Students are expected to enter with a basic knowledge of American history, and a commitment to participating in large class discussions. (Same as History 139.)

Seminar. Explores how Christianity, Islam, and indigenous religious beliefs shaped the formation of modern West African states and societies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Discusses the role of these world and indigenous religious institutions and movements in the transformation of major West African societies in the following important historical themes: (1) religion and state formation in the turbulent nineteenth century; (2) religion and colonialism; (3) religion and decolonization; (4) religion and the post-colonial state; (5) religion and politics in the era of globalization. (Same as History 203.)

206b - ESD. The Archaeology of Gender and Ethnicity. (Same as Anthropology 206.)

An introduction to the cultures of various French-speaking regions outside of France. Examines the history, politics, customs, cinema, literature, and arts of the Francophone world, principally Africa and the Caribbean. Readings include newspaper and magazine articles, short stories, and a novel. Students see and discuss television news, documentaries, and feature films. Conducted in French. (Same as French 207 and Latin American Studies 206.)
Prerequisite: French 205 or permission of the instructor.

The social and cultural meaning of race and ethnicity, with emphasis on the politics of events and processes in contemporary America. Analysis of the causes and consequences of prejudice and discrimination. Examination of the relationships between race and class. Comparisons
among racial and ethnic minorities in the United States. (Same as Sociology 208).

Prerequisite: Sociology 101, Africana Studies 101, or Anthropology 101, or permission of the instructor.


The careers of composer/leader/bassist Charles Mingus (1922–1979) and singer/pianist Nina Simone (1933–2003) reflected similar concerns—the multifarious varieties of black music, the use of black musics as statements of racial pride, the openness toward many musical genres in their own work, the constant explorations, and not least the intense involvement in civil rights and their own explosive temperaments. At the same time, these two major artists were very different in their individual styles and in their life experiences. Studies the output of both Mingus and Simone in their relationship to jazz history and other musical genres, and in the context of the social movements of their time. Biographical and autobiographical readings as well as some secondary literature will complement the critical musical analysis. (Same as Music 212.)

Prerequisite: Music 121 or 122.


Explores and critiques a variety of proposed solutions for healing racism in the United States. A working definition of racism is developed through a careful examination of the social structures that support the continuance of racism and discrimination based on race in the United States. The dominant/subordinate relationships of European Americans with African Americans, Latino/a Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans are reviewed. (Same as Sociology 217.)

Prerequisite: Sociology 10 or 101, or Anthropology 101, or permission of the instructor.


Surveys societies and politics in sub-Saharan Africa, seeking to understand the sources of current conditions and the prospects for political stability and economic growth. Looks briefly at pre-colonial society and colonial influence on state-construction in Africa, and concentrates on three broad phases in Africa’s contemporary political development: (1) independence and consolidation of authoritarian rule; (2) economic decline and challenges to authoritarianism; (3) democratization and civil conflict. Presumes no prior knowledge of the region. (Same as Government 222.)


Considers the representation of “race” in the English Renaissance (c. 1500–1650). Explores how authors from Philip Sidney to Aphra Behn used literary strategies to represent ethnic, religious, and cultural difference. Topics include England’s role in the nascent slave trade, the aesthetics of blackness, and the influence of Islamic and “Moorish” cultures on an increasingly cosmopolitan London. Readings include Othello, Jonson’s Mask of Blackness, selected travel narratives, sonnets by Sidney and Shakespeare, and Behn’s Oroonoko. (Same as English 225.)

Prerequisite: One first-year seminar or 100-level course in English or Africana studies.
Note: This course fulfills the pre-1800 literature requirement for English majors.


Examines globally mediated formations of ethnic and racial identities, including the ways in which transnational communities are shaped through contact with “homelands” (physically and virtually) and vice versa. Particular attention given to “Black” and “South
Asian” diasporic communities based in London and the transnational cultural networks in Africa, the Indian Subcontinent, and the Caribbean that they help maintain. Readings include works by Paul Gilroy, Arjun Appadurai, Les Back, Stuart Hall, Jayne Ifekwunigwe, Ian Ang, and the Delhi-based sarai school. (Same as Asian Studies 263 and Sociology 227.)

Prerequisite: Sociology 101 or Anthropology 101.

[229c - ESD. Science and Race in Modern America. (Same as History 230.)]

[233b, d - ESD. IP. Peoples and Cultures of Africa. (Same as Anthropology 233.)]


Traces the circulation of narratives at the height of Britain’s colonial power in the Americas. Situates such literary commerce alongside the larger exchange of people and goods and focuses on the fluctuating nature of national, racial, and sexual identities in the circum-Atlantic world. Explores how literary texts attempted, and often failed, to sustain “Englishness” in the face of separation, revolution, or insurrection. Of special interest are figures who move across the Atlantic divide and exploit the possibility of multiple roles—sailors, pirates, freed or escaped slaves, female soldiers. Texts may include General History of the Pirates; The Woman of Colour; Moll Flanders; The History of Emily Montague; Obi, or the History of Three-Fingered Jack; The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano; the Journals of Janet Schaw; The History of Mary Prince; The Female American. (Same as English 233.)

Prerequisite: One first-year seminar or 100-level course in English.

Note: This course fulfills the pre-1800 literature requirement for English majors.


Examines the history of African Americans from the origins of slavery in America through the death of slavery during the Civil War. Explores a wide range of topics, including the establishment of slavery in colonial America, the emergence of plantation society, control and resistance on the plantation, the culture and family structure of enslaved African Americans, free black communities, and the coming of the Civil War and the death of slavery. (Same as History 236.)

[237c, d - ESD. The History of African Americans from 1865 to the Present. (Same as History 237.)]

[239c, d. Comparative Slavery and Emancipation. (Same as History 239.)]


The first part of the course will concentrate on studying the converging forces from the 1890s to the 1950s that combined to create the vastly increased activity toward racial justice in the 1950s and 1960s. The second part will concentrate on the tactics, uncertainties, and, ultimately, the significant but incomplete victories of the 1960s. The third part will concentrate on what has been called the “retreat to the ghetto,” and an evaluation of where we are now. (Same as History 243.)


Women of color are often ignored or pushed to the margins. There is a cost to that absence, obviously, for women of color. As Zora Neale Hurston put it, “There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside you.” There is also a cost to those who are not women of color, as women of color are encountered as objects, rather than subjects. Addresses the gaps and explores the histories and contemporary issues affecting women of color and their ethnic/racial communities in the United States. (Same as Gender and Women’s Studies 245 and History 245.)

Examines contemporary work in this diverse and exciting area. African philosophers raise many questions: Given the variety of African cultures, is there a distinctive outlook African philosophers share, and if so, what is it? How should academic philosophers regard indigenous philosophy? Are their distinctive African concepts of beauty, truth, and the good life? What “counts” as African? Examines these and other ethical, aesthetic, and metaphysical questions. (Same as Philosophy 249.)


Examines the prehistory of Africa since the appearance of modern humans on that continent about 100,000 years ago. Particular attention paid to changes in African economies and social systems through time. Some of the topics covered include the cultural development of modern humans in Africa; the beginnings of agriculture in different parts of the continent; state formation processes in sub-Saharan Africa; and the coordination of ethnographic, linguistic, and archaeological data in research. (Same as Anthropology 256.)

Prerequisite: Anthropology 101 or 102, or permission of the instructor.

African American Fiction: (Re)Writing Black Masculinities. (Same as English 260 and Gender and Women’s Studies 260.)

African American Poetry. (Same as English 261 [formerly English 276].)

Africana Studies


Focuses on conquest, colonialism, and its legacies in sub-Saharan Africa; the violent process of colonial pacification, examined from European and African perspectives; the different ways of consolidating colonial rule and African resistance to colonial rule, from Maji Maji to Mau Mau; and African nationalism and independence, as experienced by Africa’s nationalist leaders, from Kwame Nkrumah to Jomo Kenyatta, and their critics. Concludes with the limits of independence, mass disenchantment, the rise of the predatory post-colonial state, genocide in the Great Lakes, and the wars of Central Africa. (Same as History 264.)

African American Literature: The Harlem Renaissance. (Same as English 266.)
Courses of Instruction

[267c,d - IP. African Environmental History. (Same as Environmental Studies 268 and History 267.])

Examines slave narratives and anti-slavery novels from the United States and Cuba (where almost all of the nineteenth-century writings in Spanish originated). Situates these works in their historical and literary contexts and explores the ways in which authors enter politically charged debates about slavery, gender, and sexuality. Authors include the orator, editor, and statesman Frederick Douglass; the enslaved poet Juan Manzano; the feisty narrator Esteban Montejo; Martin Delany, known as the father of Black nationalism; the once enslaved authors and activists Harriet Jacobs and Louisa Picquet; and Jamaica’s famous woman warrior, Nanny. Spanish speakers will be encouraged to read primary texts and criticism in Spanish. Writing intensive. (Same as English 268 and Latin American Studies 268.)

Prerequisite: One first-year seminar or 100-level course in English or Africana studies.
Note: This course fulfills the literature of the Americas requirement for English majors.

[269c,d - ESD, IP. After Apartheid: South African History and Historiography. (Same as History 269.])

Explorations of short fiction by African American writers from fugitive narratives to futurist science fiction. Focuses on strategies of cultural survival as mapped in narrative form—with special interest in trickster storytellers, alternative temporalities and double-voicing. Close attention paid to the exigencies of the short form, the experimental ground of the short story and its role for emerging writers, and notable anthologies and the role of stories in movement-making. (Same as English 270 [formerly English 275].)

Prerequisite: One first-year seminar or 100-level course in English or Africana studies.
Note: This course fulfills the literature of the Americas requirement for English majors.

Seminar. The slavery that emerged with the expansion of European powers in the New World was historically unique—a form more exploitative and capitalistic than any seen before. Paradoxically, it was this same Atlantic world that bred the ideas of universal human liberty that led to slavery’s demise. Explores this conundrum and examines the movements in the Atlantic world dedicated to abolishing slavery in the Atlantic basin in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Considers the foundations of antislavery thought, the abolition of the slave trade, the relationship between capitalism and abolitionism, the role of African American protest, the emergence of immediatism in America, the progress of Atlantic emancipations, and the historical memory of antislavery. Intensive engagement with historical arguments on this topic. (Same as History 270.)

[277c. Topics in Nineteenth-Century American Literature: Empire of Feeling. (Same as English 252 [formerly English 277].)]

Explores the politics and culture of the 1960s in the United States. Particular topics of focus include civil rights, student activism, the Vietnam War, the counterculture, and the beginnings of the feminist and environmental movements of the 1970s. Also explores the political dynamics of the decade’s various controversies, paying particular attention to the way that such controversies shaped—and continue to shape—United States political culture. (Same as History 278.)
Examines a broad swath of antebellum and postbellum American sentimental literature; its purpose is to understand the ways in which the literature defines itself both in alliance with and opposition to slavery. Students also engage a number of theoretical texts that discuss the philosophical dimensions of sentimentalism and its impact on the form of American fiction. Works by Stowe, Melville, Hawthorne, Sedgwick, Sarah Hale, Lydia Maria Child, Frances Harper and Frank Webb, among others, will be included. (Same as English 279.)
Prerequisite: One first-year seminar or 100-level course in English or Africana studies.
Note: This course fulfills the literature of the Americas requirement for English majors.

280b - ESD. Race, Biology, and Anthropology. (Same as Anthropology 280.)


305c,d. Critical Race Theory.

322c,d. African American Literature and Visual Culture. (Same as English 322.)

324c,d. Empirical Africa: Exoticism, Race, and Gender. (Same as French 324 and Latin American Studies 324.)

Close readings of literary and filmic texts that interrogate widespread beliefs in the fixity of racial categories and the broad assumptions these beliefs often engender. Investigates “whiteness” and “blackness” as unstable and fractured ideological constructs—that, while socially and historically produced, are no less “real” in their tangible effects, whether internal or external. Includes works by Charles Chesnutt, Sinclair Lewis, Nella Larsen, Norman Mailer, Anne McClintock, Jack Kerouac, John Howard Griffin, Andrea Lee, Sandra Bernhard, and Warren Beatty. (Same as English 327.)
Prerequisite: One 200-level course in English or Africana studies, or permission of the instructor.
Note: This course fulfills the literature of the Americas requirement for English majors.

A research course for majors and interested non-majors that culminates in a single 25–30 page research paper. With the professor’s consent, students may choose any topic in Civil War or African American history, broadly defined. This is a special opportunity to delve into Bowdoin’s rich collections of primary historical source documents. (Same as History 336.)
Prerequisite: One course in United States history.

360c,d. Religion and Politics in African History. (Same as History 360 and Religion 360.)