On October 22, 2021, the University of Tennessee Board of Trustees approved Africana Studies to become a new department in the College of Arts and Sciences. As of January 2022, our Africana Studies program became the Department of Africana Studies.

Indeed, 2021 was a momentous year for us, as we began celebrating the 50+ Year Anniversary of the Africana Studies program in spring. We highlighted the history, strength, and visions of the past program directors and their contributions to our program and the learning experiences of former and current students.

We also welcomed renowned, mixed-media artist Joe Sam for a presentation and discussion and, in a co-sponsorship with the UT Department of Theatre and the Clarence Brown Theatre, we featured an interview and discussion with Oscar-award-winning costume designer Ruth E. Carter, who has had a several-decade career in Hollywood and discussed her most recent work in the movie, Coming 2 America.

We also hosted Professor Ron McCurdy, from the University of Southern California, who performed Langston Hughes’, “Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods of Jazz,” with the Langston Hughes Project. Professor Jessica Johnson discussed the book, Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy, and Freedom in the Atlantic World. We co-sponsored programs in honor of Frederick Douglass Day with colleagues in the Department of English and, notably, Professor Katy Chiles, who has served as a vice chair of Africana Studies. We hosted Professor Abou-Bakar Mamah of Rhodes College for a discussion of post-democracy in sub-Saharan Africa with colleagues in the Department of Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures.

Professor Koritha Mitchell of The Ohio State University conducted a workshop on responsible teaching in violent times. With our colleagues in the Department of Religious Studies, we featured the civil rights activism and professional journey of Professor Emeritus John Hodges, a past chair of Africana Studies. We also co-hosted panel discussions featuring several activists and scholars, who centered social justice issues, activism, and scholarship on the carceral state and criminalization in the Appalachian South, with other co-sponsors from the UT Departments of History and Sociology, and the Women, Gender, and Sexuality program. We participated in the Critical Race Collective’s Symposium on the impact of systemic racism and COVID-19 on higher education.

Angelica Williams will spend the next semester digging through archival materials to uncover the history of the Africana Studies program at UT.

A junior English literature major, Williams has experience with preserving materials. In addition to a previous job with the McClung Museum, Williams works as a student library assistant for rare books in the UT Hodges Library.

DeLisa D. Hawkes, a new assistant professor of Africana Studies, chose Williams for the assistantship and will oversee her work of processing and curating an exhibit as part of the 50+ years of Africana Studies celebration this spring.

Williams has a unique opportunity to review rare photographs – including one of Nina Simone, presumably on the UT campus.

She will go through documents and other items, such as minutes from the East Tennessee Committee Against Racism and Apartheid.

“In the future, I would like to enter the field of rare books librarianship,” Williams said.

“This assistantship will help to further equip me with the skills necessary to preserve materials for widespread use, to recognize areas of interest within rare materials that are going unattended to, and to utilize various research methods upon entering my prospective job field.”

Read more about our undergraduate student research opportunities online at africana.utk.edu.
In other good news, Carolyn R. Hodges, former chair of Africana Studies (2016-2019) and vice provost and dean emerita of the UT Graduate School, has committed to establishing the Dr. Carolyn R. Hodges and Dr. Amadou B. Sall Travel Endowment to support students participating in the Africana Studies study abroad program. Hodges established the endowment to help support and enhance Africana Studies, as well as honor the dedicated work of Amadou Sall, who initiated study abroad programs in Africana Studies and who has led numerous study trips to Ghana, Senegal, and South Africa, since 2005. Sall’s eucrative programs engage students in language learning, classes on African history and culture, and service learning. For more information or ways to donate to the Hodges-Sall Travel Endowment, visit us at african.utk.edu.

We closed the end of the 2021-2022 academic year, with the excitement of preparing for departmental status by hiring several new faculty, who joined us in fall 2021—Danielle Pracope Bell, Derrick R. Brooms, and DeLisa Hawkes—who have backgrounds in English and sociology.

In collaboration with the Division of Diversity and Engagement and Project Grad Knoxville, we developed and co-sponsored an inaugural leadership and civic engagement summer experience for rising high school students in the Knoxville area. The academy welcomed 16 students, some community leaders, top scholars across the country in Africana Studies, geography, medicine, music, political science, sociology, and religious studies, and a presentation on socio-demographics and data collection by a representative from the US Census. The academy also provided learning excursions to The Bottom, Knoxville College, and the National Museum of African American Music in Nashville, Tennessee.

With May 2021 being an exhilarating time of graduation, we congratulated our Class of 2021 Africana Studies majors and minors and honored the achievement of Africana Studies major, Adanze Nwokochah, who was our 2021 Outstanding Graduate in Africana Studies with the College of Arts and Sciences.

During fall 2021, we continued celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Africana Studies at UT. Reverend Renée Kesler, a UT alumna and president of the Black Cultural Center, joined us for a presentation about the effects of urban renewal on the historic, Black community and neighborhoods of the City of Knoxville. Professor Nadia E. Brown from Georgetown University joined us for a guest lecture on the politics of appearance for Black women political elites. With our colleagues in the UT Humanities Center, we co-sponsored a guest lecture by the “Father of Environmental Justice” studies, Professor Robert Bullard. We continued our discussion about environmental justice issues affecting communities of African descent by having a fireside chat with our local community at The Bottom, a non-profit community center, where Erkeshi El-Amin, a UT alumna and lecturer in the Department of Sociology, is the founding director. The Bottom is named for the historic, Black neighborhood in East Knoxville that was ravaged by the 1950s urban renewal program.

Spring 2022 is a new step forward for our department, and we are enthusiastic to reflect on the more than five-decade presence of our unit at the University of Tennessee. We are dedicated to teaching, research, and service in the building of knowledge about Africana Studies, and, in the process, we hope to do even more to engage with our students with greater emphasis on undergraduate research and experiential learning. We also hope to engage more with our community through thought-provoking programming.

As we commemorate this historic moment for our university, we invite you to join us for our historic fête throughout the year, including programs and what we anticipate will be a joyous celebration of our new department. We hope you enjoy reading this first edition of our department newsletter.

Thank you for your steadfast support of our department.

Sincerely,
Shayla C. Nunnally Violette
Professor and Head
UT Department of Africana Studies
In addition to classroom training, Africana Studies offers study abroad opportunities for students. In May 2022, Amadou Sall, lecturer in Africana Studies, will resume the study abroad program in Ghana.

The program takes an interdisciplinary approach to the study of African traditions, cultures, religions, political economies, the impact of colonization, globalization, and role of Africa in the contemporary world. Participants engage in service learning by working with local communities on issues related to poverty, social justice, race, and gender. Students also learn to speak basic African languages (Wolof and Fulani) and French. Students in any major with a 2.0 GPA or higher are eligible for the study abroad opportunity.

Funding for study abroad in the Department of Africana Studies is provided by the Dr. Carolyn R. Hodges and Dr. Amadou B. Sall Travel Endowment. In honor of Professor Emerita Carolyn Hodges and Africana Studies Lecturer Amadou Sall, the fund was established in 2019 to support the program within the College of Arts and Sciences and provide student funds for travel so they have the opportunity to participate.

Hodges joined UT in 1982 as an assistant professor of German. Her 37-year-career at UT included several leadership positions. She rose from assistant to full professor and served as head of the Department of Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures from 1999 to 2004. She was associate dean for faculty personnel and, in 2007, became the university’s first African American vice provost and dean of the Graduate School. She retired from UT in 2019, but left a legacy of leadership and in November 2019, was inducted into the UT African-American Hall of Fame, housed in the Frieson Black Cultural Center on campus. She has written a number of articles and books, including the most recent book, Truth Without Tears: African American Women Deans Share Lessons in Leadership (Harvard Education Press, 2018), which she co-authored with Olga M. Welch.

Sall has been part of the Volunteer community for more than 30 years and an advocate of internationalism and interculturalism on campus. As a lecturer of Africana Studies, Sall has been a leader in promoting diversity and multicultural understanding both within and outside the classroom. He regularly organizes events to broaden peoples’ understanding. Since the 1980s he has worked with the African Student Association on their annual production of Africa Week. He has been honored for his dedication with the University Citation for Excellence in Teaching, the Outstanding Adult Educator–East Tennessee College Alliance Award, and the Black Graduate and Professional Student Association’s Outstanding and Dedicated Service Award, to name a few.

Both Hodges and Sall received the Hardy Liston Jr. Symbol of Hope award, which goes to a faculty member, staff member, or friend of the university who demonstrates a commitment to diversity, multiculturalism, and appreciation of the differences in people and cultures on our campus. Liston—the first African American member of the UT Knoxville central administration— came to UT in 1970 as the assistant vice chancellor for academic affairs and professor of mechanical engineering. He retired in 1990 and passed away in 2021 at the age of 91. Sall received the award in 2014 and Hodges received the award in 2017. The award is presented by the UT Commission for Blacks each year during the Chancellor’s Honors Banquet.

Thanks to their generosity, UT students will have the opportunity to travel to Africa and experience the cultural richness of the area, as well as learn about issues impacting the local communities. If you are interested in supporting this opportunity for our students, please visit africana.utk.edu to donate to the endowment.

“I have learned patience, to take full advantage of every experience, to be more open minded. This trip was completely worth it, and was an adventure I will never forget.”

Ashley Williams

“I learned so much about another culture and also about myself. I’m proud that I was out of my comfort zone for most of this trip and still had a blast.”

Lizzy Stephens
Danielle Procope Bell joined UT in 2021 as an assistant professor of English and Africana Studies. Bell, who received her PhD from Vanderbilt University, teaches undergraduate and graduate courses on African American literature and Black feminist theory, with a focus on literary criticism and effective writing. Her research areas are mid-to-late 19th and early 20th-century African American literature and contemporary Black feminist criticism.

In addition to her scholarship, Bell is helping us develop innovative, student-centered courses and programming through a collaboration with the Frieson Black Cultural Center. The goal is to reach more UT students and welcome new majors and minors to Africana Studies. In spring 2022, Bell is teaching AFST 450: Black Feminist Theory and AFST 233: Major Black Writers.

Derrick R. Brooms joined UT in 2021 as a professor of sociology and Africana Studies. Brooms, who received his PhD from Loyola University, Chicago, is a scholar-activist and youth worker. Through research, teaching, service, and community/collaborative work, Brooms is committed to educational equity, inclusion, and racial justice. His education research primarily centers on Black men's lives to understand and appreciate their experiences and representations in the media as well as the development. He also examines Black boys' and men's lived experiences of Black resistance and the makings of Black subjectivity in a world bent on refusing citizenship, and even personhood, to Black people.

He is the founding editor of the Critical Race Studies in Education book series with SUNY Press and recently took on co-editorial duties of Social Problems, which is the official journal of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP), a national professional organization of sociologists and other related scholars. He participated on a panel about scholarly publishing at the SSSP annual conference in August 2021. Brooms is the author of several peer-reviewed journal articles, including “He Wanted Everybody to Succeed: Black Male Students’ Perceptions and Relationships with their Counselor” (2021) in the Professional School Counseling, Special Issue: School Counseling and Males of Color and, along with his co-author Keisha M. Wint, “Caring Now and Later: Black Boys’ Schooling Experiences and Relational Care” (2021) in Teachers College Record.

DeLisa D. Hawkes joined the UT faculty in 2021 as an assistant professor of English and Africana Studies. Hawkes received her PhD from the University of Maryland-College Park. Her research and teaching focus are in 19th to 21st-century African American and Black diaspora literature, Southern Black feminism, Afro-Indigenous Studies, and historical and speculative fiction. Theories concerning memory and national identity formation, particularly regarding archives and family histories, inform her research.

In her current book project, tentatively titled, Respectable Radicalism: The Rhetoric of Black Women’s Intellectualism, examines how so-called “respectable” rhetoric coheres with radical thought in Black women’s writing in the 19th century. Respectable Radicalism focuses on Black women’s strategies to be heard, traces Black women’s intellectual thought, and considers the multivalent ways that Black women make plain their inherent humanity through a strategic use of respectable rhetoric. At the core, her work examines strategies of Black resistance and the makings of Black subjectivity in a world bent on refusing citizenship, and even personhood, to Black people.


Hawkes participated in the Community Engagement Academy (CEA) facilitated by the UT Office of Community Engagement and Outreach, which is an interdisciplinary professional development program that trains participants in the foundations of community engagement and engaged scholarship. To mark her completion of the program, Hawkes presented her community-engaged project-in-progress titled, “Bridging Generations: The Black Knoxville Oral History Project.” In November 2021, she presented “Intersectionality: A Framework to See and Address Inequality” as a part of the Office of Multicultural Student Life’s Diversity Dialogues Symposium, which brings together members of the UT community to participate in interactive discussions focused on fostering diversity and inclusivity.

In January 2022, Hawkes began her tenure as a co-producer for the “C19: The Society of Nineteenth Century Americanists,” podcast. Hawkes will assist leading and emerging scholars of the 19th century in developing episodes to discuss their recent literary and historical discoveries, nuanced approaches to understanding key texts and historical moments, and innovative pedagogy. Additionally, she is teaching two new courses in Africana Studies – AFST 435: North America and the Diaspora and AFST 450: Issues and Topics in African American Studies, which will focus on race in horror, sci-fi, and horror across a variety of mediums.
Congratulations to **Dawn Duke**, past chair of the Africana Studies program and current chair of the Portuguese program, on her promotion to full professor. She was awarded the Lindsay Young Professorship (2021—2023) and has received a book contract with Bucknell University Press.

**Robert Bland**, assistant professor of history and Africana Studies, attended the Center for Urban Renewal and Education (CURE), conference held September 27-29, 2021. The topic of the conference was on the State of Black America. He was also a speaker and spoke about his paper on a larger panel about the policy report. This policy report will also be a published article scheduled for release in May 2022.

**Larry Perry II**, assistant professor of religious studies and Africana studies, recently presented his research to the Board of Visitors, and he is celebrating a new publication in the journal, *The Acorn*, “Beyond Black Churches: Toward an Understanding of the Black Spiritual Left, featuring Du Bois, Bethune, Thurman, and Black Lives Matter.” Read it online at [tiny.utk.edu/acorn](http://tiny.utk.edu/acorn).