

3/5/73  
Black  
Studies

REPORT OF THE VISITING COMMITTEE  
TO EVALUATE THE  
BLACK STUDIES PROGRAM  
AT  
DARTMOUTH COLLEGE

MARCH 5, 1973

Benjamin F. Payton, Chairman

Richard A. Long

James P. Breeden

Michael O. Sawyer

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**INTRODUCTION**

**COMPARATIVE MODELS**

**ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION**

**CURRICULUM AND FACULTY**

**STUDENT SERVICES**

**CONCLUSION: RECOMMENDATIONS**

## INTRODUCTION

The traumatic climate which saw the establishment of Black Studies at Dartmouth and at other American colleges and universities is responsible for a generally hazy perception of what Black Studies is, can, or should be. Black Studies came out of the demands of black students for the creation of an affirmative environment for themselves in the heart of the academy and a general student demand for an end to the isolation of the academy from questions such as social justice and militarism. Hastily devised Black Studies programs lumped together social and counselling programs with curriculum expansion and innovation. In consequence, such curriculum developments were perceived, from the beginning, as adjuncts to social experiment rather than as educational reform and enrichment of intellectual inquiry. Black Studies, in short, was precipitated by black student activism, rather than by a maturing consciousness among scholars of the parochial nature of much academic inquiry.

At this time, a primary obligation for the entire academic community is to move from a stagnant view of Black Studies derived from the anguish of its birth to a sensitive perception of the implications of Black Studies to the entire academic enterprise. This new perception must be informed, however, by the realization that Black Studies, though it should not be confused by extraneous and peripheral questions, is inseparable from the presence and persons of black people, as represented by black students on campuses, for they and their history are its subject matter, and they are and will continue to be its most impassioned clientele. Neither the history of the middle passage through which their ancestors passed nor the analysis of the economic status of black people in 1973 can be faced by

black students with the distant response possible to most non-blacks, though neither of these topics should be absent from the awareness of any educated American.



## COMPARATIVE MODELS

American colleges have formulated different ways of including Black Studies in their curricula. The often expressed ideal, that of imbuing each area of teaching which touches upon the black experience with a black perspective, can hardly be attained in this generation, but it should be present whenever the evaluation and assessment of academic endeavors are undertaken. In the absence of the intellectual revolution required by the ideal, and in keeping with the standard procedure of American colleges which recognizes newly perceived areas of academic interest by the establishment of courses, programs, and departments, several different models have been developed.

In some large institutions an interdisciplinary department (Harvard) or institute (Cornell) with the degree-granting character of similar units in the institution has been created. In at least one instance (Santa Cruz) an individual cluster college devoted entirely to Black and other Ethnic Studies has been created on the model of other cluster colleges devoted to urban and environmental studies.

Within the framework of these separate academic units with their own staffs, many aspects of black experience, nearly always in an international spectrum (Africa, the Caribbean) are presented in course format. Many of the courses draw upon the content and methodologies of the larger disciplines (History of Ideas, Comparative Religion, etc.). Others draw upon disciplines of narrower range (Politics, Musicology).

Other institutions have created interdisciplinary programs of varying scope. In some (University of Georgia) the program is a listing of courses offered in a number of departments (Politics, History, English, Art, Sociology)

with no overt evidence of a program philosophy or character, or any indication of program input into departments. At others (Yale), a carefully conceived program with interdisciplinary courses of its own relies, not with total success, upon highly autonomous departments to supply narrower range courses. In such programs, faculty usually hold membership and status in one of the contributing departments. Program concentration is usually indicated by the conferring of a certificate.

It is safe to say that hundreds of colleges which do not have either departmental or program organization in Black Studies nevertheless offer courses, sometimes an impressive number, in the Black Studies area. Further, in colleges of all categories discussed a conscious effort to include the black perspective in general course offerings is frequently undertaken by both black and white professors.

The goals and organization of Black Studies at Dartmouth, while they must be considered in the light of the national picture, must nevertheless be related to Dartmouth's resources--material, academic, and human. Accepting the seriousness of the Black Studies development in American education, devising an appropriate vehicle for expressing that development within the Dartmouth context, and supporting that vehicle in all appropriate ways, can only serve to strengthen Dartmouth's educational venture as Dartmouth itself defines it.

## ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION

It is true that organization and administration are processes that include much more than concern for the smooth and efficient management of a discrete operation. In a college, they embrace the concerting of people, values, fiscal resources, and proudly held institutional traditions around missions and purposes which often conflict or coexist in uneasy tension. Dartmouth is not unique in discovering that its fundamental aim of "preparing leaders for the American Society" often appears to be distracted by changes in society of sufficient magnitude, depth, and controversy such that bewilderment and protracted debate seem to become a normal rather than an occasional state of mind at the institution. In such a situation, it is not unusual that many people "cop out" by keeping at arms length concern for either the sound management or the substantive purposes and commitment of programs that are close to the vortex of unsettling social change.

This appears to be the case with Dartmouth and its Black Studies Program. Begun in the Fall of 1969 on the heels of widespread and deep student unrest here and across the nation, Dartmouth, in company with many other colleges, has made mistakes in launching its Black Studies Program. Fortunately, most of the salient errors have been recognized and efforts are under way to correct them. Some of the more prominent problems are:

1. Inexperienced leadership of the program initially.
2. Insufficient attention to academic as distinct from cultural needs of the program.
3. Initial uncertainty about the amount of fiscal resources available for the program.

4. Lack of clarity regarding whether the new effort should have departmental or program status.
5. Rapid turnover in staff leadership.

Dartmouth is fortunate in that most of these and other problems have been recognized and some movement is under way to correct them. The underlying issue of institutional commitment to the program as perceived by both black students and black faculty, is a matter of concern to this committee. We are very clear that of paramount importance at the moment is the provision of capable, mature leadership of the program. In our opinion, the present director provides that type of leadership. We are led to believe that serious efforts are under way to retain him, and we strongly recommend that these efforts continue.

While black students express strong commitment to the ideal of having a full-fledged and competent department as distinct from a program of Black Studies, we believe their fundamental concern is for a change in the status and esteem of Black Studies as an unquestionably competent academic activity in the college. We believe that intelligent and committed efforts to acquire mature black scholars in all departments in the college will contribute significantly to alleviating their fears and anxieties. Our recommendation is that the direction laid down by the present director be followed.

We further urge that the relationship between the Black Studies Policy Committee and the Black Studies Program be clarified. The present director seems to have an adequate understanding of how they should mesh, and that understanding should be formalized and widely communicated.

We recommend further that the distinction between the Afro-American Society as a cultural program and Black Studies as an academic program be retained and widely communicated.

Organization and administration cover much more than sound management practices. At the same time, any institution which tolerates shoddy management of any program expresses thereby something about its commitment to that program. We think it highly important that this institution's concern for the manner in which Black Studies is administered be placed at just as high a level of priority as its concern for the management of any sound and legitimate academic pursuit at Dartmouth.

## CURRICULUM AND FACULTY

The goal of Black Studies is to provide a curriculum based on knowledge of black experience. The curriculum should be adequate to the needs of the entire student body and should be taught in accord with the highest standards of excellence.

The basic pattern of core courses offered by the Black Studies staff, associated courses offered by departments and other programs off campus in the U.S. and abroad ought to be maintained. However, we recommend that all three aspects of this pattern be examined with an eye to inclusion of material related to the sciences in addition to the social sciences and humanities.

The notion of the "Certificate in Black Studies", including the requirement that the student contribute to the knowledge of black experience, should be maintained. Lack of continuity over the past three years is likely to result in few students taking advantage of this option immediately, but it remains promising for the future.

Two points deserve special attention. Dartmouth has a well deserved reputation for its development of programs making use of computer technology, for its teaching in sciences, and for its pre-medical preparation. Our conversations with students confirm our notion that attention usefully can be given to development of Black Studies curricula in these areas. Perhaps such development would include creation of a core course in Black Studies which focused directly on the methodologies and priorities of the various sciences and professions. In addition, associated courses in the science division might be created along similar lines.

The second point suggested by our visit is that in the evaluation of programs and departments at Dartmouth in the future a standard component should be inquiry into the adequacy with which knowledge of black experience is incorporated into their curricula. The black experience presents a valid object for inquiry and disciplined accumulation of knowledge. However, its ultimate value rests in its inclusion in universal knowledge. Concern with Black Studies must inevitably extend to concern with the entire curriculum of the college.

Black Studies must have faculty of sufficient stature to command respect in the councils of their peers and among the student body. In addition, the core of the faculty of Black Studies must have continuity over time in order to make possible development of the program as well as a continuing relationship to students over the full course of their stay at Dartmouth. Absence of these elements of stature and continuity has been the greatest source of past weakness of the program and the surest sign of the inadequacy of Dartmouth's initial commitment to Black Studies.

Responsibility for Black Studies must be lodged in tenured faculty who are professionally committed to study, teaching and contribution to the knowledge of black experience. Junior faculty appointed to teach Black Studies ought to have the opportunity to achieve tenure.

At present the only way to achieve the stability represented by tenure is by departmental election. The model of departmental appointment with teaching and administrative responsibilities in Black Studies has inbuilt stresses. These stresses fall largely upon the person receiving such appointments and may be resolved to the detriment of Black Studies if clear understandings do not accompany each departmental appointment. Nonetheless

we believe that this model is appropriate for a college of Dartmouth's size and make-up. The model depends upon a high degree of co-operation between Black Studies and the various departments through joint appointments and proper distribution of FTE's. While dependency upon such co-operation represents a risk of unpredictable dimension, it is also a promising arrangement that could enhance the institution-wide impact of Black Studies.



## STUDENT SERVICES

In 1969 Dartmouth decided to increase dramatically the number of black students enrolled at the college. That decision, combined with the special attributes of Dartmouth, has substantial implications for student services. By special attributes of Dartmouth is meant an emphasis upon academic excellence and an emphasis upon tradition both within and outside the classroom. Geographic remoteness and the lack of minority representation in the surrounding community are also part of the "specialness" of Dartmouth. Since it is unlikely that Dartmouth will change its essential attributes, it becomes centrally important that black students who are recruited and admitted have academic interests and life styles that are of a nature to increase the likelihood that their Dartmouth experience will be productive. They need to have demonstrated substantial academic ability and an adaptability to the Dartmouth environment. An admissions policy consistent with the foregoing should be clear and widely understood. Recruitment of minority students then becomes a specialized and sustained effort calling for a major contribution from students and faculty who work with the Black Studies Program.

Black students at Dartmouth encounter special hardships. They are a minority and they are isolated at Hanover. They appear to have substantial self confidence to the extent that there is not a need for bravado. A large number of black students indicated to the members of the evaluation team that despite the hardships, given the choice they would still choose to attend Dartmouth rather than some other school. That speaks well for black students and for Dartmouth. However, the fact of hardship is not vitiated by becoming habitual. Therefore, special sensitivity to the problems

encountered by black students needs to be continuing and that sensitivity may take forms ranging from making it possible for more black faculty to do more counseling to increasing initiative by white faculty in extending academic counseling for minority students.

The Black Studies Program is important to black students even though most of them are professionally oriented and would not major in Black Studies even if that were possible. But they do find Black Studies courses useful and academically sound. The Program also has symbolic value and is seen as a barometer of the extent of commitment by the College to the education of minorities. The student perception is that currently the Black Studies Program is not strong. Therefore they question commitment. Students are fully aware of the turnover in administrators of the program, of the unresolved tenure question, and the sense of constantly being on trial. Student morale and sense of community would be increased to a marked degree if the foregoing problems are resolved promptly.

There is a delicate balance between a measure of cultural independence and corrosive isolation. In order to avoid the negative aspects of isolation there is a need to build additional bridges between black students individually and in their collective activities such as at the Temple and other parts of the Dartmouth community. For example and specifically it means providing increased opportunities for greater contributions by black students by serving on committees within the Black Studies Program, and on committees considering the future of the Black Studies Program and the life of black students at Dartmouth. Related to the foregoing is the need for the development of much more data, we might almost say the development of any sustained data on a systematic basis, of the experience of blacks at Dartmouth. For example, what are the characteristics of entering

students, what are their attitudes, how do their attitudes change, what are their successes and failures, and what will be their experiences upon leaving Dartmouth? Such data would be valuable in learning about students relating to any program or department at Dartmouth and in evaluating long established departments, but perhaps, the Black Studies Program can and must serve as a model for others in this regard.

## CONCLUSION

Some of the uncertainties and difficulties with Black Studies at Dartmouth are shared nearly universally by the predominantly white institutions with which we are familiar. Nonetheless we are convinced from our conversations with faculty, administrators and students that much has been learned through past experience--not the least being that with all its weaknesses the Program has had a positive impact on the academic progress of a number of students. A strong Black Studies Program can and must be established at Dartmouth. The unique strengths which have shaped Dartmouth's contributions to higher education and to the education of leaders can contribute uniquely to meeting the intellectual and societal challenge presented by black experience.