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Team-Teaching Africana Studies: Developing a Model for Innovation, Interdisciplinary Pedagogy, and an Inclusive Curriculum

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Team-Teaching Africana Studies: Developing a Model for Innovation, Interdisciplinary Pedagogy, and an Inclusive Curriculum

Abstract

Africana Studies Faculty from Central Missouri State University will discuss how they developed an innovative team-taught course for Introduction to Africana Studies. The faculty have worked on the course for the past three years and it was recently added to the curriculum as a general education requirement.

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In the fall of 2002, Central Missouri State University approved a minor program in Africana Studies. This momentous occasion marked a period of nearly 50 years in which the institution had struggled with issues of race, ethnicity, and an inclusive curriculum. While the university quietly desegregated in the summer of 1954, access, retention, and opportunity often remained illusive for faculty and students.

As early as 1969, the first course in African American history was taught every other year. Over the next three decades courses in African American literature, African History, the African Diaspora Jazz, African American women and other related topics had been taught or added to the curriculum. Yet, no comprehensive program existed until the late 1990s when a group of faculty pushed for change aided by a review team visit from the National Council of Black Studies.

Under the leadership of Drs. Bryan Carter & Dr. Yvonne Johnson, but amid state budget cuts, CMSU approved the minor with no funding or faculty reallocation. The Department of History and Anthropology agreed to serve as the discipline home. Again, a few dedicated faculty came forward to offer their time and expertise. With a teaching load of 4-4 for CMSU faculty, the Africana Studies steering committee decided to team-teach the course to get the program started and to prevent anyone from carrying an academic overload without pay. Necessity proved to be the mother of invention.

In three years, the Introduction to Africana Studies course has become a model for team and interdisciplinary teaching on its campus. The work of the Africana Studies faculty also resulted in the Introduction to Africana Studies courses being added to the General Education requirement in the area of cultural interaction during summer 2004.

Faculty from six disciplines (literature, history, religion, music, sociology, and social work) will discuss the pros and cons of team-teaching and course development. They will explain syllabus development, their different teaching styles and assessment strategies. For example, the course has utilized service learning and distance learning during various offerings. Faculty will offer insight on lessons learned and offer suggestions on the future direction of the course and the place of Africana Studies in the millennium. They will tackle the thorny issues of increasing student enrollment as well as how to sustain the course as multiple sections are added. Besides the different academic disciplines represented, the core faculty are diverse in race, ethnicity, nationality, gender and generation. Furthermore, the panel will discuss the symbiotic relationship that the faculty have developed in their teaching, research, and student interaction. This session responds to the conference theme by addressing how access, achievement and opportunity have been created through their innovative pedagogy and their persistent effort to create a curriculum inspired by the architects of the landmark *Brown* decision.

Presenters

Dr. Bryan Carter is an assistant professor of English and co-founder of the Africana Studies program. He specializes in African American literature and online and distance learning teaching technologies. He has taught in Sweden, the Netherlands and most recently at the Sorbonne in Paris.

Dr. Delia C. Gillis is an associate professor in history and the Coordinator of the Africana Studies minor. She specializes in African American and South African History. She has taught at the Maastricht Center for Transatlantic Studies in the Netherlands, the University of the Western Cape and the University of Port Elizabeth in South Africa

Dr. Mosa 110 is an assistant professor in sociology. He specializes in urban sociology, the sociology of knowledge, and race/ethnic relations. His current research focuses on race, democracy, and imperialism. He has taught in Nigeria.

Dr. Yvonne Johnson is professor of history and Coordinator of the Women Studies program. She is a co-founder of the Africana Studies program and has taught in the Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and the Netherlands. She specializes in African American and African Diaspora History.

Reverend Albion Mends is an adjunct instructor in the Africana Studies program and the Center for Religious Studies. He specializes in African history and the religions of Africa, the Caribbean and African Americans and has taught in Ghana.

Dr. C. Dianne Mack is an associate professor in music. She specializes in teaching spirituals, gospel, work songs, and jazz.

Ms. Regina Tenney is an assistant Professor of Sociology and Social Work. Her research interests include: African American families and communities, culturally competent social work practice and child welfare practice and policy. In recognition of her teaching ability, Ms. Tenney was awarded the College of Education & Human Services "Excellence in Teaching Award" in May, 2004.