A Letter from the Department of Africana Studies at CSU Northridge

Dear Colleagues, Friends, Students, Supporters and Visitors:

“You will never see new oceans until you are willing to lose sight of the shore.”

-- South African Proverb

It is truly a pleasure to welcome you to the new Africana Studies website at California State University, Northridge. We are very proud of this site, which offers a full palette of opportunities and offerings available in the discipline. This AY 2014-2015 finds us now entering our 46th year of service, reflecting an over four-decade history of educating and graduating thousands of students who have either majored or minored in Pan African Studies.

Name Change, Renewed Commitment

A brief, but very important note about the Department is the recent change in name. We began in 1969 as the Department of Pan African Studies, one of the oldest state-supported Black Studies Departments in America. We stand as the first in the California State University system, widely considered as one of the nation’s most outstanding state colleges. From those beginnings in 1969 to May 2014, those who chose to major or minor in Pan African Studies would have printed on their baccalaureate degrees “African American Studies.” Though it has taken many years, we are now proud to share that the University and the Chancellor have given approval to change the Department’s name from Pan African Studies to Africana Studies. Students will earn the baccalaureate degree in Africana Studies as well. Doing so puts us in lockstep with several of our sister departments and programs within the CSU system, along with an ever-increasing number of colleges and universities across the country.

Notably, there have been other important changes made as our Department boldly steps forth in the 21st century, reaffirming our commitment to the challenge given the nation by President Barack Obama: “Become the change you want to be.” One of our longstanding concerns is the education of our children. This concern has reshaped the discipline. Students entering this upcoming year are now able to major in any one of three options: (1) African and African American Social Sciences, (2) African and African American Humanities and Cultural Studies, and (3) African American Urban Education. Students may also declare a minor in Africana Studies, or an African Studies Interdisciplinary minor. These changes come at the same time when we find an increasing number of students interested in careers as educators, and as the federal government commits hundreds of millions of dollars that promotes training a new generation of educators and scholars to meet a growing national need.

Curriculum Choices Offer Greater Flexibility

At the same time that the nation – especially here in California – embraces an ever-increasing multi-cultural and multi-racial population, we have re-tooled our curriculum to reflect the interests of this culturally diverse community. We’ve built greater flexibility into the discipline, whereby students are now able to select from our list of general education courses and electives to find classes that match with their career aspirations, which will make them more marketable upon graduation. Our website makes students aware of those options, and we have a team of competent, highly trained faculty to provide the proper guidance in making those choices.
For those of you perusing our website wondering about the meaning of Africana Studies, or the significance of changing the name of the department and its degree, rest assured that our bedrock remains an adherence to what we fought for initially back in 1969, and what we have found the general public increasingly demanding in today’s world --- a relevant education. For us, a relevant education has been defined as one that provides students with an understanding of the long history of African people on this planet and their contributions to human civilization; an education that offers students of all backgrounds an appreciation of the richness and vitality of African cultures as they exist on the continent of Africa and throughout the African Diaspora.

Africana Studies provides for critical analysis of racism as a system that discriminates against, exploits, and oppresses African people based exclusively or primarily on the unscientific concept of race. Rather than educating students away from themselves, Africana Studies has the goal, indeed the mission, of educating students about themselves as they are situated in their society, and about the responsibility that they have for transforming this, our world, into a just, humane, and equitable one for people of all races, creeds, and colors.

**Giving back to the Community**

Our diverse, dedicated faculty is committed to the mission and goals of Africana Studies. We have a blend of senior and junior faculty who come from world-class institutions ranging from Harvard University and Stanford University to Temple University, from the University of Massachusetts to the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). Our faculty are educators, to be sure, but they are also scholars, intellectuals and community activists, who are committed to mentoring students so as to help them reach their fullest potential. We have formed and remain committed to forging partnerships, on and off the campus, that provide students with service learning and community engagement opportunities. Likewise, we have been able to form partnerships with organizations, groups and agencies that enable our students to secure internships that not only give them “real world” experience, but also allow them to “give back to the community.”

Through much work and commitment, we have been able to form alliances with other programs and departments to broaden the diversity and quality of our course offerings. Starting this new academic year we will, for the first time, identify and offer those choosing to major in Africana Studies the unique opportunity to participate in a six-year program, beginning in their freshman year, that will result in the B.A./JD degree that culminates with the Juris Doctorate from Southwestern Law School – one of the first programs of its kind in the CSU system. The College of Social and Behavior Sciences (CSBS) is also launching an online B.A. degree program, which includes a selection of Africana Studies courses. In a similar vein, our college has now partnered with the prestigious National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), which has opened up opportunities for faculty and students alike to collaborate and conduct research that focuses upon people of African/Latin descent. Students majoring in Africana Studies also have the opportunity to spend up to one year studying at other colleges and universities, not only in America, but also at several sister campuses, which have established programs in the African nations of Zimbabwe and South Africa.

This is an exciting time, a great time – and most certainly a moment in time when one of the best choices in higher education one can make today, in our judgment, is to major or minor in Africana Studies. The world is far different from where it stood in 1900, or in 1954 with the U.S. Supreme Court’s
Brown v. Board of Education decision, which struck down the “separate but equal” concept that served as the milk blood of segregated, second-class citizenship and education, or the turbulent 1960s out of which was born our discipline and those of Chicano/a Studies, Asian American Studies, and efforts like the Equal Opportunity Program (EOP). We have seen an African American now hold the nation’s highest position, something that never before happened in our history.

Come Visit Our Department

Just as America has come of age during these years, the same holds true for our discipline. We invite you to browse our website, come talk with our faculty and academic advisers, take advantage of our updated and approved General Education course offerings, many of which are aligned with the university’s new GE Paths. Most of all come visit our department as we welcome you to an educational journey that will last for a lifetime. We are located in the Santa Susanna Building, Room 221 and can be reached at (818) 677-3311.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Department of Africana Studies Faculty