Graduate Handbook

**Department of African American Studies**

Pennsylvania State University

Welcome to the Department of African American Studies at Penn State!

The principal aim of the dual-title Ph.D. program in African American and Diaspora Studies is to train graduate students to describe, analyze, and objectively evaluate social, cultural, economic, political, philosophical, and religious phenomena and policies that structure the experiences and possibilities of people of African descent in the United States, the Black Atlantic (including the larger Americas), Europe, and Asia. Students in this program will identify and study the African American and African Diaspora populations of Slavery, Emancipation, Colonial and Post-Colonial periods, and also modern periods, including the Civil Rights and post-Civil Rights eras in North America, including modern cycles of globalization and migration.

The dual-title Ph.D. program in African American and Diaspora Studies integrates knowledge produced across disciplines and is shaped by historical and contemporary considerations, an approach that reinforces and broadens the knowledge that students acquire in their traditional disciplines. It provides an intellectual and physical location where inherently interdisciplinary scholarship related to African America and the African Diaspora can assist in broadening graduates’ academic credentials. Students in more traditional disciplines such as English or History who want to acquire formal knowledge about African Americans and the African Diaspora beyond what is offered by their home departments will be able to acquire that knowledge through the seminars offered in this program.

Graduate students get hands-on experience in applying interdisciplinary theories and research methods. In addition, the dual-title degree program provides students with an opportunity to work within a pedagogical framework that encourages an interdisciplinary approach to teaching. Broader preparation enhances the job market experience; graduates qualify for a wider selection of jobs across academic disciplinary and interdisciplinary units and in the larger employment marketplace. To complete a dual-degree Ph.D., students must be admitted first to one of our partner programs listed below:

***Art Education Communication Arts and Sciences English History Philosophy Political Science***

Please read this handbook as a starting point for navigating our graduate program, and please do not hesitate to contact the Director of Graduate Studies in the African American Studies Department, as listed on our website, if you have any remaining questions.

# I. INTRODUCTION

This handbook provides an overview of the African American and Diaspora Studies graduate program: the dual-title Ph.D. It also provides information and advice that will help you navigate our graduate program. It is critical not only to read this handbook and meet with the Director of Graduate Studies as you plan your courses, but also to reach out to core and affiliated faculty to receive guidance appropriate to your field. These professional and scholarly relationships are critical to completing successfully the dual-degree program.

The distribution of roles and responsibilities in our dual-degree graduate program are as follows:

* ***The Director of Graduate Studies*** handles general advising for students and coordinates the program. The DGS provides advice on degree requirements, monitors the progress of all graduate students, approves elective courses toward the dual-degree, and certifies that requirements are met.
* ***The Graduate Studies Committee*** is in charge of admissions processes for the dual-degree program, evaluates graduate teaching applications, and recommends to the Department Head whom to appoint for residential teaching assistantships. The GSC also selects recipients or makes nominations for graduate student awards (see AFAM website for more information). The GSC charts graduate curriculum and policy agendas for the Department, with consultation and final approval by the entire faculty.
* ***The Graduate Staff Assistant*** maintains graduate student records and handles paperwork required at various stages of the graduate program. Ashley Scott (ams87@psu.edu) is our Graduate Staff Assistant currently, taking central responsibility for administering the class schedule, credit approvals, and other matters related to the Graduate School and Registrar’s Office.

# II. Dual-degree program

This section presents the admissions process and requirements for the dual-degree Ph.D. program. It is critical for students to follow closely the degree requirements in their partner program, as the Department of African American Studies does not have control over—or comprehensive knowledge of—partner departments’ requirements. We seek to make our dual-degree program as flexible as possible to allow students to complete all the requirements in a timely manner while maintaining the integrity of our degrees.

## Admissions process

You can apply for the dual-degree Ph.D. program before admission to Penn State, or you can apply after you matriculate. If in the latter group, you must do so before you achieve candidacy in your major program. Students will need to speak with advisors in their partner department to ascertain exactly what constitutes candidacy in those departments.

**Students applying before admission to Penn State:** Students may apply to the dual-degree program when they apply for admission to a partner Ph.D. program at Penn State. Please follow the guidelines for applying established by the budgetary unit and indicate clearly on your application that you are applying to the dual degree program in African American and Diaspora Studies. Send all materials to the partner department but be sure your personal statement reflects your interest in this interdisciplinary degree. The dual-title partner department is responsible for the first years of funding and assistantships. *If you are admitted into one of the doctoral programs listed above*, our admissions committee will review your file using the same material you submitted in that application (the same statement and letters, etc.). In this context, your application statement should recognize that the partner program is the first to review your application and that you must be admitted to that program before being considered by us—view that program as a central audience for your application. Nevertheless, the statement also should indicate how your research and professional goals reflect an interest in interdisciplinary, African American and Diaspora Studies. While being sure to identify faculty with whom you would work in your partner department, it is helpful for your dual-title degree application to articulate the ways faculty in AFAM at Penn State can help further your research and professional goals.

Our admissions committee follows the timetable of our partner departments, although you may receive an acceptance from that partner program before receiving our admissions decision. If you have received admission into one of these doctoral programs and have not received notice of admission or non-admission from us, please contact us ([ams87@psu.edu](mailto:ams87@psu.edu)).

**Internal candidates applying after matriculating at Penn State:** It is important to take the time to decide whether to pursue a dual-degree, ideally taking an AFAM seminar to think this through, but it is also critical to start planning and getting advice about how to navigate it as soon as possible. Students are encouraged to discuss their application in advance with their advisor in the partner department and the African American and Diaspora Studies DGS. There are two application deadlines for internal candidates for the dual-degree (those who have already started their graduate coursework at Penn State): **October 15th** and **February 15th** each academic year. Please note that you must apply and be admitted into our dual-degree program before you achieve candidacy in your other program.

Students already enrolled in a partner department at Penn State may apply by submitting the following to the Department of African American Studies in 345 Willard Building, University Park, PA 16801;.

* A copy of your Graduate School Application which was originally submitted to your home department;
* Official transcripts from all previous coursework (Photocopies of transcripts sent from the home department are acceptable);
* A writing sample;
* A personal statement that describes how the dual-degree program fits with your scholarly interests.

Students applying to the dual-title degree program should be aware that participating in a dual-title program may require additional time to complete the degree; students should plan ahead to secure sufficient funding.

## Dual-title Ph.D. requirements

Students must complete 9 core credits in the African American Studies Department (AFAM 501, AFAM 502, and AFAM 503) and 6 elective credits at the 500-level approved by the DGS for the degree. Students who already hold a master’s degree from another institution may petition to have up to 6 equivalent course credits recognized. The Director of Graduate Studies will maintain a list of acceptable electives.

* 9 credits of core theory coursework:

**AFAM 501**: Seminar in African American and Diaspora Studies (3 credits)

**AFAM 502**:Blacks in the African Diaspora (3 credits)

**AFAM 503**:Sexual and Gender Politics(3 credits)

* Six elective credits at the 500-level approved by the AFAM Director of Graduate Studies.

\* Any AFAM 500-level course not counted toward your 9 core credits can count toward your electives. Please do not assume a course will count towards the degree if you do not have this approval before taking it. Electives may come from the student’s home department or from other departments offering courses relevant to the African American and Diaspora Studies dual-title program. Courses approved currently as electives from other departments are listed below:

AFR 501: Key Issues in African Studies

PHIL 539: Critical Philosophy of Race

HIST 547: Slavery in the Americas

HIST 549: Topics in African-American History

HIST 551: The African American Freedom Struggle in the Twentieth Century

HIST 572: Race and Empire in the Americas, Caribbean & Pacific

ENGL 565: Period Studies in African-American Literature

ENGL 566: Genre Studies in African-American Literature

ENGL 567: Thematic Studies in African-American Literature

ENGL 568: Gender Issues in African-American Literature

ENGL 597: African American Rhetoric

**Other requirements for the dual-title Ph.D**.:

* At least one member of the African American Studies graduate faculty must be included in the doctoral committee.
  + The dissertation committee for a dual-title doctoral degree student must include a minimum of four faculty members, i.e., a chair and at least three additional members, all of whom must be members of the Graduate Faculty, and one of which must be on the Graduate Faculty in African American Studies. If the chair is not faculty in African American Studies, then the committee member representing African American Studies must be appointed as co-chair.
* The comprehensive exam must incorporate African American and Diaspora Studies content based on the student’s thematic or regional area of interest and specialization in African American and Diaspora Studies. The African American and Diaspora Studies portion of the exam will include the following components: broad history of the field, contemporary theory and debates, and either sexual and gender politics or a topic related to the student’s specific area of interest.
* The candidate must complete a dissertation and pass a final oral defense of that dissertation on a topic that reflects their original research and education both in the primary discipline and African American and Diaspora Studies in order to earn the dual-title Ph.D. degree.

A complete list of the graduate faculty in our department can be found here: <https://secure.gradsch.psu.edu/gpms/index.cfm>.

**Students should consult the graduate school calendar for information about graduation deadlines**.

## Annual Progress Reports

We ask that each dual-title Ph.D. student submit an annual self-evaluation report.

By **April 15** every year, each dual-title student should submit in writing an annual self-evaluation report form (see Appendix A), signed by the student. Please turn in this form to the Graduate Staff Assistant by combining all pages into ONE .pdf titled “LASTNAME\_FIRSTNAME Annual Report 20XX-20XX” and email to Ashley Scott (ams87@psu.edu).

The report will be reviewed by the AFAM Graduate Studies Committee, and the DGS will provide written feedback for each student on the status of their progress in the program.

# III. FUNDING and teaching opportunities

Students enrolled in the dual-title degree program are not expected to incur additional costs by participating in the program. Advisors will assist the students with selecting courses to ensure that all degree requirements are satisfied in a timely manner. Graduate assistantships that may be available to students in this program and other forms of student aid are described in the Student Aid section of the Graduate Bulletin:

“Graduate funding for Ph. D. candidates in the dual-title doctoral degree program may be provided by the primary program and/or the African American and Diaspora Studies program. Students who are supported by graduate assistantships or fellowships from the African American and Diaspora Studies Program will teach in roles and circumstances determined by the African American and Diaspora Studies head.

Students will receive every available support from the African American and Diaspora Studies graduate faculty to write grants to support their field research and other academic endeavors. Students will also be given every opportunity to participate in the efforts of the African American and Diaspora Studies graduate faculty to secure extramural funding. External funding by African American and Diaspora Studies graduate faculty also may provide additional graduate funding.”

The African American and Diaspora Studies faculty member who serves on the student’s graduate committee will also provide advice regarding funding sources and publication venues. All teaching assistants in the dual-title graduate program will meet regularly with appropriate coordinators and each other over the course of each semester to discuss course content and pedagogy. Students supported by funds from the primary program perform teaching and other academic duties determined by the graduate officer of that program. Students who are supported by graduate TA-ships or fellowships from the Department of African American Studies teach in roles and circumstances determined by the Head of the Department of African American Studies. Successful applications for external funding by faculty would also provide additional graduate student funding. Some students who teach core introductory courses in the undergraduate major may be funded through workload resources. Dual-title degree candidates are eligible for any assistantships offered through the Department of African American Studies.

**Residential and online teaching appointments**: The Department of African American Studies also offers teaching appointments, both online and residential, that are not in the form of teaching assistantships (thus they do not carry a tuition waiver nor insurance).

Residential and online teaching appointments that are not teaching assistantships are made on a rolling basis as needed in response to programmatic needs. Requests for applications will be made via the AFAM department office and vetted by the Department Head.

**Conference Travel Funding.** While we cannot guarantee support for graduate students in all circumstances, we typically provide funds for dual-degree and graduate minor students to present their research at an academic conference oriented toward African American and Diaspora Studies. We prioritize presentations at meeting and try to set aside funds particularly in support of graduate student participation. Please send your requests to the Director of Graduate Studies, including the following information: the name of the conference; the title of the paper or poster you will present; the relevance of the conference to your professional development in the field of AFAM; and a brief budget detailing the amount of your request (include any funds for the trip already committed from other units or entities). Please send this request well in advance of your departure.

# IV. BuildING COMMUNITY

We encourage you to engage the AFAM community from the moment you arrive at Penn State—even if you have not yet decided whether to formally apply for a dual-title Ph.D. Here are important modes of doing so:

**Graduate student listserv**. Please email ams87@psu.edu to be added to the graduate student listserv *at any time* after you receive your PSU email account. You can be on the list whether you have formally joined or been accepted into the dual-title program, or even if you will not be doing either but want to hear about our events.

**Annual graduate student orientation and reception**. We hold an orientation session a few weeks into fall semester as well as a welcome dinner.

**Africana Research Center meetings and events**. The Africana Research Center (ARC) puts on a number of events throughout the year that are of interest to our graduate students. The ARC hosts visiting and local scholars in a Food for Thought Luncheon series and for annual lectures named for Barbara Jordan and Nelson Mandela. The ARC also offers graduate fellowships and other funding opportunities.

**Professional Development Opportunities**. The Director of Graduate Studies seeks to organize workshops to support the professionalization of graduate students—examples include sessions on how to organize a job application, give a job talk, organize a conference presentation, and identify publishing opportunities.

**African Diaspora Working Group**. The African Diaspora Working Group (ADWG) meets monthly to discuss common readings (often in anticipation of a scholar's campus visit), workshop works-in-progress by faculty and graduate students and develop an interdisciplinary community of scholars interested in various aspects of the African Diaspora. Faculty and graduate students in AFAM and in other departments across the university are welcome to join.

**Appendix**

**Annual Student Self-Evaluation Report**

**XXXX-XXXX**

Name:

Term/Year Started Program:

Advisor(s):

In assessing our dual-title students, the department would like a student self-evaluation to be filled out by each student so that we can assess how you are progressing toward the degree.

The faculty meet in May to review progress toward degree. Please complete the following self-evaluation items by April 15.

**If more space is needed for your self-evaluation report, please feel free to attach additional pages to this document when you submit it.**

1. List the courses taken in the past year and your performance in each:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Department** | **Course Number** | **Course Title** | **Credit Hours** | **Grade Received** |
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1. List the courses you intend to take in the next academic year:
2. List research projects/papers on which you have worked during the past year and briefly describe them:
   1. Research Project Name:

Start Date:

End Date:

Brief description of role: (use as much space as necessary)

* 1. Research Project Name:

Start Date:

End Date:

Brief description of role:

* 1. Research Project Name:

Start Date:

End Date:

Brief description of role:

1. List all teaching experiences you have had in the past year, including GSI appointments. Under activities, note any teaching related lectures or presentations:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Department and Course Number** | **Course Title** | **Term** | **Activities** |
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5a. List all professional presentations you made in the last year, including seminars presented to the department:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Audience** | **Location** | **Title** |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

5b. List all professional presentations you plan to make in the next academic year:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Audience** | **Location** | **Title** |
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6a. List all applications for research support, dissertation work, travel to conferences or other professional activities you have submitted in the past year related to your own research:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Funding Source** | **Funding Requested** | **Outcome** |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

6b. List all applications for financial support you intend to submit in the next year for research, dissertation, travel or professional funding:

7. List all the manuscripts you have submitted for publication in the past year, including seminars presented to the department:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Journal/Book** | **Manuscript Title** | **Status** |
|  |  |  |  |

1. Complete the following information about Ph.D. program milestones achieved to date or expected achievement dates:
   1. **Required Courses** (Course Number, Title, Date Completed and Grade)
   2. **Candidacy Exam**
      1. Date taken/To be taken:
      2. Grade:

If Applicable:

1. Date retaken/To be retaken:
2. Grade:
   1. **Comprehensive Exam**
      1. Date taken/To be taken:
      2. Grade:

If Applicable:

1. Date retaken/To be retaken:
2. Grade:
   1. **Masters Committee**
      1. Date formed:
      2. Members:
   2. **Ph.D. Committee**
      1. Date formed:
      2. Members:
   3. **Final Oral Dissertation Defense**
      1. Date defended/ to be defended:
3. Briefly describe the research topic you are pursuing or plan to pursue for your dissertation research.
4. List sources of assistance you anticipate needing from faculty and staff in the coming year (other than student financial support, i.e. readings courses, mentoring, participation in doctoral committees, etc.)
5. Briefly assess your strengths and weakness in overall performance and progress toward completion of degree as a doctoral student. Include both academic and work performance.
6. Identify what skills you need to improve and explain how you intend to do so.
7. List any non-departmental awards/honors that you have received in the past year (fellowships, scholarships, top paper, etc.)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Award** | **Award Description** |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |