African American Studies

Chair
• Michael Hill

Undergraduate major: African American studies (B.A.)
Undergraduate minor: African American studies
Graduate degree: M.A. in African American world studies
Faculty: https://clas.uiowa.edu/afam/people/faculty
Website: https://clas.uiowa.edu/afam/

African American studies focuses on the study of people of African descent in the United States and the African diaspora. The African American Studies Program originated in 1969 through courses intended to foster awareness of African Americans’ role in the development of the United States and the world. Because a thorough understanding of the African American experience cannot be achieved through study restricted to the perspective of a single discipline, all students are required to pursue courses in the humanities, social sciences, and performing arts.

The African American Studies Program draws upon faculty from American studies, including sport studies; communication studies; English; gender, women's, and sexuality studies; history; journalism and mass communication; religious studies; rhetoric; and sociology.

Cocurricular Activities

Afro-American Cultural Center

African American studies encourages students to use facilities of the Afro-American Cultural Center. The center serves as a museum and library of educational and cultural artifacts and exhibits of African American culture, providing cultural enrichment for the Iowa City community and promoting diversity among all members of the University community. It also provides a cultural meeting place for African American students.

African American Studies Student Association

The African American Studies Student Association aims to promote knowledge about people of African descent by sponsoring programs on various topics. Any University of Iowa student interested in African American studies is eligible to become a member.

Seminar and Lecture Series

The African American Studies Seminar Series and the Darwin Turner Lecture bring important scholars and creative artists to the University of Iowa campus. Guests of the lecture and seminar series have included Amiri Baraka, Michelle Wallace, and Valerie Smith.

The New Research in African American Studies lecture series, sponsored by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, focuses on research by faculty in the African American Studies Program.

Graduate Seminar

Graduate students from a range of disciplines in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences are encouraged to participate in the program’s interdisciplinary graduate seminar, which is dedicated to advanced readings, scholarly books, and articles in African American studies.

Graduate Student Mentoring and Advising

African American studies sponsors several intellectual and social gatherings for graduate students across disciplines. During these events, students connect with others interested in African American studies and receive advice about becoming faculty members and being productive members of the academic profession.

Programs

Undergraduate Programs of Study

Major
• Major in African American Studies (Bachelor of Arts)

Minor
• Minor in African American Studies

Graduate Program of Study

Major
• Master of Arts in African American World Studies

The African American Studies Program is not accepting graduate students at this time.

Courses

African American Studies Courses

AFAM:1000 First-Year Seminar 1 s.h.
Small discussion class; topics chosen by instructor. Requirements: first-year standing.

AFAM:1020 Introduction to African American Culture 3 s.h.
Interdisciplinary look at Black culture in the United States through significant contributions of the humanities (music, art, literature, drama, philosophy) to development of Black culture. GE: Values and Culture. Same as AMST:1030.

AFAM:1030 Introduction to African American Society 3 s.h.
Social and cultural history of African Americans through framework of general works in anthropology, sociology, history. GE: Social Sciences; Values and Culture.

AFAM:1240 The Art of Listening to Jazz 3 s.h.
What is jazz and its importance; guided introduction to jazz music, anatomy of jazz music, cultural context; development of skills to become an informed listener; process of performing jazz music, its connection with Black culture; focused listening/analysis of prominent jazz artists' work from past and present, including intersection between jazz and hip hop; formal music experience or training not required.
AFAM:1241 The Soundtrack of Black America 3 s.h. Linkage of African American culture and music; Black musical innovations that shaped mainstream American musical tastes over the last century; exploration of relationship between Black music and culture; examples of blues, jazz, gospel, hip hop; artists including Bessie Smith (blues), Mahalia Jackson (gospel), Miles Davis (jazz), Nas and Talib Kweli (hip hop).

AFAM:1250 Introduction to African American Religions 3 s.h. GE: Values and Culture. Same as RELS:1350.

AFAM:1820 Everybody is a Star: Black Celebrity Since 1968 3 s.h. How shifts in social access after 1968 meant that renowned blacks no longer automatically saw themselves as freedom fighters; effects of change shown in Michael Jackson’s career, Barack Obama’s election, and fame of Beyoncé, Lil’ Wayne, and Oprah; analysis of black celebrity from 1968 to 2012 with focus on Muhammad Ali, Dianna Ross, Whitney Houston, Denzel Washington, Michael Jordon, Stevie Wonder, T.D. Jakes, Condoleezza Rice, Jay Z, LeBron James; black celebrity influence on post-civil rights understandings of gender, class, sexuality, politics; biographies, cultural criticism, music videos, movies, documents.

AFAM:1830 Music of the African American Diaspora 3 s.h. History and characteristics of music styles emerging from African American culture from time of slavery to present; beginning with Negro spiritual, exploration of origins and musical anatomy of relevant music styles (blues, gospel, jazz, rhythm and blues, funk); ubiquitous role music plays in civil, cultural, and political unrest amongst African American community throughout 20th century.

AFAM:2014 Giants of Jazz: Miles, Trane, and Duke 3 s.h. Miles Davis, John Coltrane and Duke Ellington as figureheads of the Jazz music style; how they changed the trajectory of modern music along with sidemen (B. Strayhorn and H. Hancock); Ellington’s resolute defiance of stereotypical views of African Americans; Miles’ brazen protests against civil injustices; how these icons are much more than mere musicians; cultural impact of landmark albums including “Kind of Blue,” “A Love Supreme,” and “The Birth of the Cool”; focus on their life, music and sociopolitical impact. Same as MUS:2014.

AFAM:2055 The Look of Blackness: African American Literature and Visual Art 3 s.h. Examination of African American literature over a 200-year span; how preoccupation with blackness as a visual marker of difference impacts formation of written works; how black writers wield, emphasize, and manipulate visuality; blackness foregrounded as if literary texts operate in league with, or in defiance of, visual images circulating throughout American culture, from late 18th-century poetry to mid 20th-century novels; primary texts placed alongside high art and popular visual forms of distinct historical moments to explore how black American writers deploy visual art forms in narrative conceptions of black identity. Same as ENGL:2462.

AFAM:2064 Racial Inequity and the Experiences of African American Families in the U.S. 3 s.h. Racial inequality and experiences of African American families in the U.S. during 20th and 21st centuries; historical context for contemporary research on African American family; relative impact of structural and cultural factors on various aspects of African American family life, declining marriage rates, family formation patterns; intersections of race and class in family life; research methods used to examine dynamics of African American family life, including quantitative analysis, structured qualitative interviews, and ethnography. Same as SOC:2064.

AFAM:2070 Black TV Drama: The Wire 3 s.h. Social and political impact of television dramas featuring people of African descent in the West; HBO’s The Wire series—a social commentary, commercial, and aesthetic force—has pioneered new ways of thinking about the relationship between media and society at large while revolutionizing ways in which black urban life is portrayed in today’s world; focus on complex intersections between urban poverty, education, and political system, crime, mediation in Western society. Same as COMM:2069.

AFAM:2076 Race, Ethnicity, and Media 3 s.h. Introduction to debates about media portrayals of race and ethnicity; focus primarily on entertainment media; use of general analytic perspectives (stereotype analysis, aesthetic analysis, history) applied to real-world examples; address one or more racial/ethnic groups in the United States. Same as COMM:2076.

AFAM:2079 Race and Ethnicity in Sport 3 s.h. Structural and ideological barriers to racial and ethnic equality in sport, with focus on African American sport experiences; historical and contemporary issues, media representations. Same as SPST:2079.

AFAM:2265 Introduction to African American History 3 s.h. GE: Values and Culture. Same as HIST:2265.

AFAM:2465 Selected African American Authors 3 s.h. English majors may apply this course to the following area and/or period requirement. AREA: American Literature and Culture. PERIOD: 20th/21st-Century Literature. Same as ENGL:2465.

AFAM:2500 Black Culture and Experience: Contemporary Issues 3 s.h. Black culture and experience within a contemporary perspective; readings, interactive experiences, course assignments (interview, essays, final paper), and unit quizzes provide an opportunity to better understand Black culture in the 21st century; students explore a variety of important societal topics (e.g., education, religion, literature, theater, media, politics, sports, criminal justice, health, economics). GE: Diversity and Inclusion.

AFAM:2700 The Black Image in Sequential Art: Comics, Graphic Novels, and Anime 3 s.h. Provides a foundation to critically interpret the representation of people of African descent in sequential art; primary focus on serial comic strips, gags, comic books, graphic novels, video games, animation, anime, Manga, film, zines, and televisual examples of Blackness; emphasis of readings and viewing materials on gender, sexualities, economics, ethnicity, the transnational circulation and commodification of the Black image, fandom communities, independent and mainstream sequential art producers. Same as AMST:2700.
AFAM:2730 African American Islam 3 s.h.
Same as RELS:2730.

AFAM:2781 Black Literature and Politics: Controversies of National Allegiance 3 s.h.
Black literature born amid political controversy, from slave narratives to award-winning texts of late 20th century; evolving politics of African American writers; changing political landscape of this expansive period and representative literature; how African American writers shape U.S. political debate; surprising politics of many canonical African American writers. English majors may apply this course to the following area and/or period requirement. AREA: American Literature and Culture. PERIOD: 18th/19th-Century Literature. Same as ENGL:2460, POLI:2107.

AFAM:2800 African American Women, Health, Hair, and Sexuality 3 s.h.
From the exotic to the erotic, African American women's bodies have been constructed to fulfill a variety of personal and cultural fantasies as well as social functions that are "killing us softly"; how cultural icons and myths of Black women—Jezebel, Mammy, Tragic Mulatto, Aunt Jemima, Sapphire, Matriarch, Welfare Queen, and more recently, the overachieving Black woman—shape and create restrictions and visions of the self that contribute to health disparities; engaging Black Feminist/Womanist theory to explore how larger images influence everyday acts of self-care and pleasure, such as hair and sexuality, on the health of African American women. Same as GWSS:2800.

AFAM:3053 The Civil Rights Movement 3 s.h.
History of the American civil rights movement. Same as AMST:3053.

AFAM:3130 Black American Cinema 3 s.h.
Major historical and cultural movements in Black cinema; independent and early Hollywood films, animation, Blaxploitation, the Black Renaissance, Black auteurs (e.g., Spike Lee, Julie Dash), hip-hop cinema, womanist films, 21st-century developments in film (e.g., theatre to film adaptions of Tyler Perry), new media's effect on film and cinema; particular attention given to gender, sexualities, region, ethnicity, and class. Same as AMST:3130.

AFAM:3245 Twentieth-Century African American Religion: Civil Rights to Hip-Hop 3 s.h.
Twentieth-century African American religious history; major political and cultural movements, such as civil rights, black power, black feminism/womanism, hip-hop. Same as RELS:3745.

AFAM:3275 History of Slavery in the U.S.A. 3-4 s.h.
Beginning, expansion, and ending of American slavery; how our national memory of slavery in popular culture (in high school history, in historical landmarks and museums) helps or hinders our understanding of history of slavery in the U.S. Same as HIST:3275.

AFAM:3400 Black Popular Music 3 s.h.
History and expressive culture of people of African descent living in America through popular music forms; historical time span between the 17th and 21st centuries; poetry, music, cultural analysis, film, and art as sources for the study of Black music; genres covered include spirituals and gospel, blues, jazz, rock, rhythm and blues, Afropunk, alternative and neo soul, and hip-hop. Recommendations: AFAM:1020 and AMST:1030. Same as AMST:3400.

AFAM:3459 African American Literature Before 1900 3 s.h.
English majors may apply this course to the following area and/or period requirement. AREA: American Literature and Culture. PERIOD: 18th/19th-Century Literature. Same as ENGL:3459.

AFAM:3460 African American Literature After 1900 3 s.h.
English majors may apply this course to the following area and/or period requirement. AREA: American Literature and Culture. PERIOD: 20th/21st-Century Literature. Same as ENGL:3460.

AFAM:3462 African American Drama 3 s.h.
English majors may apply this course to the following area and/or period requirement. AREA: American Literature and Culture. PERIOD: Varies by semester. Same as ENGL:3462, THTR:3462.

AFAM:3465 African American Autobiography 3 s.h.
English majors may apply this course to the following area and/or period requirement. AREA: American Literature and Culture. PERIOD: 20th/21st-Century Literature. Same as ENGL:3465.

AFAM:3500 Malcolm X, King, and Human Rights 3 s.h.
Religion and politics of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. in the context of U.S. civil rights and international human rights in West Africa and the Muslim world; emphasis on civil rights connections to Gandhi, the Nobel Peace prize, and other international experiences that have impacted Pan Africanists, such as Stokely Carmichael, who worked on human rights. Recommendations: international studies major or undergraduate standing. Same as RELS:3808.

AFAM:3550 African American Literature 3 s.h.
English majors may apply this course to the following area and/or period requirement. AREA: Transnational Literature and Postcolonial Studies. PERIOD: 20th/21st-Century Literature. Same as ENGL:3550.

AFAM:3555 Topics in African Cinema 3 s.h.
English majors may apply this course to the following area and/or period requirement. AREA: Transnational Literature and Postcolonial Studies. PERIOD: 20th/21st-Century Literature. Same as ENGL:3555.

AFAM:3710 African American Women Writers 3 s.h.
Introduction to major African American women authors of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries; major debates of black feminist literary scholarship; analyze African American literary representations by reading novels, poetry, short stories, plays, relevant historical and critical texts. Same as GWSS:3710.

AFAM:3840 Free-Style Writing: Poetry, Plays, and Performances 3 s.h.
Creative writing lab experience in reading, writing, and performing poetry and short plays; expansion of students' horizons of the self; arc of innovation in African American literature from Harlem Renaissance to present, with texts from Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston to Saul Williams and Jill Scott; role of the artist in society and as outsider and insider; shifting perspectives on race, gender, class; musical influences and models, from blues to house music; sensuality, spirituality; artistic reflections on the cultural moment; effects of these on literary form and performance style; students create and perform a work for an audience. Same as THTR:3403.

AFAM:3900 Topics in African American Studies arr.
Different topic each semester.
AFAM:3925 African Americans and the Media 3 s.h.
Same as JMC:3165.

AFAM:4001 Television and African American Culture 3 s.h.

AFAM:4195 African American History 1619-1865 3 s.h.
Race and African American history, from the rise of racial slavery to the Civil War; advanced course. Same as HIST:4295.

AFAM:4298 African American History 1865-Present 3 s.h.
African American history since Reconstruction; survey of African American politics and society from Reconstruction to present. Same as HIST:4296.

AFAM:4310 Pre-Colonial African History 3 s.h.
Africa to 1880; oral tradition, other sources; political development, ecological change, slavery and slave trade. Same as HIST:4710.

AFAM:4710 Midwest African American Literature and Culture 3 s.h.
English majors may apply this course to the following area and/or period requirement. AREA: American Literature and Culture. PERIOD: 20th/21st-Century Literature. Same as ENGL:4410.

AFAM:4715 African History Since 1880 3 s.h.
Africa in colonial, post-colonial period; economics, political structures of colonialism; social change, political life in the 20th century. Same as HIST:4715.

AFAM:4910 Special Topics 3 s.h.
Selected topics, issues, and debates about various components of African American culture including literature, sociology, psychology, media, history, rhetoric, theater, sports, health, and education.

AFAM:4980 Independent Study arr.
Topics vary.

AFAM:4990 Honors Project arr.
Independent research and writing on interdisciplinary topic.

AFAM:5900 Advanced Readings in African American Culture arr.
Textual, social, political analyses of works by Black authors.

AFAM:7130 Readings on Twentieth-Century Black Internationalism arr.
Complex dynamics of black internationalism during 20th century, focusing on the global visions, transnational activities, and transracial political alliances of people of African descent worldwide; readings will reflect geographical breadth of the African Diaspora including Africa, the Americas, and Europe. Same as HIST:7130.

AFAM:7205 Gender and Race in Nineteenth-Century U.S. arr.
Same as GWSS:7205, HIST:7205.

AFAM:7214 Readings: African American Women’s History arr.
Same as GWSS:7214, HIST:7214.

Interpretations and methods applied by historians in various world regions to different forms of oral history, from old oral traditions to contemporary autobiographical testimony. Same as HIST:7710.