



**BlackEconomics.org®**

### **“Work Awaits Black Studies Programs”**

The first US “Black Studies” program appeared in 1968.<sup>1</sup> Today, Black Studies programs serve over 200 college and university campuses across the country.<sup>2</sup> Black Studies experts certainly have their perspective on original intents and purposes of these programs and their appropriate evolution. However, from an economic perspective and with an aim to marshal all academic disciplines to address the “Black American problem,” the following thoughts come to mind.<sup>3</sup>

As you know, Black Studies programs are typically multidisciplinary, and entail consideration of, but may not be limited to, the following topics: History, literature, culture, language, the Black Diaspora, religion, sociology, political science, law, art, music, and dance. Many early Black Studies programs were established on this basis, and some later programs followed suit. Some Black Studies programs have also factored in a “town and gown” relationship in order to leverage the rich resources inherently available in Black areas of influence that are in close geographic proximity to campuses. More recently developed Black Studies programs have factored in health (physical and mental), demography, the environment, migration, and entrepreneurship as important topics.

This takes us to our first concern about Black Studies programs. But before considering that concern, it is important to note that we performed a virtual and cursory inspection of 76 Black Studies programs.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, we considered these programs’ faculties (Core, Affiliated,

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<sup>1</sup> These programs are known variously as Africana Studies, African American Studies, African and African American Studies, African and Diaspora Studies, Afro-American Studies, Black Studies, Pan African Studies, etc.

<sup>2</sup> A seemingly comprehensive list of US college and university Black Studies programs appears on the College Express Internet website; <https://www.collegexpress.com/lists/list/four-year-colleges-with-african-black-studies-programs/2884/> (Retrieved April 10, 2021). However, this list includes Canadian programs, and it lists programs on a campus-by-campus basis (232 such programs), not solely by college or university. On the other hand, the CollegeVine Internet website provides a November 2020 list of US colleges and universities that have Black Studies programs (162 such programs); <https://blog.collegevine.com/us-colleges-with-black-studies-major/> (Retrieved April 10, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> We discuss a potential future vision/purpose for Black Studies programs below. That vision/purpose assumes that it is possible to fully define, explore, describe, and analyze the “Black American problem”—as nebulous as it may appear today.

<sup>4</sup> We visited the home and faculty pages of these 76 programs. This was a selected, non-random, sample of the 162 colleges and universities with Black Studies programs that are listed on the CollegeVine Internet website.

Adjunct, Visiting, Emeritus, etc.). As permitted by the Internet, we determined the ethnic composition and scholarly expertise of these faculties.<sup>5</sup>

Now to the first concern. Arguably, one of the most important aspects (an essential aspect) of Black American life is economics. Consequently, it is disturbing that so few Black Studies programs feature as a core topic the “Economics of Black America.” Our virtual inspection of 76 Black Studies programs—our inspection produced a rough count—identified only 11 programs that included a Ph.D. economist on the faculty. Given the importance of economics to Black America, it is somewhat surprising that Black Studies is taught without a considerable emphasis on economics. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that Black Studies programs will entertain adding economists to faculties in the period ahead. If not as core faculty members, then certainly in affiliated roles. If these new economists happen to be Black, then this will help ameliorate the gross under-representation of Black economists in economics departments on college and university campuses across the country today.

Our second concern arises from the seeming fragmented nature of Black Studies programs. Given the multidisciplinary design of the programs, this concern is understandable. However, there is no better positioned department or program on college and university campuses than Black Studies programs to design a comprehensive and multifaceted plan/strategy for resolving the “Black American problem.” It may be somewhat unrealistic to expect the students and faculty of a lone, small Black Studies program to develop an overarching and strategic plan for the resolution of all of Black America’s problems. However, what certainly seems feasible is that students and faculties of a consortium or coalition of Black Studies programs would seek to fill this gap. Clearly, a post Covid-19 world with the intensified use of virtual connectivity should facilitate efforts to achieve this objective.

As we move deeper into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we hope that Black Studies programs will make secondary the existing paradigm of just providing educations that define, explore, describe, and analyze Black America and the Black Diaspora. Rather, we look forward to the transformation of Black Studies programs into innovative laboratories that leverage their multidisciplinary to identify Black America’s future requirements and to prescribe comprehensive, detailed, and dynamic solutions to the “Black American problem.”

Black America is running out of time and needs answers now! Black Studies programs should develop a laser-like focus on providing those answers as soon as possible.

B.B. Robinson  
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<sup>5</sup> We made a rough count of the number of total faculty members that were associated with the programs; we made a rough count of the number of faculty members who were phenotypically Black based on available photograph—to the extent that photographs were available; and we observed, as available, information about the disciplines in which the faculty members earned their doctoral degrees, their areas of interest, and courses taught. Our rough findings on the racial makeup of the 76 programs that we inspected are that: On average (mean), 22 total faculty members are associated with the programs, 13 are identified as Black, while the remaining 9 are non-Black. Given an absence of photographs for certain faculty members, our count of Black faculty members should be viewed as understated. These data are available upon request from **BlackEconomics.org** ([BlackEconomics@BlackEconomics.org](mailto:BlackEconomics@BlackEconomics.org)).