Proposal for a Cluster Hire in African Diaspora Studies

This document is a proposal for the development of a cluster of faculty whose research and teaching expertise is in the area of African Diaspora Studies (see the following URL: http://weber.ucsd.edu/~rfrank/AfDiasporaCluster.pdf). This is a field that is broad, multidisciplinary, and necessarily global in its focus. Scholars from history, ethnic studies, communication, literature, the arts, the social sciences and the sciences have produced groundbreaking research on the African Diaspora for generations. We believe it is time for UCSD to demonstrate its commitment to this area of study and take a leading role in the development of Diaspora Studies for the 21st Century.

At present, UCSD has had more African American Studies faculty leaving than remaining at the institution. Yet, with several African American Studies faculty across the Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences, an African American Studies Minor, an African and African-American Studies Research Project, and many course offerings in African Diaspora Studies, there is clearly strong interest in building this field at UCSD. However, the institution must communicate a clear commitment to this endeavor. In keeping with one of the recommendations of the UCSD 2005 Task Force on Minority Faculty, we maintain that a cluster hire is one of the most effective methods of diversifying the faculty, strengthening the curriculum, and meeting our obligations as a public university.

Defining Diaspora, Defining the Field

The African Diaspora is the term used to describe the movement and migration of peoples from the African continent to the Americas, Asia, and Europe since the 15th century, from the time the European-led slave trade began, through the more recent movements and resettlements of people in the post-slavery period beginning in the 19th century. This is the modern Diaspora, which includes the “Black Atlantic,” but also expands to involve African migrations across the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, the Mediterranean, and even intra-African movements. This body of generative research concerns itself with political, linguistic, artistic, cultural, and economic formations of African peoples both historically and in contemporary settings. One of the central questions scholars ask in this field is, given the centuries of Western domination, exclusion, and Othering since before the time of the Enlightenment, how does one

produce a black subject? In other words, since Western European intellectuals and political leaders have consistently marginalized and denied the importance of African history and subject formation as well as the crucial contributions of black discourses to a modern Western identity, one of the critical tasks of African Diaspora Studies is to claim that subjectivity and claim African peoples’ role in history. If, to a large extent, Africa was a cultural invention of Europe, then we must be reminded that African people and their labor were critical to the growth and expansion of Europe and the West, and to the development of white racial identities in Europe and North America and elsewhere (including within Africa itself). The African Diaspora is one that is continually being made, remade, and unmade, as diversity and hybridity of language, religion, culture, and race/ethnicity collide to produce new experiences and new identities no longer bound by simplistic notions of “blackness” or the idea of an authentic motherland. And like Indigenous Studies, African Diaspora Studies is inherently multi-disciplinary and global in scope; since its very beginning, scholars engaging this body of research have worked to close the gap between the academy and the community. African Diasporic formations intersect with Diasporas of many other peoples and these dynamics and their contributions must be studied, researched, and taught.

**Existing Resources at UCSD**

There are a number of existing resources on campus that suggest that we have a significant scholarly and programmatic foundation on which to build a cluster on African Diaspora Studies. These include:

**Academic Programs and Institutes**

**African American Studies Minor**

UCSD has recently created an African American Studies Minor. The AASM has sixteen affiliated faculty across several departments in the Arts and Humanities and the Social Science Divisions, including Communication, Ethnic Studies, History, Literature, Music, Sociology, and Theatre and Dance. While nearly all the course offerings for the AASM are centered on African American experiences, a growing number of them suggest an interest in topics pertaining to the Diaspora. For example, see: VIS 126DN: African & Afro American Art; LTEN 188: Contemporary Caribbean Literature; TDMV 136: Dances of the World; HIUS 135B/ETHN 170B: Slavery and the Atlantic World; and

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HIUS 164/264/ETHN 181: Topics in Comparative History of Modern Slavery. The AASM faculty has made it clear that it would welcome an expansion and deepening of course offerings and faculty scholarship on the broader African Diaspora.

**African and African-American Studies Research Project**

The African and African-American Studies Research Project (Director, Bennetta Jules-Rosette) is a center for the study of Africa and the African Diaspora, and has, for many years, brought artists and speakers to UCSD for the purpose of initiating a conversation about the links among African peoples and their contributions in making the modern world. This AAASRP would benefit a great deal from—and would be able to contribute much to—a cluster hire in African Diaspora Studies.

**California Cultures in Comparative Perspective**

The California Cultures initiative is a center for creative, interdisciplinary research, teaching, and collaboration among faculty, students, and the public to explore the broad implications of the history and current growth of California’s diverse populations. CCCP faculty research and teaching are necessarily global and interdisciplinary, as California is a space where multiple nationalities, languages, cultures, and racial/ethnic groups co-exist. There are two faculty members affiliated with the CCCP initiative whose research interests converge around African Diaspora: David Pellow (CCCP Director, see below) and Daniel Widener (see below). CCCP would be in a key position to support a cluster hire in African Diaspora Studies.

**Center for Comparative Immigration Studies (CCIS)**

CCIS conducts and supports fieldwork-based research on sub-Saharan African migration to Europe, especially Spain and France. CCIS currently has a major research project underway on this subject, running through 2007-08, and expects to continue this line of research, in collaboration with several Spanish universities. CCIS also has pre-doctoral and postdoctoral research fellows working on migration within Africa and to Europe.

**Departmental Level Faculty Resources**

**Department of Communication**

Boatema Boateng (Globalization, cultural production and intellectual property regulation; media, culture, law & politics in Africa; cultural studies; gender and women’s studies; critical political economy; critical legal studies.)

Michael Hanson (race, space, popular culture, music, politics, and the African Diaspora)

Zeinabu Davis (Film, African American cinema, African American women’s history, folklore)

**Department of Ethnic Studies**

David Naguib Pellow (Environmental conflicts in African and African Diaspora communities)
Denise da Silva (Social Theory and the development of the idea and category of race vis-a-vis African subject formation)

Ana Celia Zentella (Anthro-political linguistics and the politics of racialization of language in U.S. schools and among Spanish speaking populations in the Americas).

*Department of History*
Daniel Widener (African American and Californian history; expressive culture, race, ethnicity, and political radicalism among African Americans in post-World War II Los Angeles.)

*Department of Literature*
Robert Cancel (African and Comparative Literature: Oral Literature; Modern African Literature and Film; Caribbean Literature)

Fatima El-Tayeb (African-American Literature and Culture; African American Popular Culture; Diaspora Studies; Film Studies; [Black] European History; Queer Theory)

Camille Forbes (Nineteenth-Century African-American Literature and Culture; African-American Performance; American Literature; Cultural Studies)

Sara Johnson (Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Anglophone, Francophone and Hispanophone Caribbean literature and theory; African-American literature; Literature of the Americas; Cultural studies of the African Diaspora)

Megan Wesling (Twentieth-Century U.S. Literature; Postcolonial Theory; Popular Culture; Cultural Studies; Critical Gender Studies)

Winifred Woodhull (African and Caribbean Francophone Literatures; Feminist/Critical Theory; Postcolonial Studies; Film Studies)

*Department of Sociology*
Ivan Evans (race, ethnicity, political sociology, comparative US-South African racial formations)

Bennetta Jules-Rosette (religion, art, technology, and cultural productions in African and African American communities)

*Department of Theatre and Dance*
Nadine Graves-George (African American studies, feminist studies, theatre history, and dance history)

*Programs at Other Leading Universities*
Faculty members at the nation’s top universities have built African American Studies departments and programs with an increasing focus on Diaspora Studies. Yale, Princeton, and Harvard Universities are among the best-known institutions on the East Coast with considerable strength in the field.

In the Midwest, a number of universities have impressive centers, departments and programs in African and African American Studies. The University of Michigan’s Center for Afro-American and African Studies, Northwestern University’s Department of African American Studies and Michigan State University’s PhD program in African American and African Studies are all considered leading examples.

In the Southern United States, Duke University’s African and African American Studies Program and Vanderbilt University’s Program on African American & Diaspora Studies (PAAADS) stand out. These programs offer undergraduates and graduates interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, and comparative perspectives of the histories, literatures, music, visual cultures, and politics of people of African descent around the world. Particular regions of focus include Africa, the Americas, and the Caribbean, with Vanderbilt’s program adding a new emphasis on Black Europe.

On the West Coast, UCLA’s International Institute and UC Santa Barbara’s Department of Black Studies focus on the African Diaspora in both their research and teaching, and the faculty seeks to determine the influences and intersections of Africa and the African Diaspora on the formation and future of the modern world.

Perhaps most important are the University of Southern California and UC Berkeley, which are our strongest competition with regard to faculty and students interested in Ethnic Studies more generally. Unlike UCSD, USC and UCB have significant numbers of African American Studies faculty and will continually be able to recruit more undergraduates, graduates, and faculty because of their solid commitment to these programs. USC’s newly formed Department of American Ethnic Studies will likely eclipse most if not all other programs in the near future with regard to its prestige and stature. However, what would distinguish UCSD from these two leading competitors is that ours would be a multi-departmental, campus-wide cluster of faculty working on much broader Diaspora Studies, while USC and Berkeley are more firmly focused on African American Studies. This broader focus would also allow us to take advantage of existing expertise in other important Diaspora studies, such as Asian, Latino/a, and Middle Eastern, allowing UCSD to become a leading contributor to the field of “overlapping diasporas.”

**Cluster Hire Proposal in African Diaspora Studies**

We now have eight departments in the Social Sciences and Arts and Humanities Divisions that will include in their response to the Charting the Course IV a commitment

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to searching for a scholar within the African Diaspora Studies cluster over the next three years. The departments are: Communication, Economics, Ethnic Studies, History, Literature, Political Science, Sociology, and Visual Arts. California Cultures will also participate by requesting 1 or 2 FTE in support of research on African Diaspora populations in the Californias.

An African Diaspora Studies Steering Committee would be selected to allocate such FTEs using the methods employed by initiatives like California Cultures, which have proven highly effective at attracting and retaining a diverse cohort of scholars. Participating departments and programs will each provide a representative to make up a Steering Committee for the initiative. The Steering Committee will coordinate the searches in order to leverage the collaborative aspects of the recruitments under the cluster hire initiative. A proposed hiring procedure appears below.

1) Department participation – procedure.
   a. A department commits to the African Diaspora Studies Cluster Hire initiative and describes proposed position in relation to departmental interests and needs and in relation to the cluster hire proposal.
   b. The final version of the proposal will list participating departments and descriptions of each requested position.

2) Steering committee – facilitates pro-active recruitment and innovative search "best practices," fosters communication among searches, and builds community around the prospective hires in order to leverage the cluster hire across campus.
   a. The Steering committee will be made up of a representative from each department.
   b. The Steering committee will devise common language for insertion in each cluster hire ad describing the campus-wide initiative and search preferences in common.
      i. Departments advertise in own venues with common language
      ii. Steering committee places combined ad in Chronicle of Higher Education describing cluster initiative and each hiring area. Funds for doing so requested from Deans of participating divisions.
   c. A Steering committee member participates in each departmental search as an outside member (non-voting), with the understanding that departments will follow the search parameters described in their CTCIV plans.
   d. Steering committee member serves as conduit for sharing files across departments when beneficial (and with applicant’s consent).
   e. Other innovative search procedures to be considered.

3) FTE allocation and California Cultures participation.
   a. 1 or 2 FTE contribution from California Cultures in Comparative Perspective (CCCP) as an incentive for departments to propose candidates who also fit CCCP criteria.
   b. Departmental commitments to the African Diaspora Studies Cluster Hire initiative will be made up front in their CTCIV plans and, if approved for the
cluster, FTE will be allocated on the basis of those commitments.

UCSD can expect the following benefits from pursuing a cluster hire in African Diaspora Studies:

- The ability to move to the forefront of research universities that are building African Diaspora Studies programs.

- The capacity to recruit and retain a much more expansive and diverse group of faculty, including scholars of color and international faculty.

- The ability to recruit and retain a broader range of undergraduate and graduate students who might not normally consider UCSD, but who have an interest in a university that offers the kinds of educational opportunities that a cohort of African Diaspora scholars can provide. Specifically, the number of students of African descent in the undergraduate population would likely move far above its current abysmal 1% mark.

- The means to compete with our strongest peer institutions for students, faculty, and staff who seek a more diverse, culturally and intellectually stimulating campus climate.

- An improved ability to develop ties and relationships with African and African American communities, institutions, and leaders in California and beyond.

Failure to act at this juncture will send the wrong message about UCSD’s vision of academia in the 21st Century, jeopardizing its role as a flagship institution, and running the risk of further alienating a crucial, but presently underrepresented, segment of its faculty and student body.

The African Diaspora is one of many Diasporas that connect people across history, space, and cultures around the globe. It is imperative that UCSD make a commitment to hiring a significant number of scholars researching and teaching the African Diaspora, because it remains critical to any understanding of the making of the modern world.