Institutions and Disciplinary Beliefs about Africana Studies

Forthcoming from the Western Journal of Black Studies

Fabio Rojas
Department of Sociology
Indiana University

&

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Scholar in Health Policy Research
The University of Michigan

Abstract: I examine the link between institutions and disciplinary beliefs held by Africana Studies professors. Three hypotheses are tested. First, a university’s mission (e.g., research vs. teaching) will affect the belief that Africana Studies is a distinct field of study. Second, scholars are less likely to hold that belief if they have affiliations with other departments and disciplines that already address African or African American issues. Third, scholars are more likely to emphasize the distinctiveness of Africana Studies if they work in an academic unit that is threatened. These hypotheses are tested with data from a 2005 survey of Africana Studies professors. I find that professors are more likely to think that Africana Studies has its own methods if they are black, work in a non-research university, are appointed exclusively in their Africana Studies program, and work in a program that has low enrollments in the Africana Studies major.

Acknowledgements: I thank the Department of Sociology at Indiana University for supporting this research. I also thank the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for providing financial support. I thank the editor, E. Lincoln James, and the anonymous referees for helpful guidance in revising
this manuscript. All remaining errors are my own. The author can be contacted via email at frojas@indiana.edu.
Introduction

An academic discipline is an intellectual community founded on common interests, but it is also an institutional entity (e.g., Abbott, 2001; Brint et al., 2009; Clark, 1982; Veysey, 1965). Academic disciplines are housed within universities, research centers, and non-profit organizations. These intellectual organizations can affect an academic discipline. Universities and other intellectual institutions vary in their goals, resources, and incentives (Brint & Karabel, 1991; Clark, 1982; Parsons, Platt, & Smelser, 1971; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996). The research university has a different mission than the liberal arts college, which affects who is hired and the work they produce. I explore these issues within the field of Africana Studies and ask about the link between institutional contexts and scholarly views. What is the relationship between institutional context and attitudes toward the discipline? How does a scholar’s professional position affect their view of Africana Studies?

In this study, I use a unique data set to address these questions. Fielded in 2005, the Survey of Issues in Africana Studies asked tenured and tenure-track Africana Studies professors if they thought Africana Studies has its own distinct methods. I use this data to test three theories about professors and their scholarly beliefs. First, a university’s mission may change how a professor views their field. For example, universities have different commitments to research and public service. I call this the organizational mission hypothesis. Second, a scholar may have professional affiliations that might change how Africana Studies scholars view their field. I call this the competing affiliations hypothesis. Third, the Africana Studies program itself may change professional attitudes. Specifically, scholars in stable programs are less likely to emphasize what is distinctive or unique about Africana Studies programs if they feel secure. Scholars may emphasize their field’s distinctiveness if they feel the need to justify themselves within the
university. Drawing from the field of social psychology (e.g., Coser, 1964; Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006), I call this the group threat hypothesis.

What is Africana Studies?

Like most academic disciplines, there are numerous debates about Africana Studies’ mission and identity. In the present essay, I use the term “Africana Studies” because it refers to the broad Diaspora that is now studied by scholars in the units known diversely as African American, Africana, Pan-Africana, or Black Studies (Harris, 2001). There is a debate over Africana Studies’ relationship to other disciplines. Since the field’s emergence in the 1960s, scholars have asked if Africana Studies is distinct from other disciplines such as history (e.g., Asante, 1983; Norment, 2001; Dagbovie, 2005, 2007), literary criticism (Griffin, 1994) or sociology (Ladner, 1973). This debate is motivated by questions about the academic organization of Africana Studies and the nature of teaching and research. There is one school of thought that views Africana Studies as a kind of interdisciplinary field. Often compared to area studies, such as American Studies, Africana Studies is viewed as a field that has a specific topic but draws its research methods and analytical frameworks from relevant disciplines. For example, scholars in American Studies view themselves as a distinct community, but they draw their analytical frameworks from fields such as history, sociology, and the humanities. Many scholars of African American Studies adopt this model as their own. For example, it has been argued by multiple scholars that history is a core topic in Africana Studies (Dagbovie, 2005, 2007; Karenga, 1993).

Theoretically, a reliance on the tools and methods of other disciplines means that scholars may formulate Africana Studies as an extension of existing paradigms (Daniel, 1980). For
example, it has been argued that the way to approach African American literature is to use ideas associated with European literature. Thus, literature from the African Diaspora is seen as another example of artistic forms generated by European literary culture instead of having its own distinctive nature, a position that many in Africana Studies would disagree with (Temple, 2006). Similarly, there has been considerable debate about the relevance of sociology as it was developed by classical European and American social researchers (Ladner, 1973).

A competing view is that Africana Studies requires its own methods and research strategies. Africana Studies is not merely the study of people of African descent, it is a mode of inquiry that makes different assumptions than other fields (Asante, 1983). Africana Studies scholars should not use the frameworks developed by scholars in European traditions. Instead, they should privilege the experiences of the people in the African Diaspora (Asante, 2006; Assensoh, 2003). Such views can be found among scholars who describe themselves as nationalist, Pan-Africanist, Afrocentrist, or Black feminist (Alkalimat, 2009; Hine, 1992). The common theme among these diverse views is that scholarship about Africa or its Diaspora should adopt a unique perspective and not perpetuate the assumptions of disciplines that were motivated by racist, sexist, or Eurocentric viewpoints. The field of Africana Studies should internally generate its analytic frameworks.

Multiple theoretical alternatives to the interdisciplinary perspective have been proposed. Alternative views often cast Africana Studies as a multidisciplinary enterprise that tightly links theory to the unique conditions of Africans and the African Diaspora. Afrocentrism might be considered a leading alternative (Asante, 1983). Afrocentric theory, defined as a scholarly approach that places African history and consciousness at the forefront of analysis, has been articulated by scholars such as Molefi Asante, Ivan van Sertima, and Chiekh Anta Diop.
Asante’s approach, which has achieved prominence, focuses on the ways that African peoples have developed in relation to Europe and how they have developed their own intellectual resources. In a relatively recent lecture, Asante states Afrocentric theory as the following:

Now as an Afrocentrist I approach the construction of knowledge from the standpoint of Africans as agents in the world, actors, not simply the spectators to Europe. Since Afrocentricity constitutes a new way of examining data, a novel orientation to data, it carries with it assumptions about the current state of the African world. One assumes for example that Africans are frequently operating intellectually, philosophically, and culturally off of African terms and therefore are dislocated, detached, isolated, decentered, or disoriented. (Asante, 2000)

Asante is also well known for promoting the idea that Afrocentrism is trans-disciplinary or multi-disciplinary. A historian or economist can adopt an Afrocentric viewpoint that will determine how they evaluate their research.

Recent discussions have focused on the tensions between these competing perspectives. For example, Mark Christian (2006, 2007) defends Africana Studies because it is uniquely anchored to a philosophy based on African and African American experiences. This anchoring can act as a bulwark against scholars who work within Africana Studies but are not grounded in more Afrocentric philosophies. Christian argues that such a philosophy is an important precondition for the continuing relevance of Africana Studies. Such a perspective can serve as a basis for training scholars, certifying experts, and otherwise reinforcing the importance of the field. Asante (1990, 2006) provides additional insight in noting that the academy provides numerous obstacles in implementing Afrocentric ideas. The theories, journals, and topics in Africana Studies are often devalued. Ideas developed from Eurocentric historical experiences are privileged. One solution to this problem is to further develop Africana Studies’ distinctive contributions and focus on how Eurocentric theories are “decentered” because they do not relate to what has happened in Africa or its Diaspora (Asante, 1990). Afrocentrism as developed by Asante isn’t the only alternative to an interdisciplinary Africana Studies. In fact, scholars have
extended Afrocentric views in new ways (e.g., Mazama, 2002), or they have developed distinct views of the field as critiques or refutations of Afrocentism (Adeleke, 2009).

The range of views about Africana Studies has yielded a number of institutional identities. Some identities focus on American experiences. Many academic units adhere to the label “African-American Studies,” suggesting that their focus is regional. Other scholars develop a more global identity. There are academic units called “Black World Studies” or “Pan-African Studies.” The department at Indiana University uses the term “African American and African Diaspora Studies” to recognize these multiple historical trajectories. The term “Africana Studies” was intended to draw attention to the global nature of the African Diaspora. Following the writings of Paul Gilroy (1993), and others, scholars have argued that there is a transnational social space defined by Africa and the Atlantic slave trade. These intellectual developments have encouraged scholars to articulate a broader Africana Studies that addresses the experiences of African populations around the world.

**How Should Africana Studies be organized?**

These debates also touch on the organization of Africana Studies. Since the earliest days of the field, there have been rival organizational models. Debate has usually focused on two options. First, Africana Studies might be organized as an interdisciplinary program. In such an academic unit, it is assumed that instructors can be recruited from other disciplines within the university (Daniel, 1980; Ford, 1973; Brossard, 1984). For Africana Studies, this means drawing from various humanities and social science programs. Professors often hold joint appointments in Africana Studies and other fields.
This form of organization has numerous advantages. It is economical because faculty members already draw salaries from other units. There are also political advantages of this model. Cross-listed faculty may form a coalition within the university that may help the unit acquire resources and develop its reputation (Rojas, 2007a: 93-129). The interdisciplinary program model also signals a certain kind of intellectual commitment. By drawing faculty members from different disciplines, the interdisciplinary unit embodies the view that Africana Studies is similar to other area studies (e.g., Russian Studies) that draw faculty from different disciplines. In many institutions, an interdisciplinary framing may be relatively easy to justify.

The interdisciplinary program does have disadvantages. First, it may be the case that this organizational form suppresses scholarly identification with the field. An environment where faculty members have strong ties to other disciplines might discourage professors from developing a unique Africana Studies perspective. Second, interdisciplinary programs face the charge of redundancy. It may be argued by critics that Africana Studies might be best addressed as a special topic within other programs and there is no need for a separate unit (Cunningham, 1990; Rojas, 2007a; Small, 1999).

The other mode of academic organization is the department (Ford, 1973; Smith, 1971). In the American university system, departments are units that have their own faculty members and can determine their own curriculum and promotion standards. They are also more likely to have graduate programs and often have higher status than interdisciplinary programs. By having the power to appoint professors and internally determine the curriculum, departments are often seen as the manifestation of a discipline on campus. Sociology departments, for example, are seen as academic units that represent the broader discipline of sociology, rather than interdisciplinary units that pull together faculty from multiple scholarly areas.
As with the interdisciplinary program, there are advantages and disadvantages to this model. One important advantage is control. Department professors retain more control over hiring and curricula because most American departments usually are not governed by external oversight committees. Another advantage is that departments are more likely to have graduate programs, which encourage professors to develop a stronger sense of disciplinary identity. Once again, Afrocentrism is an important illustration of this idea. As reported by Small (1999), Africana Studies at Temple University was bolstered when it was institutionalized as a department with a doctoral program. Within the program, Afrocentric scholarship was developed. The new theory provided a justification for Africana Studies that was acceptable to both faculty and the administration.

The disadvantages are that departments may not always retain the support of other faculty within the university. Self-governance carries the risk of isolation (Frye, 1979; Rojas, 2007a). Another problem is that departments may have governance problems, especially if the department is small. Numerous studies have shown that Africana Studies units are small, which means that they do not always have the staff needed for teaching and administration (Cunningham, 1990; Rojas, 2007b). While a program may more easily acquire faculty from other programs, departments rely on their own staff. Even a small fluctuation in the number of professors within a department can lead to years of instability.

Africana Studies is institutionalized in these many forms. Africana units at well known universities include departments, such as those at Harvard and Temple, and interdisciplinary programs, such as the one at Yale. There is also great diversity in the scholarship represented by the different programs. Some academic units, such as the one at the University of Wisconsin at
Milwaukee, have adopted Africology as their professional identity to emphasize the global nature of Africana Studies.

The landscape of Africana Studies shows that the relationship between intellectual agenda and organizational form is complicated. Programs, such as the ones at Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Temple, embody the idea of the department aligned with an Africana Studies that internally generates its own analytic frameworks. The doctoral program at Yale was seen by many as an exemplar of the interdisciplinary program (Rojas, 2007a). In the present, the Yale doctoral program requires dual training in Africana Studies and an older social science or humanities discipline. The African American Studies master’s degree was expanded and merged with training in other disciplines. Michigan State University’s program is another example of a dual training model where students are required to learn the techniques of Africana Studies and a related social science or humanities discipline.

The history of Harvard’s program shows the constantly evolving relationship between identity and academic organization. The first proposals at Harvard envisioned an “Afro-American Studies” major that was clearly interdisciplinary but focused on African Americans. The program was first instituted as a combined African and African-American Studies. With different chairs, the program hired faculty with differing views. The program’s resurgence in the 1990s was based on hiring scholars with strong disciplinary reputations (Rojas, 2007a: 116-27). Thus, universities may institutionalize Africana Studies in multiple ways, which are subject to further change and combination with other disciplines.

**Institutional Context and Disciplinary Identity**
The debates over the meaning of Africana Studies and its institutionalization draw attention to an important issue: how are the attitudes of individual scholars affected by their programs and the university? This question can be broken down into three related issues. First, a scholar might be affected by the university where they work. Universities may selectively attract scholars with particular views. Academic organizations reinforce certain views and affect people after they begin working there. Second, a scholar’s views may be affected by their affiliations with other disciplines. This may occur through doctoral training or through joint appointment with other departments. Third, the short term conditions within a program may affect how people view their discipline. When an academic program is stable, scholars may not feel the need to emphasize what is unique about their field. If an academic program is secure, then scholars may cede more to related fields. The rest of this section develops explains these hypotheses in more detail.

Organizational mission: The American university system contains organizations with differing goals (Clark, 1982). Some universities emphasize research. Promotion is based on scholarly productivity and impact within one’s field. Departments within research universities may offer doctoral degree programs that provide research training (Veysey, 1970). That is not the only model. Other institutions focus on teaching. In these institutions, scholars are also expected to produce research, but there is also a high expectation of teaching (Braxton & Nordvall, 1985). Professors in these institutions have more teaching obligations and it is expected that they have close contact with students. Of course, the research intensive institution and the teaching college represent ideal types. Many institutions combine missions or mix teaching and research obligations. The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education lists over twenty different types of colleges based on what they teach and how much they focus on research (Carnegie Foundation, 2005).
These missions are also shaped by public service. Another defining feature of a college or university is whether they are state supported. Since the beginning of American higher education, both local and state governments have established colleges. The modern public college is designed to be accessible. Public universities often have lower tuition, have larger enrollments, and have many more branches than their private counterparts.

Differences in research missions and public service speak to the issue of organizational culture. As defined by management scholars, “organizational culture” denotes norms, values, and beliefs of the people working within an organization (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985). Thus, organizational culture of a university might be reflected by what is considered valuable research or teaching. Scholars in a research university might be encouraged to focus on research in highly prestigious outlets instead of doing community service. In contrast, a scholar in an institution with a teaching mission might be rewarded for community service and their teaching might involve helping students work in local service organizations.

University missions can affect Africana scholars and their attitudes toward the field. Research universities house departments that train the majority of practitioners in various disciplines. They also sponsor many leading journals in established disciplines. Thus, one might expect Africana Studies professors to be drawn toward the older academic disciplines. Similarly, one might expect that publicly owned universities to have an effect as well. Serving the public, scholars in state supported schools might view a distinct Africana Studies as a service to African American students. These arguments can be summarized in the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Africana scholars in research universities are less likely to see Africana Studies as distinct than other scholars.

Hypothesis 2: Africana scholars in public institutions are more likely to see Africana Studies as distinct than scholars in private institutions.
Competing Affiliations: In addition to the influence of their college or university, a scholar may have their own disciplinary affiliations. Prior research shows that Africana Studies maintains connections with many different disciplines. A majority of Africana Studies professors hold doctorates in fields other than Africana studies. Only 6% of Africana Studies professors have doctoral degrees in that field (Rojas, 2009a). Instead, most doctoral degree holders studied fields like history, English, sociology, and psychology.

Furthermore, there is substantial variation in how disciplines relate to Africana Studies. Some fields would appear to be very friendly to the ideas found within Africana Studies. For example, W.E.B. DuBois considered himself to be a historian and sociologist, and his writings have been highly influential not only in Africana Studies but also in the older disciplines (e.g., Lewis, 1994; Rabaka, 2006). Other seminal writings on African American communities, such as St. Clair Drake’s and Horace Cayton’s Black Metropolis (1993), were rooted in survey research and other social science tools. Thus, it might be expected that persons trained in social science fields would be less likely to see Africana Studies as a distinct area.

In contrast, some disciplines have had a difficult time assimilating African or African American communities as a legitimate object of study. Perhaps the most instructive example is the debate in the 1980s and 1990s over multiculturalism in the humanities (e.g. Bryson, 2005; Yamane, 2002). Vastly simplifying, the debate over multiculturalism in literature departments was over the relative merit of literary works produced by non-Europeans. Multiculturalists tended to argue that the literary canon was narrow and should be expanded. Critics argued that the call to include non-European literature was misguided or that multiculturalists inflated the importance of non-European literature. The purpose here is not to adjudicate this dispute, but to point out that literary study, up until the 1970s or so, was defined as the study of canonical
European and American texts, and it was a great struggle to have African American literature accepted as a standard topic with the academy.

These examples suggest that disciplines have different effects on scholarly attitudes. If a discipline has always viewed the African American community as a legitimate topic of study, then doctoral training in that field should decrease the view that Africana Studies is distinct. If a scholar trained in a field where African American topics were excluded, they might be more likely to view Africana Studies as offering something truly unique.

Disciplinary affiliations can also be found in a scholar’s relationship to non-Africana Studies units in the university. As noted above, Africana Studies units are often assemblages of professors who hold appointments in other departments or programs. Previous research has found that over 60% of Africana Studies professors hold joint appointments (Rojas, 2007a). These appointments are valuable for many reasons. As programs with limited budgets, Africana Studies programs may be able to hire more faculty by sharing salaries with other programs. Joint programs may also signal that Africana Studies is viewed as well integrated with other disciplines and these connections may bolster the program’s political position within the university (Cunningham, 1990; Small, 1999).

Joint appointments may suppress the view that Africana Studies is a distinct discipline through multiple mechanisms. First, faculty members may split their teaching and service, which decreases face to face contact with the Africana Studies community on campus. Second, faculty members may be encouraged to publish in non-Africana Studies journals to maintain their scholar reputation. Working in another discipline’s framework may decrease the scholar’s attachment to Africana Studies. Third, scholars may self-select into joint appointments. Those who don’t feel strongly about Africana Studies unique identity may be more likely to accept joint
appointments. Thus, one may suspect that any cross-discipline affiliation would suppress the inclination to see Africana Studies as distinct. These disciplinary affiliations can occur in different ways:

Hypothesis 3: An Africana Studies scholar is less likely to see Africana Studies as distinct if they hold a doctoral degree in the social sciences.

Hypothesis 4: An Africana Studies scholar is less likely to see Africana Studies as distinct if they hold a joint appointment in a field other than Africana Studies.

Hypothesis 5: An Africana Studies scholar is less likely to see Africana Studies as distinct if they teach Africana Studies in a non-Africana Studies unit.

Hypothesis 6: An Africana Studies scholar is less likely to see Africana Studies as distinct if they teach in an interdisciplinary program.

Hypothesis 7: An Africana Studies scholar is less likely to see Africana Studies as distinct if they teach in a unit that combines African American Studies with other fields such as African Studies or American Studies.

*Group Threat:* The discussion has so far focused on disciplinary affiliations and organizational missions, but scholars may also be affected by the stability of their work unit. Scholars can emphasize the distinctiveness of their work if they perceive their position to be unstable. This hypothesis is drawn from an idea in social psychology known as the group threat hypothesis (e.g., Coser, 1964). It has been argued by sociologists and psychologists that group threats increase an individual’s identification with the group. This theory is motivated by the observation that social conflict is often followed by more vocal and visible affirmations of group identity. When nations are attacked, for example, there are almost always strong nationalist outpourings.

Heightened social solidarity during conflict has been found in contexts as diverse as nationalism, ethnic groups, schools, and corporations. A 2006 meta-analysis by Riek, Mania, and Gaertner (2006) examines different types of intergroup threat and how that might lead to
negative outgroup attitudes. They note that groups can be threatened directly, though competition over resources or physical conflict. Intergroup threats can also have symbolic and identity based components. Intergroup conflict creates negative stereotypes about their own group, or challenge the distinctiveness of group members. In response, group members may develop negative stereotypes about outgroup members or reinforce what they believe to be distinctive about themselves. Riek, Mania, and Gaertner then review nearly 200 published studies of intergroup threat and does find that it is correlated with negative outgroup view.

There are academic counterparts to each of these issues. Africana Studies is an academic field that has self-perceptions and beliefs about out-group members. These attitudes may be heightened or suppressed in various ways. There may be objective group threats in the form of declining resources in the university. Core audiences within the university, such as African American students, may choose not to enroll in the Africana Studies program, which might lead to financial consequences. Struggles over enrollments might be interpreted as a kind of inter-discipline conflict within a university. There might also be group threat in terms of the overall health of an academic program. An Africana Studies program may be losing faculty members, have conflicts with administrators, or have a flagging reputation. These might lead to a situation where the Africana faculty members believe that the program is in decline.

These different threats to an academic program might encourage Africana Studies faculty members to emphasize what is unique about their field. There are case studies that support this point of view. Small’s (1999) article on Africana Studies departments suggests that Afrocentrism was developed to bolster the reputation of the Temple University program. Similarly, one might conjecture that Africana Studies professors would focus on their distinctiveness when
enrollments are low, as a way to appeal to students and faculty. This arguments can be summarized with the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 8: An Africana Studies professor is more likely to see Africana Studies as distinct if they believe their department or program to be in decline.

Hypothesis 9: An Africana Studies professor is more likely to see Africana Studies as distinct when enrollments in the major are low.

It might also be conjectured that the demography of the university itself may matter. For example, it has been argued that Black Studies is particularly relevant to institutions that are predominantly White (Assensoh, 2003). Thus, low Black enrollments in the university might encourage faculty members to develop the idea that Africana Studies is distinct.

Hypothesis 10: An Africana Studies professor is more likely to see Africana Studies when the proportion of African American Students in the university is low.

Data and Statistical Models

Research Method: The hypotheses are tested with data on how African Studies professors view their field. I used the Survey of Issues in Africana Studies, a 2005 survey asking professors about their personal characteristics and attitudes toward their profession. This survey was conducted by the Indiana University Center for Survey Research. Invitations to participate were sent to every tenured or tenure-track professor in a degree-granting Africana Studies program. A list of degree-granting programs was compiled from various editions of the Index of College Majors and other reference books. Faculty rosters were assembled from Web sites and, if necessary, through contacts with department secretaries. 198 professors agreed to participate. 145 professors provided enough data to be included in this analysis. Comparison of respondents
and non-respondents shows that there are no statistically significant differences between the sampled population and the broader population of African American Studies professors, except that professors in recently created programs are slightly more likely to respond to the survey (Rojas 2007: 234-36). Information on the university where the respondent teachers was obtained from the Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS). This data base, operated by the National Center for Education Statistics, contains data on college enrollments and degree data for all accredited institutions of higher education.

**Dependent Variable:** The Survey asked respondents if they believed that Africana Studies possessed its own distinct methods. I interpret this as an indicator of whether the respondent views Africana Studies as a field that is distinct from others. A respondent who believes that there is not a distinct research method, or analytic strategy, for the field would presumably think that its tools are those of some previously existing discipline. This would be one indicator of whether the respondent believes that Africana Studies possesses a sufficiently distinct identity from other disciplines. Respondents indicated their views on a five step scale from “strongly agree to strongly disagree.” Respondents who failed to answer that question or who answered “don’t know” were not included in the analysis.

**Independent Variables:** Data on the universities that employ Africana Studies professors are drawn from IPEDS. Variables such as public ownership, research emphasis, enrollments in the Africana Studies major, and African American enrollments are drawn from that data set. Variables about the professor’s appointment, affiliations with other departments, age, gender, race, and beliefs about the stability of the program are drawn from the Survey of Issues in Africana Studies. Data on the field of the professor’s doctoral degree (if any) are drawn from Dissertation Abstracts International.
Control Variables: Age, gender, and ethnicity were included as controls in the model. These were included to account for the fact that biography and social status may also affect how scholars perceive the distinctiveness of their field. Table 1 reports the summary statistics for the variables used in the analysis. Table 1 only reports data for the complete cases that were used in the final analysis (N=145).

[Table 1 about here.]

Statistical Techniques: Respondents were given a scale (e.g., strongly agree to strongly disagree) so hypotheses were tested using ordered logistic regression (Greene 1997: 926–931), where $p_i$ denotes the cumulative probability of moving from one state (e.g., “agree”) to the next state (e.g., “strongly agree”).

Limitation of the Study: This study has limitations that are important to mention. By surveying professors, I have selected the most institutionalized portion of the Africana Studies population. Numerous Africana Studies courses are taught by adjunct instructors, and they may systematically differ from their tenure-track counterparts. Also, many professors or independent scholars may identify with Black Studies but work in other programs such as history or literary criticism. An important aspect of Black Studies is that while it has had a limited institutionalization, the field has influenced other disciplines. Another limitation is that cross-sectional analyses do not distinguish between selection and treatment effects. For example, it may be the case that joint appointments are negatively correlated with disciplinary beliefs because people who do not identify themselves with Africana Studies are more likely to ask for joint appointments (i.e., people select themselves). However, it may also be the case that having
a joint appointment decreases one’s interest in Africana Studies (i.e., a treatment effect). Regardless, the correlation should still be present in the data. Further research can use longitudinal data to distinguish treatment and selection and different sampling frames can be used to survey Africana Studies scholars who are not tenure-track professors.

**Model Estimates and Main Findings**

Table 2 reports the model with all the independent variables. The results are straightforward. Hypotheses about declining resources, black enrollments, program identity (i.e., whether Africana Studies is bundled with other curricula), and teaching outside the Africana Studies programs are not supported the analysis at the $\alpha=.10$ level. However, there are a number of notable positive findings. First, there is support for hypothesis 9. The number of degrees awarded in Africana Studies has a negative effect at the $\alpha = .10$ significance level. The more popular the degree within the respondent’s university, the less likely it is that the respondent believes that Africana Studies has its own methods. This supports the idea that when an academic program is popular there is less need to justify the distinctiveness of the field it represents. The magnitude of the effect is notable. Each additional major decreases the log-odds by -.06, or shrinks the odds by about 6.0%.

[Table 2 about here]

Another important finding is that there is a negative effect of having an appointment in multiple programs (Hypothesis 4). It is important to note that this analysis can’t distinguish
between treatment and selection effects. However, the effect is important because it is another indicator of how interdisciplinary academic organization, the joint appointment, is associated with opinions within the Africana Studies field. The effect is large. An appointment in multiple programs corresponds to multiplying the odds by 43% - an enormous reduction. Table 1 shows that joint appointments are very common within Africana Studies, 70% of the sample, which indicates the extent that joint appointments create a professoriate who do not view the field as having its own methods.

The analysis also shows that university mission and a professor’s race have significant effects. Black respondents were more likely to claim that Africana Studies has distinct methods and those in research universities were less likely to make the claim. In each case, the result is significant at the $\alpha = .05$ level. Each of these findings are intuitive. Black respondents are more likely to have a close identification with the field. Respondents in research universities are more likely to de-emphasize the distinctiveness of Africana Studies possibly due to the fact that these institutions may have multiple programs that already carry on research on the African American community.

**Discussion**

The effect of institutions on disciplinary attitudes is of great practical significance. Earlier in this article, I described the debates over how Africana Studies should be organized. In that debate, some writers argued that certain kinds of academic organization should be promoted because it signaled an adherence to a specific intellectual model for Africana Studies (Ford, 1973; Brossard, 1984; Rojas, 2007a). Interdisciplinary programs show alignment with the older
disciplines, while departments indicate a more autonomous position. The evidence in this paper shows that the beliefs of professors are not correlated with their employment in either type of program. Instead, the belief in Africana Studies’ distinct methods correlates with the professor’s appointment in other non-Africana departments. This type of appointment may be found in both programs and departments.

It has been argued before that joint appointments are helpful to Africana Studies because they draw on the faculty who are present in the university (Rojas, 2007a). Case studies indicate that there is also a political benefit (Small, 1999). Joint appointments help build a coalition behind Africana Studies programs. However, the survey evidence suggests that there is a serious cost. Joint appointments fill programs with scholars who have strong allegiances to other disciplines and academic units. The overall effect is to shift opinion within Africana Studies towards an interdisciplinary position rather than Afrocentric perspective.

It is also important to ask about the impact of the research university. Prior research has found that that Africana Studies programs are much more likely to be found in research universities than in other types of institutions. About half of degree granting Africana Studies programs are to be found in research universities, even though research universities only comprise 10% of four year degree granting institutions (Rojas, 2006). Placement within research universities has numerous advantages. Generally speaking, research institutions are more visible and have more resources. They also attract very strong scholars and students.

The trade-off is that research universities have a culture that discourages scholars from emphasizing the distinct nature of Africana Studies. Earlier, I suggested a number of explanations. For example, research universities tend to be centers for research in the core social science and humanities disciplines. Thus, faculty members might be encouraged to align
themselves with these disciplines rather than a newer interdisciplinary field like Africana Studies. The data can’t directly test that hypothesis, but they can be used to eliminate competing hypotheses. For example, the suppressing effects of the research university might be attributed to having professors with joint appointments. Since the model in Table 2 already includes that variable and the research university effect remains, this hypothesis can be rejected. On similar grounds, one can reject the hypotheses that research university instructors are less likely to view Africana Studies as distinct because they are more (or less) likely to be Black or female. The research university effects even when accounting for professorial demography.

Should there be any attempts to mitigate the suppressing effects of the research university? A full discussion is beyond the scope of this article, but a few points can be made. It should be noted that the research university is capable of supporting disciplines with strong boundaries (e.g., economics, physics) and those with porous boundaries (e.g., information science, American Studies). There is not one single, preferred disciplinary position within the research university.

The issue is how to shift Africana Studies to a state where the typical practitioner has a stronger identification with the field and increase Africana Studies’ reputation in the academy. One strategy for enabling this transformation is the doctoral program, which has already seen limited implementation. Presumably, one would expect graduates of Africana Studies programs to be employed in Africana Studies programs and not require or demand joint-appointments. These graduates would also be focused on the traditional institutions of the Africana Studies field, like the National Council for Black Studies, instead of the professional associations of older disciplines. Africana Studies doctoral degree holders would shift
With a few notable exceptions (e.g., Evans, 2007; Bankole, 2006), there has been little research on Africana Studies doctoral program graduates and their placement in research universities. It is known that there are at least ten Africana doctoral programs and they have collectively produced a small fraction (6.4%) of the professors who teach in Africana Studies units (Rojas, 2007a: 186). Other research shows that doctoral program faculty members have vastly different orientations towards the field as indicated by their publication records (Rojas, 2008). Ivy League professors teaching in Africana Studies doctoral programs are less likely than others to have published in core Africana Studies outlets such as The Journal of Black Studies and The Western Journal of Black Studies. The same study found that Ivy League professors are more likely to publish in core discipline journals such as the American Journal of Sociology or the American Political Science Review. This suggests that Ivy League professors rely on older disciplines for prestige, while other professors are more willing to establish their reputation in forums associated with Africana Studies and its history of activism. This preference may be due to elitism, or the fact that Ivy League professors tend to be uncommitted joint appointments from other programs. Professors in highly competitive private research universities are more likely to be recruited from disciplines rather than new interdisciplinary areas. These findings suggest that there are limits to using doctoral programs as the seeds of internally generated ideas within Africana Studies.

A notable empirical finding in this study is that enrollment in the Africana Studies major decreases the belief that Africana Studies has distinct methods. From the perspective of group threat theory, this is straightforward to explain. High enrollments mean that there are ample resources and that students are attracted to the major. Therefore, Africana Studies professors may cede more to other disciplines. The policy implications of this finding are unclear. A negative
outcome (low enrollments) is correlated with what might be viewed as a positive social resource (solidarity within the discipline). In general, Africana Studies majors are few. It has been estimated that less than 1% of all degrees awarded to African Americans are in Africana Studies (see Rooks 2006 for a discussion). There has been ample discussion about what can be done. For example, it has been argued that African American students are extremely sensitive to the economic consequences of choosing a college major (Wilson, 2005; Okafor, 2007). In the context of this essay, it might be asked: how can enrollments be increased while maintaining the relevance and urgency of the field? One approach might be to market Africana Studies as a field with a more clearly defined intellectual mission rather than another type of area studies. Once again, there is little research on this topic, but the existing research on students in Black Studies courses does suggest that students are not attracted to the courses for abstract intellectual reasons. Rojas and Shaffer (2009) present survey evidence indicating that students are not interested in broad disciplinary issues, such as multiculturalism, nor do a majority believe that Africana courses will bring them jobs. Rather, they see the courses as speaking to a topic they care about, African American experiences, and they provide academic support in the university.

**Conclusion**

This paper is motivated by a simple fact: Africana Studies is part of the academic system. Therefore, one would expect that academic institutions should affect how Africana Studies professors view their field. It was hypothesized that institutions affect professors’ opinions through organizational culture, affiliations with non-Africana Studies disciplines, and the stability of particular Africana Studies programs. The empirical analysis showed that having a
joint appointment in another department or program, high Africana Studies major enrollments, and employment in a research university decreases the odds that a professor believes that Africana Studies has its own distinct methods. These findings suggest that institutions can influence professors in ways that decrease the demand for a distinct Africana Studies field.

Future research on the Africana Studies professoriate might focus on the following issues. First, are graduates of Africana Studies doctoral programs different than other professors? I suggested at multiple points that doctoral programs may be the institutional tool for increasing solidarity within the field. There is almost no research on the scholars who have graduated from the doctoral programs at Temple University, the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and other long standing doctoral programs. It is not known how many graduates there are or what they teach or where they teach, though there is some limited evidence on the topics of their dissertations (Bankole, 2006). Thus, if one is to judge if Africana Studies doctoral programs do indeed produce scholars who work from “inside” the field, more work must be done.

Second, research can focus on the impact of new scholarly agendas. As noted above, an important development in Africana Studies is the Diaspora perspective. According to that point of view, scholars should reframe African American studies as part of a larger project that studies the community created by the transatlantic slave trade. This is not the only scholarly agenda that is changing Africana Studies. Black feminists have sought to understand the role that gender plays in various African or African American communities. It may be possible that these scholarly traditions may provide the infrastructure needed to promote disciplinary identity within the field.

References


Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. (2005). *Basic Description*. 


### Tables

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for complete cases used in analysis  
(N=145)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Believes that Africana Studies Has Its Own Methods&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Survey of Issues in Africana Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holds Social Science Doctoral Degree</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dissertation Abstracts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Appointment in Africana Studies and Other Field</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Survey of Issues in Africana Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaches Africana Studies in Another Unit&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Survey of Issues in Africana Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaches in a Non-Departmental Program</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Survey of Issues in Africana Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program that Combines Africana Studies with other Topics</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Survey of Issues in Africana Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believes Program is in Decline&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Integrates Postsecondary Education Data System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of University Enrollments that are Black/African American&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>Integrates Postsecondary Education Data System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Degrees Awarded in Africana Studies Program</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>5.84</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Survey of Issues in Africana Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Respondent</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Survey of Issues in Africana Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent's Age</td>
<td>49.31</td>
<td>11.35</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Survey of Issues in Africana Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Respondent</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Survey of Issues in Africana Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent Works in Public University</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>University Website Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent Works in Research University&lt;sup&gt;5&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Survey of Issues in Africana Studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Respondents were asked to indicate level of agreement from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5).  
2 Respondents were asked specifically if they had taught Africana Studies courses, such as Introduction to African American Studies, in other units. In this analysis, the variables is coded as 1 if they had taught any course in another unit.  
3 Respondents were asked if they thought that their program or department had problems acquiring funds or suffered from declining enrollments. An affirmative answer to either question was coded as 1 in this analysis.  
4 This proportion was computed by dividing the number of self-reported African American students by the total enrollment of the university at all levels.  
5 In this analysis, a university is a research university if it is “research intensive” or “research extensive” in the current Carnegie Classification. This, approximately, corresponds to the older “Research 1” and “Research 2” categories.
Table 2. Model of Institutions Effects on Belief that Africana Studies Has its Own Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coef.</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>z-score</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizational Mission</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent Works in Research University</td>
<td>-0.83</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>-2.18</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent Works in Public University</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competing Affiliations</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holds Social Science Doctoral Degree</td>
<td>-0.48</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>-1.34</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Appointment in Africana Studies and Other Field</td>
<td>-0.87</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>-2.1</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaches Africana Studies in Another Unit</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaches in a Non-Departmental Program</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Combines Africana Studies with other Topics</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group Threat</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believes Program is in Decline</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Degrees Awarded in Africana Studies Program</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-1.72</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of University Enrollments that are Black/African American</td>
<td>-1.49</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>-1.35</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Respondent</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent's Age</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Respondent</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut point 1</td>
<td>-3.59</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut point 2</td>
<td>-2.60</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut point 3</td>
<td>-2.05</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut point 4</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>145</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psuedo-R²</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>-176.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\chi^2$</td>
<td>25.72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>