

ACS-Mellon Faculty Renewal Report

Report submitted by:

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Name of Project: Atlantic Africa: The Missing Link in Southern Culture

Date of Teaching Seminar: February 25-27th

Amount Awarded: \$11, 805.00

Final Report on the Teaching Seminar

The goals and objectives of this teaching seminar were threefold and complimentary. The first goal was to introduce ACS faculty to the literature which explore the new cultural forms created by enslaved Africans and their influence on Southern culture. Second, assist ACS faculty in designing curricular units that incorporate the scholarship on African retentions. Thirdly, our goal was to establish a website on Atlantic Africa which can serve as a resource for interested ACS faculty.

The goals of the teaching seminar were met in several ways. The participants were introduced to the existing scholarship on African retentions in Southern culture as a result of attending two thematic workshops, two plenary sessions, and a keynote address by Michael Gomez, an eminent scholar in the field (See **Appendix A** for a copy of the program). Each workshop and plenary session included bibliographic materials, videos, and books which were distributed to the participants. Subsequently on the last day of the seminar, each participant designed at least one teaching module incorporating the knowledge and ideas on African cultural retentions. All ACS faculty in attendance agreed that there is a need to establish an Atlantic African Study Group which will serve as a resource group for ACS faculty interested in teaching or researching African derived cultural traits, be it the American South or other African Diaspora

cultures. Members of the Atlantic Africa Study Group intend to sponsor an annual conference, providing a venue for students and faculty to present papers. During the summer of 2011 a small group of us will create an Atlantic Africa website that will keep ACS faculty abreast of the major publications, conferences, videos, art exhibitions, and research opportunities pertaining to African retentions (See **Appendix A** for the program).

The organizers developed an evaluation instrument in order to gauge the success or failure of the project's goals. Each workshop participant was asked to complete the evaluation form which consisted of four summative questions. (See **Appendix B** for a copy of the evaluation form). Responders indicated that the teaching seminar was a success in that it provided information, explanations, and demonstrations of Atlantic African "retentions" in the four disciplines: literature, performing arts, and folklore. Moreover, respondents explained how they will use knowledge gained in the various workshops, expressed a need for a study group, as well as suggested ways of improving future teaching seminars on Atlantic Africa (See **Appendix C** for a summary of the responses).

As a result of a detailed examination of the evaluations it is clear that participants wanted to increase the length of the workshops, providing more time for discussion of the major theoretical debates in the field. The plenary sessions' mini-modules which demonstrated how materials could be integrated into existing courses, were greatly appreciated by the respondents. Participants requested a copy of the keynote speaker's most recent book. Due to budgetary constraints we were unable to distribute copies of Dr. Gomez's book during the teaching seminar. However, once all outstanding debts were settled enough funds remained for the purchase of books. Nancy Fairley has received copies of Gomez's book and they will be sent to the participants before the end of the semester.

Two important considerations in redesigning this project would be increasing the duration of the teaching seminar and allowing participation in all four workshops rather than limiting them to two. While participants were placed in workshops based on their interests once at the conference they wanted to attend all of the workshops. In order to do this it would be necessary to extend the teaching seminars by one day. Many indicated that they were starved for the cross-fertilization of theoretical, pedagogical, and philosophical ideas which occurred during this weekend teaching seminar. According to many of the participants this was the first time they have been engaged by scholars as well as colleagues interested in teaching materials on Africa's influence on Southern culture.

Based on electronic and verbal exchanges from both workshop planners and participants there is already some noticeable impact on the institutional level. At Hendrix College, for example, Alice Hines presented the reshaping of her course on the Black Writer to members of her department and to prospective majors in American Studies and literature. Hendrix College faculty asked that Professor Hines present her "new" approach at a campus-wide faculty gathering. Hines has also made a presentation of the overall workshop concept at the Conway Morning Rotary Club.

Three faculty members from Birmingham-Southern College participated in the teaching seminar. Dr. David Smith, has plans to develop a January-term course that will examine the impact of African musical traditions on America. Dr. Tynes Cowan was able to complete development of a course in colonial literature focusing on literary encounters between European explorers/settlers and Africans/African slaves. Dr. Jane Archer has more contextual knowledge to expand her course on Contemporary International Fiction. One of the organizers of the seminar, Dr. Sandra Sprayberry, plans to revise her course on Contextual Studies in World

Literature to include a course segment on the Harlem Renaissance and its African roots. In addition, Sandra Sprayberry has met with BSC's interim president, Dr. Mark Schantz, to discuss her ideas for institutional impact on the curriculum level. She also has plans to meet with the director of Multicultural Affairs, Ms. Erica Brown.

The impact on Davidson College faculty is also noteworthy. The education professor at Davidson College incorporated a unit on dance in his course which deals with informal education within African American communities. This one week unit examined the educational role of competitive dance and explored the ways in which dance foster leadership skills and mentoring. A member of the Davidson English department, leader of the workshop on African retentions found in the southern literature, gave a lecture on the topic at another college. And she has incorporated the materials into one of her literature courses. The Ethnic Studies Program at Davidson sponsored a concert in April which demonstrated the relationship between bluegrass and Atlantic African musical traditions. The attendance by members of the college and community was impressive. As a result of the teaching seminar Fairley and a colleague are collaborating on an article that examines the role of urban youth in the cultural reproduction of Africa. Fairley has also helped a private school develop a teaching unit on Africa's contributions to America as well as given a presentation on the topic at a local retirement home. Lastly, three Davidson professors who did not attend the teaching seminar have requested some of the bibliographic materials distributed at the teaching seminar. Davidson is in the process of developing new interdisciplinary majors; two of the most recent include Environmental Studies and Latin American Studies. Dr. Fairley is head of an advisory committee which is exploring the feasibility of establishing an African Diaspora Studies major.

The only students in attendance were from Davidson College; four students served as van drivers, ran errands, and were technical assistants for workshop leaders. Consequently they attended all activities and discussed at length how much they learned about Africa's influence on both white and black Americans. In addition, these students echoed the need for the establishment of an Atlantic Africa Study Group and a yearly ACS conference which will provide a venue for students and faculty to present research and exchange ideas.

Mostly importantly, this teaching seminar provided an accessible avenue for ACS faculty to participate in a well-structured professional development activity at little cost to their institutions. In addition, this seminar will help to diversify and enrich the curriculum at many ACS institutions. Another positive outcome was the discussion of pedagogy with faculty from sister institutions. On the last day of the conference we held the first meeting of the Atlantic Africa Study Group. The workshop participant committed to sharing this information with interested faculty on their respective campuses. As soon as we establish the Atlantic Africa website, we will have topical materials available for all interested ACS faculty. In other instances, some attendees will take the workshop ideas to annual meetings such as the Africa Network, the American Literature Association, and the Southern Anthropology Society. The former organization is an excellent resource for gathering ideas for the expansion of essential topics and ideas from the workshops. In fact, the four workshop presenters hold membership in the Africa Network. In April of 2010, Nancy Fairley made a presentation comparing contemporary dance and antebellum dance at the Southern Anthropology Society annual meeting. That presentation helped to prepare Fairley for the plenary session she organized.

The three workshop organizers—Fairley, Hines, and Sprayberry---will meet in late June through conference calls and e-mail to discuss the status of the Atlantic Africa Study Group and

the proposed website. Each planner will assume responsibility for an aspect of the “follow-up.” In the fall of the 2011-12 academic year workshop organizers will contact participants, asking for an update and syllabus, demonstrating how they have integrated materials from the workshops. Participants will also be encouraged to share their work by posting on the Atlantic Africa website. In addition, the Atlantic Africa Study Group will elect officers and will begin planning a conference for the spring semester of 2013.

ABSTRACT: Atlantic Africa: The Missing Link in Southern Culture

Although Northwestern European settlers in the United States were mainly of British, Scot-Irish, and German extraction distinctive regional cultural formations exist. Scholars concur that part of the cultural distinctiveness of the American South can be attributed to the presence of Atlantic Africans. In spite of their enslavement, research indicates that Atlantic Africans played a key role in the cultural formation of the Southern region. However, this African influence rarely receives more than a cursory mention in many undergraduate courses. This teaching seminar introduced ACS faculty to the scholarship which examines Atlantic Africa's influence on Southern culture so that they may begin to incorporate these materials into the undergraduate curriculum.

Appendix A: Program of Teaching Seminar

ACS-Mellon Workshop: "Atlantic Africa: The Missing Link in Southern Culture"

Friday, February 25th

3:00 p.m. Check-in @ Hampton Inn, Cornelius, NC

5:30 p.m. Registration/Reception (Lilly Gallery, Chambers Bldg)

6:30 p.m. Dinner (Lilly Gallery, Chambers Bldg)

7:30 p.m. "The Art of Piecing: Quilts and Storytelling" by Professors Alice Hines and Sandra Sprayberry (Lilly Gallery, Chambers Bldg)

8:30 p.m. Shuttle to Hotel

Saturday, February 26th

9:00 a.m. Keynote Address: “Theorizing African Retentions” by Prof. Michael Gomez (Lilly Gallery, Chambers Bldg.)

10:30 a.m. Concurrent Workshops:

- 1. Religious Life in the South by Prof. Nancy Fairley (1015 Chambers)
- 2. Southern Literature and Atlantic Roots by Prof. Brenda Flanagan (1046 Chambers)

1:00 p.m. Lunch (Lilly Gallery, Chambers Bldg)

2:30 p.m. Concurrent Workshops:

- 1. The Performing Arts by Prof. James Makubuya Chambers (1015 Chambers)
- 2. The Expressive and Material Dimensions of Southern Folklore by Prof. Alma Billingslea (1046 Chambers)

5:30 p.m. Dinner (Lilly Gallery, Chambers Bldg)

6:30 p.m. Youth: Guardians of African Diaspora Culture by Prof. Nancy J. Fairley (Lilly Gallery, Chambers Bldg)

8:00 p.m. Shuttle to Hotel

Sunday, February 27th

9:30 a.m. Workshop V: Teaching Modules: Billingslea (1046 Chambers), Fairley (1027 Chambers), Flanagan (1096 Chambers), and Makubuya (1015 Chambers).

11:30 a.m. Complete Workshop Evaluation

Appendix B: ACS-Mellon Faculty Renewal Workshop Evaluation Form

In order to aid the workshop coordinators and ACS personnel in the designing of future workshops, please provide your candid response to the following. Please use the reverse side of this page if needed.

- 1. What were the most useful sessions of this teaching workshop? Please explain.

2. What, if any, improvements should be made to the workshop sessions? Please be specific.

3. What and how will you incorporate the materials from the workshop into your existing courses? Please explain.

4. Do you think an Atlantic Africa Study Group across ACS would be beneficial? Please provide suggestions for the establishment of and activities for this group.

Name (optional) _____

Appendix C: ACS-Mellon Faculty Renewal Workshop Evaluation

Fourteen evaluations were completed. Below is a sample of the types of responses provided by the participants:

EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

I. What were the most useful sessions of this teaching workshop? Please explain.

- “Teaching modules because I got to focus more on my needs.”
- “The opening session with Dr. Gomez established a context for the workshop. He presented a challenging thesis and carefully supported w/material that provided a context for each of the teaching modules.”
- “All of them! Lots of great handout/bibliographies/teaching suggestions” “Teaching module was also very good.”

- “The connections between Brenda Flanagan’s ‘Southern Literature’ and ‘Southern Folklore’ with Alma Billingslea are profoundly helpful to my teaching of Contemporary Nigerian fiction as well as my teaching of Slave folklore as it appears in the novels of Toni Morrison.”
- “I enjoyed 2 sessions the most: Gomez[‘s] talk was excellent. He brought in very useful theory & historical overview and really set up the workshop w/a meaningful foundation. The Religious Life workshop also helped me make many connections & provided a great deal of bibliographic material for future pedagogy.”
- “The Performing Arts workshop was the most useful session for me. I came hoping to leave with material/information to use in a survey course. I’m now thinking of developing a new course.”

II. What, if any, improvements should be made to the workshop sessions? Please be specific.

- “Great first effort! I do wish there was some way for us to attend all the sessions.”
- “Since the material is by its nature so interconnected, more exchange of materials and ideas between the sessions would be great.”
- “I would have liked to have just a little more integration of Gomez’s lecture into the workshop sessions. He brought up so many great ideas.”
- “Perhaps more time to look at models of modules or syllabi.”
- “Perhaps not having workshops concurrently. I would have liked to attend sessions that were offered at the same time.”

III. What and how will you incorporate the materials from the workshop into your existing courses?

- “Fairley’s concept of ‘cognitive orientation’ will enable me to theorize Africanisms more broadly in the African and Africa American fiction I currently teach.”
- “I will use material from both workshops to enhance my course on the Black writer. We were given excellent bibliographies in each workshop. These materials will allow me to select new texts which indicate the roles of African religions and folklore in the South.”
- “I will add an Atlantic Africa component to an existing course and develop a Harlem Renaissance course incorporating some of this scholarship.”
- “I will develop further my connections between African myths and Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* in my Intro Fiction course. More broadly, I will be able [to] strengthen my unit on African post colonial literature.”
- “I will incorporate the video *RIZE* into a course that I currently teach. I am also interested in developing an intro to Africana Studies course with much of what we have talked about here”
- “I will focus more on African connections when teaching about emigrationists and about DuBois in my Af-Am Thought course; in a new course, Southern Identities.”
- “I will immediately use some of what I learned in the music survey course I teach. I also intend to use what I now know for future research for course development.”

IV. Do you think an Atlantic Africa Study Group across ACS would be beneficial? Please provide suggestions for the establishment of and activities for the group.

- “I do.—More workshops, but not necessarily w/more faculty. I found the size of this grouping to be optimal.”
- “Absolutely. Many ACS schools do not have professors w/academic training in African religion, folklore, music, and African-American literature. ... providing a valuable ‘in-service’ for ACS faculty teaching in Southern colleges.”
- “We need the study group because so many of us have information to share! Get an on-line group---connected to website.”
- “Yes! I think consortium faculty would benefit a good deal from a workshop at Spelman—how to develop an Africa in the Diaspora World minor or at least courses.”
- “Yes—online discussion group; website; and an occasional ACS workshop.”
- “Yes! Syllabus sharing [/]continued opportunities to share resources [/]continued chance to discuss teaching [/]best practices dialogue” “Teaching module workshop was also very good”