

Cover Page (1 page):

Title: African American, African, and African Diaspora Studies Cluster (A4DS)

Participating Disciplines and Academic Units:

Department of Africana Studies
Department of Art and Art History
Department of Dance
Department of English
Department of Geography and Earth Sciences
Department of Global Studies
Department of History
Department of Languages and Culture Studies
Department of Middle, Secondary, K-12 Education
Department of Philosophy
Department of Political Science and Public Administration
Department of Public Health Sciences
Department of Religious Studies
School of Social Work
Center for Applied Geographic Information Science
Center for Holocaust, Genocide & Human Rights Studies
Women's and Gender Studies Program

Target category for the submission: Existing and Emerging Excellence

Cluster Leaders: Christopher Cameron, Erika Edwards, Akin Ogundiran

Keywords: race, social justice, historical studies, arts and culture, social policy

2. Executive Summary (1 page):

Two complex and foundational questions that confront our society today are (1) how to achieve social equity locally and (2) how to meaningfully engage the rest of the world toward creating a just and sustainable global society? History has taught us that perennial social inequality and injustice is a recipe for societal collapse and that an interconnected world must seek a global solution to its local problems. None of the existential challenges that face us today, from climate change to health, environmental, and migration crises, will be resolved without racial equity and global solutions that take account of racial disparity in the U.S. and the world. The Africana Studies Faculty Council (ASFC) emerged almost thirteen years ago as a self-organizing cluster to provide a coherent framework for addressing these questions through interdisciplinary, collaborative, and engaging scholarship that is locally relevant and globally connected. The cluster comprises more than fifty faculty located in five colleges—Liberal Arts and Sciences, Arts and Architecture, Business, Education, and Health and Human Services. It is the only community of scholars at UNC Charlotte dedicated to the holistic study of African American, African, and African Diaspora experiences.

The African American, African, and African Diaspora Studies (A4DS) research cluster is a product of ASFC, named in response to UNC Charlotte's aspiration for an R1 status. The cluster emphasizes four intersecting areas: race and social justice, arts and culture, historical studies, and social policy. A4DS is the largest and most disciplinarily-varied ethnic studies research group at UNC Charlotte. The A4DS members have significantly contributed to advancing the university's mission as an urban research university. They bring an unparalleled global, international, interdisciplinary perspective to UNC Charlotte, having carried out research on five continents and more than fifteen countries. As a whole, the group has achieved distinction in interdisciplinary scholarship as recipients of some of the most prestigious fellowships, grants, awards, and career honors in the humanities, arts, and social sciences. Their work is consistently and deeply community-engaged: they have consulted with private and public entities on race, social justice, historical studies, culture, and arts. Over the past five years, members of the cluster have authored 268 publications, out of which 140 are co-authored; received 57 research grants; and garnered 25 external prestigious book prizes and lifetime career awards. They have been invited to give 126 scholarly presentations in other institutions and countries since 2016.

Members of the A4DS cluster have a deep history of collaborating on research projects and dissemination of knowledge through conferences and seminars. Given our achievements to date, we are well-positioned to take on big projects consistent with UNC Charlotte's goal to become an R1 institution. These projects include large-scale research grants that address pressing issues regarding race, social justice, migration, environment and climate change, technology, health, identity, culture, and the arts, from empirical, historical, policy, and community relations perspectives. Historically underfunded by the university, we seek investment of resources in this cluster, in the form of seed grants, appropriate organizational structure (e.g., a center), and faculty hires in strategic areas, to realize the full potential of this dynamic and multigenerational community of scholars.

3. Evidence of Strength and Excellence (2 pages):

Strengths of the Collaboration(s)

A4DS is an organic and self-organizing body of scholars. The majority of A4DS members are located in the humanities, where the individual pursuit of scholarship and authorship is the norm. Yet A4DS members have formed deep and meaningful partnerships because of their shared valuing of interdisciplinary, holistic, and transnational approaches to the study of the Black experience. This value is rooted in the principles of collectivity, intersectionality, and collaboration. Members are guided by the epistemology of Black Studies that a tree does not make a forest. Hence, disciplinary purity or autonomy is ill-equipped to understand the complex facets of the Black experience. Whether in South Africa, France, Brazil, or the United States, the Black subjectivity is a product of history. Therefore, equity and justice questions cannot be addressed with policies that ignore history, arts, and culture. We need each others' work to do our own. This realization informs the four core areas of the research cluster as intersecting and interdependent fields of inquiry. The *modus operandi* of A4DS is the primary source of its strength and resilience. It is a thirteen-year-old cluster that offers an open-ended and flexible network for exchanging ideas through formal monthly seminars, biannual meetings, an annual symposium through the Africana Studies Department, and other settings. It is also a project-based cluster where subgroups work on specific projects—research, publication, conferences, seminars, and team-teaching, while the other members provide feedback and support.

Evidence of the Success and Collective Impact of the Group

A4DS faculty have worked across multiple colleges--Atkins Library, CLAS, and COE to co-author research grants. These include the ones submitted to the National Endowment for the Humanities (urban greenspace and digital humanities), U.S. Ambassador Grant (archaeological documentation of an urban landscape), and National Council for Black Studies. The third funded a poverty simulation workshop in 2016 to help K-12 school teachers understand life in a typical low-income family. This was a contribution to the efforts to improve social mobility in the Charlotte region (see [The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force Report](#), 2017).

The cluster members also have co-organized and participated in several on-campus conferences that address racial equity in the U.S., global migrations, and African and African Diaspora issues. Boaz (AFRS), Homann (ARTH), and Williams (DANC), for example, co-organized “Performing Africana Arts and Culture: Repression, Resistance, and Renewal” conference in 2017. One conference led to a book edited by Smith-Ruiz et al.; and another, Community Engagement and Citizen Empowerment, resulted in a journal special issue co-edited by Ogundiran and De la Torre (AFRS). Moore (RELS) and Sullivan (PHIL) collaborated on a project entitled “Rituals of White Privilege: Keith Lamont Scott and the Erasure of Black Suffering,” and published in the *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy*. John Cox (HGHS) has collaborated with several faculty to present more than a dozen on-campus events in the past five years, including the 2019 international conference, “Denial: The Final Stage of Genocide.” This and other events on genocide give us the credentials to pursue large-scale funding that investigate the ramifications and prevention of crimes against humanity.

Graduate students in COE and CAGIS have served as co-author and co-editor on publications initiated in the A4DS cluster. Graduate student Marcia Watson (COE) co-edited with Smith-Ruiz, *Contemporary African American Families: Achievements, Challenges, and Empowerment Strategies in the Twenty-First Century* (Routledge, 2016). Five faculty and students in Urban Education and Sociology contributed to the book. Three graduate students in

GES co-authored two articles with Ogundiran (AFRS) and Wenwu Tang (CAGIS). The title of one of these is “*Spatial Simulation Modeling of Settlement Distribution Driven by Random Forest: Consideration of Landscape Visibility.*” *Sustainability*, 12. doi:10.3390/su12114748. Many A4DS members have also served on doctoral dissertation committees in Health Services Research, Public Policy, Education, and Geography.

The A4DS members have been more successful with individual grants than collective grants, in part because the former has been the emphasis of grant efforts in the humanities and the arts and because faculty reappointment, promotion, and tenure documents in those fields reward solo publications. Some of the most competitive fellowships in the U.S. have been awarded to individual faculty in this cluster. The only two National Humanities Center fellowships at UNC Charlotte were awarded to A4DS faculty. The cluster members have also received National Geographic Society, Wenner-Gren Foundation, Fulbright, National Endowment of the Humanities, American Council of Learned Societies, and American Philosophical Society grants. Others have received resident fellowships at Ivy League institutions--Harvard, Yale, and Brown Universities, and in other leading institutions, including the University of Cambridge and University of Lyon, France. Some members have consulted for the World Bank, Department of Homeland Security, and Congressional Offices on cultural, historical, and policy issues. Others have received lifetime career awards, including the Nigerian Academy of Letters and the Nigerian National Order of Merit. The national and international impacts of A4DS members are also reflected in the awards they have received for their collective work. These include the NCBS Sankore Award for outstanding institutional achievement awarded to the Department of Africana Studies in 2017. The 30 faculty, who signed up for this proposal, submitted 154 external grant proposals in the past five years, and received 57 of them. They published 268 scholarly articles, essays, and books (including 140 co-authored), and received 25 external awards and career honors during the same period. The cluster members have also delivered 126 invited talks to national and international audiences since 2016.

Potential Areas of Excellence and Additional Resources to Build upon Past Success

Race, social justice, the African American experience, and global Africa, including the African Diaspora, have been the focus of the scholarship and community outreach pursued by members of A4DS cluster and the units that they represent. This cluster is unique for its methodological plurality and theoretical elasticity that draw insights from the humanities, social sciences, and applied sciences. Hence, the cluster members seek to use their current strength to build high-level research capacity in the following areas:

- Racial equity and social justice in health, environmental sustainability, education, social mobility, police brutality, gun violence, and digital technology.
- Migration and refugee crisis, human rights, and crimes against humanity.
- Long-term implications of climate change and resource scarcity for social stress and conflict.
- Aesthetic, historical, cultural, and artistic expressions of the Black experience domestically and internationally.

We recommend that the university pursue future cluster hires of faculty in these critical areas and create a university-wide Center for African American, African, and African Diaspora Studies. The center will coordinate research activities and outreach (service and policy) on race, social justice, Africa, African American affairs, and the global African Diaspora. This institutional support will provide coherence and focus for building on the past accomplishments of A4DS as a cluster of excellence.

4. Alignment with Regional and National Priorities (1 page):

Describe how the area aligns with regional, national and international priorities and supports the mission of the university. Provide supporting evidence, including references to publications and policy documents issued by state and federal agencies (e.g., National Science Foundation Big Ideas, NIH Strategic Research Priorities, Office of Science and Technology Policy, Institute for Education Sciences, and National Endowment for the Humanities Strategic Plan) and/or national organizations and professional societies.

The aims of the A4DS cluster fit well with two main areas of UNC Charlotte's mission: to offer internationally competitive programs of research and creative activity and, also, to maintain a particular commitment to addressing the cultural, economic, educational, environmental, health, and social needs of the greater Charlotte region. Few research groups can make such a dually-focused claim.

As #BlackLivesMatter protests and the [Charlotte-Mecklenburg Task Force on Opportunity](#) (2017) have made clear, our nation and our region both have much work to do specifically related to Africa-descended populations and the other minorities. Our cluster presents strong scholarly profiles across a range of expertise. We are an invaluable resource to the ongoing effort to make progress on race and social justice within the United States and internationally (Africa, Caribbean, and Latin America) based on empirical research.

A recent search conducted by the university's Center for Research Excellence, using keywords for our areas of research, identified 150 funding opportunities. In particular, we intend to look at the Mellon, NEA, NIH, SSRC, NSF, Carnegie, and Collaborative NEH grant opportunities related to racial equity and social justice in health, environmental sustainability, social mobility, migration, refugee, religious freedom, police brutality, gun violence, pedagogy of the Black experience, and the impact of digital technology on the African American community in particular and the Africana world in general.

The implications of climate change and resource scarcity for social stress and conflict in Africa, and the effects on the African Diaspora peoples in the Caribbean and Latin America is another area of interest ripe for collaborative research. This is consistent with the [U.S. Integrated Country Strategy policy](#) and UNC Charlotte's internationalization goals. Such projects will build on the previous collaborative work between the AFRS and CAGIS faculty. For this, the USAID, NSF, and Carnegie Foundation are three of the grant agencies that we will approach for funding. There are also funding opportunities at NEH to explore the impacts of indigenous ecology losses on cultural heritage and social sustainability.

We also seek to contribute to the National Endowment for the Humanities' long-term goals to help serve democracy's need for wisdom and provide all Americans with access to the lessons of history. [The NEH special initiative](#) for advancing civic education and commemorating the Nation's 250th Anniversary particularly offers grant opportunities that we can seek in partnership with the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African American Arts and Culture, Latibah Collard Green Museum, and other community institutions, to tell the story of Black Charlotte and Black Carolinas. The goals will include improving instruction for elementary- and secondary-level educators; application of the digital humanities tools; providing large-audience venues for reading, discussion, and communication; exhibitions; community engagement programs; and outreach to K-12 schools. In addition, we plan to create a long-term National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute on race, art, culture for high school teachers and college instructors.

5. Supporting Documents:

Names and titles (in tabular form), and a short description of the contribution or expertise of each member. Provide a two-page c.v. of participating and contributing faculty members. The list should be limited to UNC Charlotte affiliated faculty and researchers of all ranks.

Name	Title	Department	Short Description of Expertise
José Manuel Batista	Associate Professor	Languages and Culture Studies	AfroHispanic Literature, Latin American Poetry, Spanish Caribbean Literature and Culture
Danielle Boaz	Assistant Professor	Africana Studies	Race and law/Race and Religion
Christopher Cameron	Professor	History	African American Intellectual History; African American Cultural History; African American Religious and Secular Thought; Slavery and Abolitionism
John Cox	Associate Professor	Global Studies	Race/racism/imperialism studies
Oscar de la Torre	Associate Professor	Africana Studies	African Diaspora in Latin America; Brazilian, Amazonian, and Cuban History (19th and 20th century); Environmental Studies; Atlantic History
Crystal N. Eddins	Assistant Professor	Africana Studies	African Diaspora Studies, Social movements, Historical sociology, Race and ethnicity, Gender and women's studies, Digital humanities
Erika D. Edwards	Associate Professor	History	African Diaspora/gender/history
Karen Flint	Associate Professor	History	History of Public and Global Health, indigenous knowledge and African traditional medicines
Lisa Homann	Associate Professor	Art History	Artistic practices in Francophone West Africa (masquerade, performance, creative innovation, portraiture, Islam and Muslim identities, patronage, ethics in field research)
Charles Hutchison	Professor	Middle Secondary K-12 Education	cross-cultural (i.e., international and diversity) issues in education, science education, and philosophies
Julia S. Jordan-Zachery	Professor	Africana Studies	Black feminist theory/politics and public policy.

Jeffrey B. Leak	Professor	English	Race, Gender and Cultural Studies in the U.S./ Literary and Cultural biography.
Janaka Lewis	Associate Professor	English	Black Women's and Black Girlhood narratives, Black women's wellness and land justice
Honore Missihoun	Lecturer	Africana Studies	African Diaspora Languages and Literatures, Afro-Hispanic Culture, Black Atlantic
Gregory Mixon	Professor	History	Racial, Political, and Social issues in the United State over time.
Julia R. Moore	Associate Professor	Religious Studies	Intersections of racism, religion, and racial violence within American Protestantism and the African Diaspora
Akin Ogundiran	Chancellor's Professor	Africana Studies	Archaeology of social complexity, social ecology, and impacts of globalization on cultural formation.
Tanure Ojaide	F.P. Graham Professor	Africana Studies	Poet-African literary scholarship, Environmental Literature
Malin Pereira	Professor	English	Black Poetry, cosmopolitanism, race and identity
S. Y. Ramsey	Associate Professor	History	Race/Gender/Education
Diana Rowan	Professor	Social Work	Reducing health disparities (especially regarding HIV); dismantling racist systems; anti-oppressive/imperialistic practices in healthcare
Monika Sawhney	Associate Professor	Public Health Sciences	Global Health, Infectious Diseases, Health systems
Kristina K. Shull	Assistant Professor	History	Race, gender, carceral studies, Afro-Caribbean and Latin American migration, ethnic studies, Cold War, US foreign relations, environmental racism, climate migration, digital humanities
Debra Smith	Associate Professor	Africana Studies	Media/Film/Race/Education
Eddy Souffrant	Associate Professor	Philosophy	Collective Responsibility, Development Ethics: Critical assessment of development programs in underserved communities
Shannon Sullivan	Chair and Professor	Philosophy	Revealing "invisible" forms of white privilege & white supremacy

Wenwu Tang	Associate Professor	Geography and Earth Sciences	Geographic Information Science, spatial analysis and modeling, land use and land cover change, and cyberinfrastructure.
Tamara Williams	Assistant Professor	Dance	African diaspora, spirituality, race, performance
Beth Whitaker	Professor	Political Science and Public Administration	Migration within Africa, African international relations, refugees and conflict, diaspora voting
Greg Wiggan	Professor	Middle Secondary K-12 Education	African Diaspora and education