THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO'S
DEPARTMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

FALL 2019 DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER

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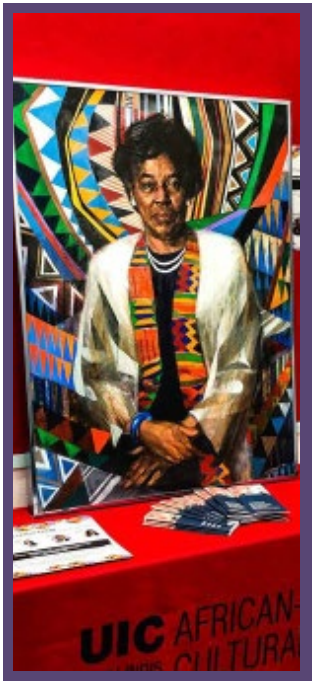
AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES

FALL 2019

The Department of African American Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago is at the cutting edge of research and teaching about today's most pressing issues, including education and economic inequality, racial and gendered violence, social movements, black artistic and cultural production, and mass incarceration and police relations.

We focus on the history, culture and politics of African-descended people in the Americas and around the globe in the quest for a more just and equitable world.



4

Welcome Back

Department Head, Dr. Jane Rhodes, welcomes back the AAST community. She speaks about the goals for the Department this year and invites everyone to stop by.

5

Faculty in the News

Read about how our Faculty is making a difference in the Chicagoland community and beyond.

6

2019 Promise Prize

An interview with the 2019 Promise Prize recipient, Yvonne Livingston, and how she will continue to uphold the awards meaning as she moves towards graduation.

8

Where are they now?

Amanda McDonald, a former student in the Department of African American Studies, talks about her success in the program and where she is now.

10

Upcoming Events

More things to add to your calendar for the Fall 2019 semester, including our Open House! See you there!

WE HAVE A BIG ANNOUNCEMENT

Stay tuned for our next newsletter!

WELCOME BACK

Dr. Jane Rhodes
Professor and Department Head

Dear Members of the African American Studies Community

It's hard to believe that we are halfway through the Fall semester. I'm delighted to be back from my leave and to find our department growing and thriving. There is LOTS of good news—a modest increase in the university budget thanks to the new administration in Springfield, more students choosing to major and minor in African American Studies, and exciting research and community-based work by our fabulous faculty. There are big changes for our department curriculum too. We are launching a brand new interdepartmental concentration in Black Studies for graduate and professional students across UIC. We are excited to build this program and be at the center of innovative scholarship and conversations in our vibrant interdisciplinary field! I hope you will attend our events and programs to help us move into this new and exciting episode in the life of the department. Please stay in touch.

FACULTY IN THE NEWS

PROFESSOR DAVID STOVALL ON THE NFL'S "DO-GOODER SYNDROME" 9/6/19

The NFL made a donation to a Chicago nonprofit that helps boys in Englewood after tweets from the groups White founder shows her cutting the dreadlocks off a Black teen who is part of her program.

PROFESSOR HELEN JUN ON TONI MORRISON WITH WGN RADIO 8/6/19

Jun speaks on the late Toni Morrison and the impact she left on the African American community with her books such as "Beloved" and "Song of Solomon".

PROFESSOR AND DEPARTMENT HEAD DR. JANE RHODES' INTERVIEW ON THE 1619 PROJECT WITH THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE 8/19/19

The 1619 project, a collection of essays and poems about the aftermath of slavery in America, "marks [an] entry into a current broad movement about the recognition of slavery" says Dr. Rhodes.

PROMISE PRIZE

An Interview with Yvonne Livingston

Each year the Department of African American Studies awards the Promise Prize to one student, nominated by Department faculty, who has demonstrated academic excellence, leadership, scholarship and community engagement. Nominated by Professor Johari Jabir and Professor Cedric Johnson, Yvonne Livingston received the Promise Prize for 2019. With a major in Psychology with a minor in AAST, the mother of six was unaware that her name was even mentioned for this award. “I thought it was a joke when i opened up the email,” Livingston recalls, “I said ‘Is this real?’”. As she thought back on the day she opened that email she started to tear up. “I felt like I didn’t belong when I first came here” she said. Little did she know that the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) was exactly where she needed to be.

“There was always somebody fighting on the front thinking about the generations ahead, and that is what I want to do now, fight for the generations ahead”

Q: What attracted you to a minor in African American Studies?

“My first class I took was Black Lives Matter in Historical Context with Professor Johari Jabir. I have taken AAST classes before, but this one was different. From that class I took Race in Urban Life with Professor Cedric Johnson, and that class was transformative as well. That class changed my life and how I view things in the world. While I was in his class is when I declared my minor in African American Studies.”

Q: A part of this award was having the opportunity to attend the Leadership Summit held by the Change Create Transform Foundation. What was that like? Has there been anything that has stayed with you?

"The first day was a meet a greet. After, we broke off into small groups to come up with a theme to talk about what the Prize meant to us. As we were sitting there, we heard all these people speak about the program. I had prepared my speech and realized that just the atmosphere and what everyone had said about this program completely identifies with who I am and my community. I'm not talking about people who looks like me - my community looks like someone who identifies with my morals and my values. That is what my community looks like. And that is what I saw in the room that night.

My conversation with Vicki [Pryor] on the last day at breakfast stuck with me. I told her that I want to make her proud of her grandmothers legacy through me, the same way I want to make my family proud through their hard work and what they took for me. That is why I do so many things I do. I don't always have time, but if I took the perspective of 'I don't always have time,' I wouldn't be where I am now."

At the end of our conversation Yvonne wanted to advocate for students with disabilities (because she is a student with a disability). She mentioned accessibility on campus - particularly the difficulty some students face in the winter with the snow and ice being physically unable to make it to class. Additionally, Yvonne brought up the need to expand electronic capture or similar options for students. Yvonne made it clear that students who need to obtain a letter for disability purposes should not feel like they are a burden to their professors. "We went through the trouble to get this [the letter of accommodation], it's not that we are being treated special, it's that we are being given the opportunity to act in our own interest. We may not be able to attend class physically every day, but that shouldn't count against us", she said, "no student should feel stigmatized." Yvonne is currently working towards creating the change she would like to see at UIC.

"Don't lose your experiences try ing to obtain the knowledge," recalls Livingston in an early conversation with Professor Jabir. "That is what has made the difference for me being here at UIC, using my experiences."

Where are they now?

Amanda McDonald is a former student in the Department of African American Studies. We sat down with her to discuss her experience with the Department and winning the 2019 Grace Holt Memorial Award.

Earlier this year Amanda McDonald graduated from UIC and is currently working as the Interim Office Manager for IRRPP (Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy). Her research centers around Black undergraduate students and their access to social support services on campus and establishing community among their peers. This led her to be awarded the 2019 Grace Holt Memorial Award. On the day she won and received the email she "thought it was a mistake" and asked herself, "is this the right Amanda McDonald?!" After the initial shock, she "felt honored at the fact that people appreciated [her] research, work ethic, and what [she] brought to the table academically." At the end of our time spent together she wanted shout out many of the professors in the Department of African American Studies that have positively impacted her over the years including: Professor Jane Rhodes, Professor Roderick Ferguson, Bri Hanny, Professor Cynthia Blair, Professor Johari Jabir, Professor Mario LaMothe, Professor Dave Stovall, Professor Lynette Jackson, and Patrick Washington.

Q: What is one piece of advice you would give to Black undergraduate students about navigating the campus?

"Make this place your own. Look for or find a place where you fit in or feel comfortable. And if you can't find one, then make one!"

Q: How do you plan on keeping the legacy of the Grace Halt Memorial Award alive?

"The weight and the meaning behind the award means a lot to me. I've read about Grace Holt and the adversity she faced and many things she had to overcome, that fuels a lot of the academic work that I do."

Q: You presented at the Association of Black Sociologist Conference recently, what was that experience like?

"It was very nerve racking. I ended up presenting on a panel named 'Historically White Institutions' where everybody else was getting their PhDs. I thought to myself 'this is going to be different!' It was my first time presenting without an advisor looking over my content before. I never felt separated out from them. I definitely understood that there was a difference in the experience of voicing your opinions, thoughts, and reasonings. But because we were all talking about a similar topic it felt like we were all thinkers coming together to share our experiences and what we've learned through our research.

Amanda McDonald

OPEN HOUSE

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 15
12PM - 3PM
1250 UNIVERSITY HALL

UPCOMING EVENTS

BLACK WOMEN AND AIDS

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 29, 3:30 - 5:30PM

ROOM 605, STUDENT CENTER EAST

750 S. HALSTED ST., CHICAGO

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR **CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES** AND UIC PROFESSOR **JENNIE BRIER** WILL BE IN CONVERSATION ABOUT THEIR RESEARCH WITH WOMEN LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS AND DR. WATKINS-HAYES' LATEST BOOK REMAKING A LIFE.

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SPEAKER SERIES FOR POLICING IN CHICAGO CLASS

TUESDAYS AND THURSDAYS, 11 - 12:30PM

AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER
ADDAMS HALL, 830 S. HALSTED ST., CHICAGO

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 29: *VIOLENCE REDUCTION*
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 31: *TORTURE JUSTICE*
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 7: *HOMAN SQUARE/FREEDOM SQUARE*

RAFAEL CINTRÓN ORTIZ LATINO CULTURAL CENTER
803 S. MORGAN ST., CHICAGO

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 21: *POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY*
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 26: *STRUGGLES FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE*

GALLERY 400 LECTURE ROOM
400 S. PEORIA ST., CHICAGO

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3: *TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE*

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