

Saint Louis University
Program-Level Assessment: Annual Report | Fall 2021

Program Name: Department of African American Studies

Degree or Certificate Level: BA (Major & Minor) **College:** Arts and Sciences

Assessment Contact: Dr. Christopher M. Tinson, Chair tinsoncm@slu.edu

Assessment Years Covered: 2019-2021 **Previous Assessment reviewed/updated:** 2017

CAVEAT: As of Fall 2021 we were elevated, after a 40-year struggle over curricular needs and against institutional and structural resistance, to departmental status. As a result, we have never completed a full assessment cycle.

1. Student Learning Outcomes

A. Through a rigorous engagement with primary and secondary scholarship, students will be introduced to the field of African American Studies, which entails the systematic study of African descendants in the U.S. and around the world. This includes the cultural, social, and political efforts African descendants have established over hundreds of years.

B. Upon completing this course of study our students will be able to identify key experiences, figures, movements, and ideas emanating from the African Diaspora.

C. Students will be able interpret crucial aspects of African and African American history up to, during and long after the experience of enslavement.

D. Students will come to understand the ways in which African culture and beliefs were maintained upon their captive arrival in the New World.

E. Students will be able to interpret movement ideas and strategies that African descendants have employed in their search for global justice.

F. Students will be able to engage with and identify political movements that emerge throughout the African Diaspora with particular focus on U.S. based struggles for justice.

In general, our Student Learning Outcomes are evaluated in three stages: Introductory, Intermediate, and Advanced. This report focuses chiefly on the Advanced level.

Introductory level: students develop basic knowledge of African American Studies as an interdisciplinary field of study; collaborative learning; gaining comfort contributing to course discussions; writing practice through short critical essay assignments.

Courses: AAM 2000: Freedom Dreams: Introduction to African American Studies and AAM 2010: Contemporary Black America

Assessment Method: Critical short essays that compare and contrast author's arguments

Intermediate level: Students develop greater range in knowledge of the field; conversant in key issues, topics, ideas, figures, sites, and strategies for justice and equity; comfort writing longer critical essays that engage secondary literature.

Courses: All African American Studies electives, including but not limited to: African American Psychology (Qualitative and quantitative research, research and writing); History of African American Women (Historical methods, key figures and contributions, research and writing); African/African Diaspora Art (Interpreting artistic and aesthetic production, research and writing); African American Literary Traditions (Exposure to African American Literary canon and African American Literary Criticism, research and writing); African Americans and Civil Rights (History of African American Struggles for Justice; interpret key legal case studies, research and writing); African American Culture: Hip Hop in Global Context (Popular culture, critical analysis, research and writing).

Assessment Method: Critical and/or research essays that compare and contrast author's arguments and utilize additional secondary resources beyond the assigned work.

1G. The Specific Aspect of our Student Learning Outcomes being Assessed here:

Advanced level: At this stage confidence interpreting and utilizing primary materials in research is expected. Students practice composing longer research essays, formulate original research questions, develop a research proposal, and execute independent research with faculty guidance; at this stage students are expected to demonstrate a deep understanding of the field/discipline.

Courses: AAM 4970: Research Methods (fall) and AAM 4960: Capstone (spring); Independent Study under professor guidance; where possible collaborative research with professor.

Assessment Method: Graduating students conduct independent research project and presentation at departmental capstone panel or university wide student panel each Spring semester.

2. Artifacts of Student Learning

We have evaluated the Capstone projects of our last few cohorts. We have included the student names and titles below:

(2021)

Mackenzie Linger, "Diversity Creates Barriers in Pursuit of Racial Justice: An examination of the use of diversity in Higher Education Institutions"

Amra Krajinic, "Last Name Ever, First Name Greatest: Youth Sports and What It Means to Youth"

(2020)

Diamond Hardiman, "To Die for Your Country: How Assata Shakur Challenged the Necessity to Die at the Hands of the State"

Elon Ptah, "We Have Nothing to Lose but Everything: Sugarcane Plantations, Capitalism, Ecological Degradation, and their Connection to Today's Climate Crisis" (2020)

Devonn Thomas, "Nobody's Free Until Everybody's Free: On Abolition and Imagination" (2020)

(2019)

Dejai Huffmon, "Black Communities and Mental Illness Stigma"

Janee Davis, "Considering HERstory: An Analysis of the Interconnectedness between Domestic Violence and Homelessness in Black Women's Lives"

Taylor Robinson, "Examining the Trauma Related Health Effects of Police Behavior on Black Communities"

Taylor Williams, "Mental Health and the Criminal Justice System in the United States"

Each of these projects are different in theoretical exploration, data collection, overall methodology, and draw distinct conclusions. They are aligned in their examination of Black community experiences in the U.S. In alignment with the pedagogical and research principles emanating from African American Studies these projects were designed to imagine social transformation at the grassroots.

3. Assessment Methods: Evaluation Process

Capstone projects are the culmination of their African American Studies degree and they must demonstrate proficiency in the field to even be eligible for Research Methods and the Capstone project. They are evaluated by the individual faculty member with whom they are working.

4. Data/Results

We want students to produce inquiry-driven research that is innovative, original, and relevant. As these are undergraduates, the level of originality varies, and with faculty guidance we assist students in developing their own research questions. Students are guided through each stage of the research process including identifying a pressing contemporary or historical issue, developing a set of research questions, identifying archival collections, acquiring compelling evidence, reading widely on their subject of interest, developing an annotated bibliography, writing a review of secondary literature, and finally organization and execution of the study.

5. Findings, interpretations, and conclusions

At the time of this Assessment, we have found that each student's level of comfort with independent research varies from student-to-student. Some are stronger and more prepared developing a new critical question but may struggle with converting that into an extended essay. Upon completion, however, their projects all achieve the level of rigor and inquiry-driven independent research expected of students in their final year. In the near future, we aim to prepare each student equitably.

6. Closing the loop: Dissemination and Use of Current Assessment Findings

- a. When and how did your program faculty share and discuss these results and findings from this cycle of assessment?

At the conclusion of each academic year, the capstone presentation panel is the space we utilize to allow students and African American Studies faculty to engage in question and answer exchanges regarding a students' project. This is designed to allow students to show their command of their research project and allow them the space to defend their findings and conclusions drawn.

- b. How specifically have you decided to use these findings to improve teaching and learning in your program? For example, perhaps you've initiated one or more of the following:

Changes to course content—As scholarship changes, we adapt and introduce students to the new research emerging from African American and African Diasporic scholarship. At the entry point of our degree path we've revised our introductory course, which is now retitled Freedom Dreams: Introduction to African American Studies borrows its name from one of the core texts to the course, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* by historian Robin D.G. Kelley. This book is a staple for our introductory courses. Other central texts for our introductory courses include primary documents such as David Walker's *Appeal*, and *The Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B. Du Bois.

For our Research Methods course (which students take as their studies conclude and prepares them for Capstone) we have done the most work to revise course content. In this latter course, students are introduced to several different approaches to research, with a focus on the challenge and opportunity of decolonizing archival research. Students are immersed in a series of readings on the history of African American Studies (also known as Africana Studies and Black Studies), decolonizing research methodologies, and theoretical approaches to the study of Black life. Students also write several critical short essays, which we call "Think Pieces" that explore themes from the assigned articles. This is intended to acquaint students with different forms of writing. Throughout the course students are provided examples of scholarly articles, book reviews, review essays, Op-eds, Digital Archival approaches and theories of Digital Humanities, anthologies, book manuscripts, and dissertations. They are also introduced to the major journals in the discipline, including the *Journal of African American History*, *The Black Scholar*, the *Journal of Black Studies*, the *African American Review*, and *SOULS*. We intend to show students all of the ways scholarship is produced and the range of its usage. The culminating assignment is the production of a thorough Annotated Bibliography. This will prepare students for their research Literature Review intended to catapult their research.

Course sequence—Upon the arrival of a new chairperson changes were made to the sequence of our penultimate and final course for our degree path for majors and minors. Previously, both minors and majors were required to complete a Capstone project. The change we made was to require both minors and majors first take Research Methods and then complete the Capstone. This change in sequence has clarified our assessment practices for both faculty and our students.

New Courses—We are in the process of proposing several new or existing courses to the new core. The hiring of a new faculty member in Fall 2021 will add to at least two new courses to our curriculum.

7. Closing the loop: Review of Previous Assessment Findings and Changes

N.B. This section cannot be completed at this time. This is our first full assessment cycle.

- a. What is at least one change your program has implemented as a result of assessment data? N/A
- b. How has this change been assessed? N/A
- c. What were the findings of the assessment? N/A
- d. How do you plan to continue using this information moving forward? N/A

8. Additional Assessment Questions:

We plan to review our assessment strategies, plan, etc., every two years. Currently we will evaluate our core major courses, and in F2023 we will evaluate our elective courses. However, this may prove challenging considering our elective courses are taught by and often originate in other units, such as Psychology and English.

We currently do not have any part of our program on the Madrid campus. However, we have had students conduct independent studies with the chairperson and other faculty members during their semester abroad. Recently, a Madrid student requested African American Studies as a minor and has already enrolled in at least two courses that would count towards the minor. We plan to grow interest in our program on the Madrid campus, but there is nothing to evaluate to date.

Engaging students in the assessment process is difficult. Prior to the arrival of a new chairperson students were not engaged collectively. We have since implemented an Advising Day for our majors, minors and any interested students. This is in addition to using the course evaluations from our core courses. These are still being retrieved.

The only external sources consulted were those provided by the Associate Dean of CAS, Dr. Kathleen Llewellyn, which has been a tremendous help in demystifying assessment. We are a severely under-resourced unit, but we are growing. The manageability of our plan will rely on effective leadership from the chairperson, as well as through commitments fulfilled by our faculty.

Future plans: At the end of each academic year faculty will begin to review all of the Capstone projects from our graduates to determine what particular skills and knowledge students are prepared to use for advanced study (graduate school) or that can be employed in their career pursuits.