

Dean Cobbs

Minutes of the Black Studies Curriculum Committee.

Thursday, May 8, 1969. Sharples Dining Hall, 12:30 - 1:30 p.m.

Members present: Mr. Wright, Mr. Van Til, Mr. Hopkins, Mr. Pierson, Mr. Legesse, Mr. Shackford; Marilyn Allman, Don Mizell, Clint Etheridge, Al Dietrich, Marilyn Holifield.

Discussion of the policy statement (appended to the minutes) continued. There were two changes from the previous draft. Under IV the BSCC merely takes note of the SASS goals as listed on pages 3 and 4 of Marilyn Allman's draft, rather than discussion them all at the present time. The second change, under I,B,1, eliminated the "positive perspective" on black people as a necessary criterion for a course to be included within the concentration. This was the main subject of debate for the rest of the meeting.

Marilyn Holifield felt it was an important criterion. The "Politics of the Urban Ghetto" course this semester did not give a "positive understanding" of the problems of black people, nor of local problems, as it was often proclaimed to do. It was suggested that Marilyn and other students in the course write up a proposal of criticisms and suggestions for the Political Science department.

Mr. Legesse suggested that we required a "balanced view" in the courses. Mr. Van Til agreed, especially when taken to mean a correction of past "imbalance" i.e. the suppression and distortion of materials and ideas. But we should not require that the course be "sympathetic"--it is too much an ideological test for an academic course. Mr. Legesse said that the teacher could either take the middle of the road between two extremes, or, preferably, take one side and include the opposite. Mr. Wright added that the balance might be within the concentration, not within the course itself. Mr. Legesse thought it was important to try to include both views within the course.

Mr. Wright and Mr. Hopkins felt that this began to infringe on academic freedom--telling the teacher what he must teach. Secondly, it produces an ad hominum situation whereby we might withdraw a course from the concentration after it has been taught because it is judged not to meet this criterion--even though the teacher may have been hired specifically for the program. Mr. Legesse said that the courses will have a "positive" perspective or a "balanced" perspective--these are the only two realistic possibilities.

Mr. Pierson suggested that the courses must reflect "sensitivity" to black perspective and problems. This avoids the implication of propaganda in "positive" and also recognizes that there is an added element to Black Studies courses that make them different from other Swarthmore courses. Mr. Wright agreed the phrase was better, but would prefer none at all. Who will decide on what constitutes "sensitivity"? The teacher, the chairman, the students, the committee? Don Mizell objected that a white teacher may be convinced that he is sensitive, while the black students know that he is not. Marilyn Allman said that we do not have to spell out how the controversies will be solved, but we should at least recognize that this is an area of controversy. Mr. Wright said that I,B,3 ("to recommend withdrawal of courses from the program... if necessary") says all we need to say. Anything more suggests an ad hominum situation. Mr. Van Til said that if we can decide on the criteria for I,B,3 then we should include it in the statement. Certainly destructive racism must be excluded.

Mr. Legesse suggested that "the courses should include the thinking of black people and black thinkers." He said that Don Henderson of Southern Illinois University while speaking to AHBAC described the basic goal of Black Studies: we should not make Black Studies a footnote to white studies; at SIU Black Studies



are a separate junior college, the black experience is the starting point and center of the entire program, ghettoese is the basic language, English is taught as a second language, and the whole program has been quite successful, especially in the social sciences; students with very low SAT scores have performed well. The danger at Swarthmore, said Mr. Legesse, is that the Black Studies program will not do the job we want it to do--namely to address the problems directly relevant to black students.

Mr. Pierson suggested that we add I,B,I,d: "every course should include black thinkers and writers." Marilyn Holifield added "and correct the distortions of the past". Mr. Wright objected: this is not a simple clear-cut matter but rather the subject of a complex intellectual debate. For example, what is the "correct" interpretation of Nat Turner? Students should object and debate in class with the teacher and thus make sure that alternate views are presented. Marilyn said that most teachers and students have no idea of alternative views and thus it is hard to debate. Mr. Legesse said that the personal views of the teacher are not relevant, he is still able to examine various view points; what is important is the philosophy of the course and of the program in general.

It was agreed to include as I,B,I,d: "the courses should include the ideas of black thinkers."

Don Mizell suggested that we get Don Henderson to speak to the people involved in the Black Studies program at the beginning of next year--so that people will know what to expect and to look for.

Mr. Pierson said that Mr. Cratsley appears cooperative about funds for outside research and field work, as long as the total cost remains moderate. Would the students draw up a sketch of what kinds of expenses might be involved in field work, and how much?

This is probably the last meeting of the year. Will there be a sub-committee for the summer? If things come up, send them to Mr. Pierson.

## BLACK STUDIES CONCENTRATION

The Black Studies concentration offers the student an opportunity to develop a deeper and broader understanding of the experiences, cultures, and goals of black people, especially those in Africa and in the Americas. Because of the unique nature of this area of study, the program offered will differ in some respects from those of more institutionalized disciplines, and considerable flexibility will be required.

### I. CHAIRMAN:

A. appointment: by President, in consultation with BSCC.

B. duties:

1. to recommend courses to be included within the concentration according to the following criteria:
  - a. course must focus directly on black people as main subject
  - b. the syllabus must be relevant to this focus
  - c. the qualifications of course leaders should, wherever possible, include field experience in the subjects covered
2. to review, within appropriate limits, courses offered to see if they meet criteria set up by the committee
3. to recommend withdrawal of courses from the program (but not the departmental curricula), if necessary
4. to set general standards and to examine the qualifications of individual students in the concentration

### II. DESCRIPTION OF CONCENTRATION:

The concentration attempts to serve both the social goals and aspirations and the academic interests of the members of the Swarthmore community, black and white. It assumes that proper understanding of Black Studies can begin to develop not only through courses offered in the traditional manner of lectures and seminars, but also through individual reading and through participation in the experiences of the black community outside of Swarthmore.

Because of the unique nature of Black Studies--the long history of suppression and distortion of information, the unavailability of written historical data, the contemporary and changing nature of developments and of available scholarship within the black community--the program offered will be of necessity very different from those of more institutionalized disciplines. Course offerings and field work openings may vary frequently. Because of the rotating nature of faculty appointments, course content and presentation may vary. Therefore, the concentrator will work very closely with the chairman of the Black Studies concentration and with his department chairman in



working out his program for each semester. He will be expected to contribute to making and maintaining high standards for the concentration.

Because of the emphasis on the application in the concentration for some students, and because students will be utilizing many of the resources of the black community, the program seeks to make some return by making information gathered available to the black community.

### III. REQUIREMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Students majoring in any subject bearing on Black Studies should be permitted to concentrate in this area as an aspect of the work in their majors. The subjects normally falling in this category are Art History, Economics, English, History, Music, Political Science, and Sociology-Anthropology. However, other combinations are possible; for example, for students seeking careers in urban planning through an Engineering major or in health planning through a Biology major.

To concentrate in Black Studies students must take at least five semester courses in the program, <sup>and also</sup> as well as fulfilling the requirements of their majors. Their work will be reviewed and evaluated when completed by means considered appropriate by the chairman of the program. Courses selected should follow the following pattern of distribution:

- 1) a course in black consciousness or a course in general Afro-American history.
- 2) at least one or more 'courses' which require the student to do substantial work off-campus, either in a black community or in an organization in the white community which functions primarily in a way which affects black people (favorably or adversely).
- 3) the remaining courses can be taken according to individual preference. However, it is highly recommended that the concentrator seek to study some area which explains the values and philosophies of the black movement.

The program in Black Studies of each student is subject to the approval of the chairman of the Black Studies concentration.

### IV. SUGGESTED COURSE OFFERINGS:

SASS has suggested the following list as a set of goals for the Black Studies concentration: (insert pp. 3 and 4 of original draft)

V. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That information gathered in the course of research and thesis writing should be copied and sent to an appropriate repository in the black community.
2. That a bibliography of such information be printed (and kept up to date) and made available to SASS and any other organizations that are interested in it.
3. That the chairman of the Black Studies concentration work closely with his counterpart at nearby black and white colleges, for coordination of offerings and for possible cooperative arrangements.
4. That a Library and Special programs budget be made available for the Black Studies program to be administered as similar budgets are administered for departments.
5. That students be encouraged to be resourceful in finding field work opportunities within the black and white communities.
6. That black student course leaders be sought to assist white instructors in courses within the concentration when appropriate.
7. That funds be provided immediately for concentrators to work out a detailed and coherent program of field work for next year and that appropriate persons be sought to participate in this part of the program.
8. That the high quality of the program be maintained at all costs, even if there is a dearth of courses available in a given semester.