

From Black Studies to Africology: University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

Black Studies emerged in the 1960s as an outgrowth of the Civil Rights and Black Liberation Movements and the demand for scholarly recognition and scrutiny of the life experiences and perspectives of peoples of African descent in the United States and across the world. Black Studies address the absence of people of African descent from traditional disciplines and carve space in universities for scholarship and the development of a disciplinary identity.

The Department of Africology was established at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in May 1968 when the university approved the creation of the Center for Afro-American Culture. That Center was *one of the first two* Afro-American Studies programs in the United States and was developed in response to grassroots movements across the nation.

The Center for Afro-American Culture began at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee with a curriculum that was framed broadly. Over the years, Africology has strengthened its foundations in order to better meet expanding student demand and incorporate new disciplinary developments in Africology. By 1971, the Center achieved departmental status becoming the Department of Afro-American Studies. In 1980, the department implemented a B.A. degree program organized around two concentrations: political economy, and culture and society. In 1986, the department began offering a minor in Afro-American Studies.

In 1994, the department was renamed to the Department of Africology, to reflect more accurately the focus on experiences and prospects of peoples of African origin in the U.S. and around the world. The disciplinary name is of recent creation, prompted by the need to distinguish a program with a broad international perspective from those that focus primarily or exclusively on either African-American Studies or African Studies. The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee program, with an interest in Africa, its diaspora, and the worldwide influence of cultures of African origin, is broadly defined. Africology recognizes the emergence of a unique body of theory and methodologies.

From the time of its inception, the Department of Africology has implemented programs that foster meaningful exchanges between the university and the wider Milwaukee community. Beyond educating future leaders and community members, the relationship between the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Department of Africology and Milwaukee is promoted through African History and Liberation Month programming, the involvement of Africology faculty with “Community Brainstorming” where the faculty presents once a year, and study abroad programs that take students to Ghana and Ethiopia.

A milestone was reached in June 2008 when the department was granted approval for a Ph.D. program by the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents. The faculty received doctoral students into the program in the fall of 2010. The new program, which will have concentrations in cultures and society, and political economy and public policy, is a step forward in the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee research agenda. The Ph.D. in Africology is at the vanguard of emerging doctoral programs across the country that educate scholars within the discipline of Africology.