African/African American Studies Program

I. Teaching & Learning Goals
Carleton’s interdisciplinary program in African/African American Studies operates within the context of the College’s commitment to “provide an exceptional undergraduate liberal arts education” (“Mission, Vision, Values and Goals” Statement, Carleton College Academic Catalog 2008-2009, p.1). Students in the program are taught and encouraged to develop their literary, analytic, and research skills through a critical study of patterns of Western and African civilizations in their interwoven complexity. Our students are thus enabled to “acquire the knowledge necessary for the continuing study of the world’s peoples, arts, environments, literatures, [social] sciences, and institutions” (Catalog, 2).

Courses, independent study, or projects that serve the program’s needs are guided by the College’s academic goal of “developing the critical and creative talents of our students through broad and rigorous studies in the liberal arts disciplines” (Catalog, 1). In addition, often in relation, to nurturing students’ “capabilities for disciplinary and interdisciplinary research and artistic production” (Catalog, 2), the program provides a forum for addressing topics like construction of self, responses to exclusion, gender, class, race, and ethnicity. While conversations about these topics and issues may be “difficult,” the program shares the College’s sense that they are “necessary for individual growth and community strength” (Catalog, 1).

The program encourages students to be active participants not only in the process of putting together a major (or concentration), but also in the broader arena of knowledge acquisition and the uses to which that knowledge is put. The requirements built into the major and concentration are intended to provide students with basic knowledge and necessary skills (at the introductory/survey level) that would then be further developed in a range of intermediate- and upper-level courses. For the major, course work culminates in a comprehensive exercise that is interdisciplinary and integrative; each student works with two faculty advisors from different disciplines in this exercise.

AFAM students should be able to…
1. Acquire and demonstrate knowledge of the major authors, figures, periods, and traditions in African/African American Studies
2. Demonstrate familiarity with and understanding of the seminal ideas, theories, and methodologies that inform African/African American Studies
3. Undertake a comprehensive exercise that is interdisciplinary and integrative. A successful project must demonstrate:
a. the student's ability to conduct (interdisciplinary) research using secondary sources, and to cite those sources correctly;
b. the student's keen analyses and skillful synthesizing of diverse primary and secondary sources; and
c. the student's ability to write and make arguments that are lucid and persuasive.

II. Evaluation and Assessment
Multiple forms of assessment are used to evaluate student learning in each course, independent study, or project that fulfills major (and concentration) requirements. These include:

- Written responses to assigned reading for each class
- Presentations in class
- Formal essays and papers
- Quizzes
- Final written and/or oral examinations

A useful tool for assessing students’ acquisition and application of knowledge in the African/African American Studies major is the senior comprehensive, interdisciplinary, and integrative exercise. The program requires each major to submit a proposal for the comprehensive exercise in the fall term of the senior year. Approval of the proposal hinges on:

- the succinct articulation of an interdisciplinary area of focus;
- the relevance and feasibility of that area of focus for sustained inquiry and research;
- a sufficiently clear delineation of the specific direction and broader aims of the study; and
- the strength of a working bibliography.

Each stage of the actual work on a project following the approval of a proposal tests and refines the student’s capability for interdisciplinary research and for skillfully synthesizing diverse primary and secondary sources. At the end of the comprehensive exercise, the successful project must provide ample evidence to support the view that its author, the student, has indeed learned “higher order thinking skills [like]…analysis of evidence, arts of communication and argumentation, and problem-solving strategies” (Catalog, 1).

III. Projected Assessment Plan

2009-10
Student Learning Outcome (SLO) 3: Analyze Evidence
Gather information on student’s/students’ ability to “identify underlying assumptions in particular theoretical orientations, methodological approaches or arguments; present opposing viewpoints and alternative hypotheses, etc.”
Information Gathering Source: Senior Comps

2010-11
1. Study evidence/information on SLO 3 and decide on a course of action if warranted.
2. In relation to SLO 3, focus on SLO 5: communicate effectively (“arts of communication and argumentation”). Gather information on students’ “ability to
write and make arguments that are lucid and persuasive.” Information collection source: Senior Comps