

General Education Report

African Diaspora Awareness

July 21, 2020

Summary

The Department of African Studies within the College of Arts and Sciences supports three degree programs at Howard University. In addition to one undergraduate and two graduate degrees, they offer several undergraduate courses that serve the larger Howard student body. These courses provide the University with opportunities for undergraduate students to explore African Diaspora Awareness.

Context

Howard University General Education 21 (HUGE 21) is a set of 21 general education learning outcomes decided by faculty in 2017. The outcomes are met through curricular and co-curricular student experiences including classes and coursework, high-impact learning opportunities, student activities, employment, and alternative experiences. Each semester, Howard University looks at student work or data related to students experiences and determines the degree to which students have met one or more of these outcomes.

Outcomes are measured on a rotating basis across all undergraduate schools and colleges. Of the 21 outcomes, 5 (Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, Written Communication, Oral Communication, Quantitative Literacy, Information Literacy, and African Diaspora Awareness) are measured every other year, and the other 15 (Creative Thinking, Ethical Reasoning, Inquiry and Analysis, Qualitative Literacy, Technology, Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences and Historical Awareness, Intercultural Knowledge and Foreign Language Competency, Science and Environmental Consciousness, Physical and Mental health, Teamwork, Entrepreneurship and Financial Literacy, Civic Knowledge and Engagement, Foundation and Skills for Life-Long Learning, and Integrative and Applied Learning) are assessed at least once each 7-year cycle.

In instances where the outcome is measured by extant data, the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (IRA) partners with a department, faculty member, or staff member to analyze data and report on a chosen general education outcome. In other cases, IRA partners with programs and units to identify how to capture data related to a chosen outcome.

In order to measure “African Diaspora Awareness,” IRA requested extant data from the African Studies Department in the College of Arts and Sciences.

African Diaspora Awareness

According to HUGE 21, the African Diaspora Awareness outcome will be met if

A Howard graduate will demonstrate an understanding of the various cultural, social, political, and economic forces and circumstances that have shaped the broad experiences of people of African descent (including the continent of Africa and its global diaspora). Graduates will also demonstrate an ability to apply research skills specific to

their particular academic discipline to address some of the major problems arising out to circumstances of racial oppression that arose in the Western hemisphere.

Davies (2003) suggests that higher education is a highly colonized space in that it “is a site for the production and re-production of a variety of discourses which keep in place certain colonial structures” which serve to maintain Euro-American hegemonies (p. ix). The only way to combat this persistent colonization is to educate and, in some cases, re-educate students with Afro-centric thought and ways of knowing. Boutte et al. (2017) argues for an African Diaspora literacy and a revitalization of indigenous ways of being and knowing (p. 66). Though their argument primarily concerns early childhood education, the purpose and reasons for a re-education are aligned with the same reasons that Howard faculty mandate all students take a course connected to the African diaspora. As a torchbearer in this important journey, Howard has paved the way for a new generation of leaders to better understand the African diaspora and walk knowledgeably through its history, growth, and impact.

Artifacts

The Department of African Studies serves undergraduate students throughout the University through several open enrollment courses. In an effort to understand the impact of this department, and the degree to which Howard students are exposed to the African diaspora, this document carefully analyzes the syllabus for the most popular course (AFST 101), the demographic distribution of students who take this course (major, year, etc.), and the success these students had in both this course and at least one signature assignment. This report is a pilot report to better understand the impact of the department’s courses on African Diaspora Awareness.

According to the syllabus, AFST 101 or Introduction to Contemporary Africa is a course designed to

illuminate and clarify the profoundly international character of the world we live in and to introduce a set of contemporary issues and challenges that affect every region of Africa. This interdisciplinary course is designed to introduce students to Africa’s history, geography, culture and political economy. Nevertheless, Africa is unquestionably diverse; it is the world’s second largest continent and the second most populous with 54 countries. In this course, students will challenge their assumptions, ask critical questions and seek new knowledge of Africa. Individual country cases will be used to explore contemporary theoretical debates in history, political science, geography, development economics and anthropology. Each unit will critically address one or more of these key questions:

1. What historic and contemporary factors have impacted the geography, culture and political economies of African communities and nations?

2. How had the forced migration of Africans to the Americas influenced transnational ties between the regions?
3. How have kinship groupings shaped social relations within and between communities?
4. In what ways have the linguistic, literary and musical contributions of the Black world evolved over time?
5. How has the legacy of conquest and colonialism influenced contemporary Africa?
6. Since political globalization is as powerful a force as economic globalization, the two movements are interconnected; therefore, why are some nations rich and others poor?
7. How has contemporary transnational migration impacted global and local communities in Africa and beyond?

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate foundational knowledge of the key political, economic, social and cultural issues affecting the regions of Africa;
2. Critically assess debates on topical and theoretical issues in African Studies using interdisciplinary tools (both theoretical and methodological);
3. Exercise critical judgment and problem-solving skills when evaluating sources of information and identifying the causes and solutions to problems and conflicts;
4. Improve written communication skills; and
5. Deepen her/his capacity for independent learning.

The course is designed as a lecture-based course, though an online section is sometimes taught. Student competency is assessed in a variety of ways including online assignments/quizzes, reflection essays, and exams. The course contains both a midterm and final exam.

Methodology

In the spring of 2020, the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment met with the Chair of the Department of African Studies to discuss capturing information on students in African Studies courses. Together, we discussed several courses that were “outward-facing” courses, serving many non-major students. One of these courses (AFST 101) was often used by undergraduate students to meet the “Afro-American” core curriculum requirements. Other courses from the Departments of Afro-American Studies, English, History, and Political Science also fulfill this requirement. The Chair provided a syllabus for the designated course, and we pulled student data on all students enrolled in AFST 101 in the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 academic years. Looking at enrollment data and final grades, we determined the degree to which the students were meeting the competencies of the course and overall competency of African Diaspora Awareness.

Results

In 2018-2019, 355 students completed AFST 101. In 2019-2020, 355 students completed AFST 101. The 710 students served by this course included students from all six undergraduate serving colleges and schools at the University: the College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Nursing and Allied Health Sciences, the School of Business, the School of Education, the Cathy Hughes School of Communication, and the College of Engineering and Architecture.

The table below shows the distribution of students in each college or school.

Major	Table of Students by College/School
Cathy Hughes School of Communications	31
College of Arts and Sciences	471
College of Engineering and Architecture	67
College of Nursing and Health Sciences	76
School of Business	34
School of Education	2
Undetermined	29
Total	710

Though AFST 101 is often taken by freshmen (45.5%), sophomores (28.6%), juniors (12.8%), and seniors (13.0%) also take the course.

The table below shows the distribution of students by year. Note that in Fall 2019 a graduate student (MFA in Film) took the course.

Major	Table of Students by Standing
Freshman	323
Sophomore	203
Junior	91
Senior	92
Graduate	1
Total	710

Course grades are often not granular enough to determine student competency on a particular learning outcome. For the purposes of this pilot assessment report though, we believe that student competency related to the broad learning outcome of African Diaspora Awareness can be understood through course grades.

The table below shows the distribution of course grades for AFST 101 over the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 academic years..

Table of Students by Grade		
Major	Grade	%
A	269	38%
B	202	28%
C	120	17%
D	43	6%
F	76	11%
Total	710	

Implications

AFST 101 and the Department of African Studies serves the Howard undergraduate student body by engaging in African Diaspora Awareness. The reach of the course and department touches all undergraduate -serving colleges and schools. By looking at the grade distribution, we suggest that AFST is meeting its goal of helping students become aware of the African diaspora. Over 80% of students who took the course received a passing grade, and over 65% of students who took the class received an A or a B.

Suggested Improvements

Though a useful tool in understanding the impact of the Department of African Studies on African Diaspora Awareness, and the general degree to which students are successful in these courses, future general education assessments should focus on specific signature assignments in African Studies of Afro-American Studies courses. A more granular view of competency in this area will better direct faculty towards curricular and pedagogical improvements.

Though useful in showing the impact of African Studies courses on African Diaspora Awareness at Howard, future work can use an internally created rubric to better understand the degree to which students are learning the many component competencies of African Diaspora Awareness. Howard students are unique in that they are expected to have a global understanding of the African diaspora and its impact on their field of study. Sustained assessment of this general education outcome is important as it is unique to the university and an important thread in the fabric of a Howard University degree.

References

Boutte, G., Johnson, G. L., Wynter-Hoyte, K., & Uyoata, U. E. (2017). Using African Diaspora literacy to heal and restore the souls of young Black children. *International Critical Childhood Policy Studies Journal*, 6(1), 66-79.

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