MEMORANDUM

TO: WINSTON LANGLEY, PROVOST
FROM: DAVID TERKLA, DEAN, COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS
SUBJ: RESPONSE TO AQUAD REVIEW OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AFRICANA STUDIES
DATE: 6/20/16
CC: ROBERT JOHNSON, CHAIR, AFRICANA STUDIES; PETER LANGER, ASSOCIATE PROVOST

The AQUAD Review of the Department of Africana Studies characterizes, “a department in crisis” and suggests that “immediate administrative efforts must be taken to begin a process of reform.” In its response, the Africana Studies department refutes it is in “crisis,” and instead argues that it is in “transition.” While I agree that the term “crisis” is a bit strong, I do not believe that this can be characterized as a simple transition issue. I do not believe that the perceptions of the Review team were simply driven by an understaffed department seeking to move in a different direction. Instead, I think they were able to perceive some underlying problems that have plagued this department for quite some time.

After the previous AQUAD, Dean Kuizenga brought in a consultant to facilitate the department moving forward. However, many of the problems that required this action do not seem to have been fully resolved. The AQUAD self-study does not reflect a unified department with a common mission, but instead several separate entities pushing individual agendas and I think the site visit confirmed that fact. The self-study was quite defensive and disorganized and included many passages directly copied from the previous self-study. Likewise, while I am pleased to see the revisions to the major and minor that were approved last year and the several new courses approved through governance this year, like the Review team, I have some concerns about the current department’s ability to implement these changes in a cohesive fashion that will expand their number of majors and strengthen the department into the high quality Africana Studies department that our students deserve.1

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1 Many of the curricular changes have been initiated and/or managed by adjunct or NTT faculty as opposed to core TT faculty creating concerns about sustainability and tenured faculty interest in these changes.
Thus, to best facilitate the transition of this department to the next level, I agree with the Review team in recommending resources that will be supported by the administration including appointing an Interim Chair and an executive/advisory committee. While the Department’s response to the AQUAD review is a blueprint to move forward in many areas that the Dean’s office has been trying to get the Department to do for several years (timely AFRs, mentoring junior faculty, timely and efficient scheduling, increasing enrollments and attracting more majors), I am not convinced the department can move forward without additional resources bolstering departmental leadership, support, and oversight. To achieve this it needs to act as a cohesive unit and rise above past interpersonal conflicts among the existing faculty and individual agendas. The goals of these resources will be to support the Africana Studies department to: (1) meet the objectives that the AQUAD review team and Department put forth in their AQUAD reports; and (2) maintain forward momentum updating policies, procedures, departmental personnel management and culture, and the curriculum. Reaching these goals will result in a revitalized department of Africana Studies better able to serve an increasing number of majors and all UMass Boston students as well as realizing its foundational promise.

To this end, while I value the list of individual accomplishments put forth by the Department, I’d also like to see more coherent structural/departmental accomplishments in the areas of curricular development, syllabi updates, advising, junior faculty mentoring, and course scheduling. I would, therefore, recommend delaying the hiring of more faculty until the department is near completion of this transition as evidenced by a coherent infrastructure related to curriculum updates, advising and mentoring plans, and increased enrollments. My reasoning is that we need to attract top notch faculty who will see this department as a rising gem and not as a partially dysfunctional project they need to fix. At this time, it is unlikely that potential faculty hires are going to see the department in a much different light than the AQUAD review team, which will not be in the interests of advancing the current department to where it needs to be.

In addition to putting faculty hires on hold until an infrastructure is in place to attract and retain them, CLA regrettably cannot authorize the hiring of a full-time administrative assistant at this time. While I am in support of all our CLA departments having a minimum of one full-time administrative assistant (and have requested the funds for this in the current budget cycle), given our finite resources, we use metrics including the number of undergraduate and graduate students, courses, enrollments, and the number of TT and NTT faculty to calculate and fairly deploy staff support across the College. Until the Africana Studies department recruits more majors and retains more faculty, we are unable to honor this request, but will work with the department to support their work study needs. I should note that several other CLA departments have grown and thrived without a full-time AA.

I commend the Department revising its major and minor (June 2015) and developing new and interesting courses. Now it is up to the faculty to implement the
new major and minor through teaching or identifying individuals to teach the new
courses, advertising the new programs at orientation and through other outlets, and
advising students about the updates. Since this has yet to be done, it will be a major
responsibility of the Interim Chair. While I am pleased with the Department’s efforts
to reach out to the Urban Harbors Institute, the School for the Environment, and the
College of Nursing, there is a lot more that can be done to strengthen
interdisciplinary ties with other CLA departments and further use social networking
to create collaborations across campus that will showcase the momentum and
potential of the Africana Studies department. Due to faculty illnesses and the two
failed tenure cases, I realize the Department has become increasingly dependent on
NTT faculty, but certain departmental tasks including course scheduling, merit
calculations, and personnel matters are tasks that must be handled by TT faculty.
The Department response asks for additional resources to support the professional
development of its NTT faculty. I note that there are professional development
resources that senior lecturers can access through the CLA Dean’s Travel Funds and
see no reason to provide additional support to this Department’s NTT faculty.

Thus, while I do not fully agree that the Department is in “crisis,” I do see this as a
pivotal time where the department requires some reinforcements to meet its
potential. There is a tremendous amount of work to be done. It is my expectation
that the Interim Chair and the Executive Committee will work in collaboration with
the Department and Dean’s office to create a sustainable and modern infrastructure
for the Africana Studies Department. Within the year, I expect to see better course
scheduling mechanisms, a coherent advising plan, implementation of the new
curriculum, and a comprehensive junior faculty mentoring program on the books.2
With these features in place, we will be in a strong position to search for faculty
interested in a cutting edge, public, urban, international Africana Studies
department.

Finally, I need to comment on the Center for African, Caribbean, and Community
Development (CACC). The reason for its discussion in this AQUAD has to do with the
history of the Center and the Provost’s and UMASS President’s office questioning

2 As a further example of the need for significant infrastructure development
through assistance from outside leadership, the Department Response raises an
issue with their course evaluation instrument, which demonstrates a
misunderstanding (passed on to the review committee) of how these instruments
are used. In the personnel case referred to, individual questions from the
instrument addressing overall performance were analyzed by review committees
and the Dean’s and Provost’s offices, thus the claim that it was defective and thus
tainted the review is unfounded. This claim seems to be based on the fact that the
summary results for the instrument show a mean at the very end, which would be
erroneous if used for evaluative purposes. However, no evaluations I have seen used
this mean. The solution of removing from the instrument questions that many
departments use as input into properly evaluating the instructor, such as students
expected grades, does not make sense.
why its formal existence is not documented, as opposed to the explanation in the Department Response, which implies the issue is just tensions between "the department and CLA." To quickly summarize, when I was an Associate Dean in CLA it was brought to the attention of the Interim Dean that the President's Office was taking a closer look at the role of Centers as was the campus itself. As part of this process, all Centers were being reexamined and their founding documents scrutinized. In the case of CACCD, no clear founding document was forthcoming. Therefore, in meetings with the Director, it was suggested that the Center reinitiate a formal process of creation, going through governance, like any new Center. This was resisted and the result was that the Center still does not appear on formal university documents. When I took over as Dean, the Graduate Dean and I agreed that we could ask the Center to complete a self-study (which is required every five years, but no record of the Center ever doing this was produced) and then use the AQUAD review team as the review team for the Center simultaneously. This is why the Review team addressed the Center. However, they note that "neither the self-study nor our meetings made clear how the center is organized or what it desires besides more staffing and administrative support." I agree. Under the new environment being enforced by President Meehan, the Center needs to clearly demonstrate what initiatives require its existence to move forward, the importance of these initiatives to the department, the college, and the university, and most importantly, how it will fund itself and continue to generate funds. Instead, the Department's response contains the same attitude as the Self-Study, asking for funds to support the Center, which is completely counter to this. Therefore, to move forward I now firmly believe that advocates for CACCD must:

(1) Put a Center proposal through Governance;
(2) Complete a coherent proposal that shows what the CACCD can do for the University now and in the future;
(3) Become self-sustaining.

My office will be happy to assist in this process. I know of no Centers in CLA that are supported by CLA resources beyond a part-time graduate student and CLR for the director, and only in cases where significant outside funds are being solicited and received and multiple events sponsored by the Center are occurring on campus. All Centers on campus are moving toward a grant supported, self-funding model and CACCD needs to demonstrate the ability to exist under this model.