

Application for Mildred Dahne Award Department of African American Studies (AAS)

Our department is proud to apply for the 2020-21 Mildred Dahne Award. We contribute to the TCNJ community in a number of ways, but most significantly through excellence in teaching, scholarship, and national recognition.

2020 marked the 50th anniversary of African American Studies at TCNJ. This history is remarkable for a number of reasons but specifically because the first Black Studies program at a traditionally white serving institution was founded at San Francisco State University in 1968 and in 1969 Black Studies was proposed at TCNJ. A quick search of the Signal Archives shows that TCNJ's Faculty Senate approved a consideration of both a "black room...open to all members of the campus community who are interested in developing their awareness of the black experience" and a minor in Black studies at a December 1969 meeting (Signal 12/11/1969). By October 21, 1970, over 40 Black students marched to Green Hall, demanding their choice for director of Black Studies to be chosen. (Signal 10/22/1970). This history demonstrates that TCNJ was at the start of the black studies movement. Now we are at another pivotal point in Black Studies as we reckon with the national Black Lives Matter movement and anti-black racism initiatives at TCNJ.

Despite being the smallest department in HSS, in the last five years we have continually increased the number of students declaring the major. We also had two faculty tenured at the associate level and we partnered with the School of Education to offer a double major in Urban Education and Special Education. In partnership with The Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies department we helped to create a minor in Social Justice. Our department consists of five individuals, Dr. Piper Kendrix Williams, Dr. Winnie Brown-Glaude, Dr. Zakiya R. Adair, Dr. Leigh-Anne Francis and Professor Michael Mitchell who is a visiting Assistant Professor this academic year and will be a full tenure-track Assistant Professor of AAS and CRIM beginning in the fall 2022. We have published scholarship in selective and prestigious peer reviewed outlets and this scholarship has received national recognition. Moreover, our faculty truly embody the teacher-scholar model.

I. Excellence in Teaching and/or support of teaching

Excellence and innovation in teaching is the bedrock of our department, which consists of a passionate, caring and interdisciplinary faculty. The AAS department offers a wide range of courses that include (but are not limited to) introductory courses, engaging electives, research courses and senior capstone seminars. Our courses serve the AAS major, AAS minor, Social Justice minor and Liberal Learning. Our curriculum is central in supporting TCNJ's commitment to diversity, inclusion and excellence. Our commitment to excellence was evidenced in 2018 when one of our professors, Dr. Leigh-Anne Francis, won the Outstanding Course Award for her FSP course on Race, Crime, and Prisons in US History. Our Commitment to excellence in teaching was even more evident when we transitioned to an online format during the coronavirus pandemic. Our faculty rose to the challenge, completed emergency online training, and employed compassionate and caring pedagogical techniques to support our students' academic success and psycho-emotional well-being.

Anonymous student evaluations consistently rate our faculty favorably. During the last three academic years, the "instructor average" for tenure-line faculty has been 4.5 and higher on a 5-point scale (for courses in which 50% or more of the students completed evaluations). The "course" score averaged 4.6 for these courses. Student comments on evaluations reflect the numeric scores and highlight the AAS faculty's caring approach and passion for their subjects. There is a consistent theme in all of the comments: all our faculty and/or their courses have been identified as "one of the best," a "favorite" or "life changing." This point cannot be overstated as many students take AAS courses, which center critical conversations about race and its many intersections, primarily to fulfill Liberal Learning requirements and often approach our courses with skepticism. After taking our courses, however, many come away transformed. A dramatic example of this transformative student experience occurred this year. The Lucas Brothers, TCNJ alumni and twin comedians wrote the Oscar nominated film *Judas and the Black Messiah* which is based on Fred Hampton, a leader in the Black Panther Party, and the Black FBI Informant who reported on him. In multiple press interviews, the brothers recalled that they initially knew nothing about Fred Hampton until they encountered him in an AAS history course at TCNJ. What this experience demonstrates is that AAS not only educates students about U.S. history, but we also educate students to go on to change the world. Other student comments are worth noting:

- Associate Professor, (AAS and WGSS), Dr. Zakiya R. Adair's students rave about her, and often take more than one class with her. In AAS 375/WGS 365/ Black Feminist Thought (Fall 2020), students focused in on the ways she was able to offer an excellent educational experience: "**Dr. Adair is one of the best professors** this school has to offer...Dr. Adair's readings and lectures helped immensely in explaining...some of the core concepts." Students also praised Dr. Adair's ability to be compassionate and flexible through the ongoing challenges of 2020 due to the

two pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism. The following student comments are representative: “She tries really hard to make sure that all her students are mentally and emotionally well during the pandemic and is extremely understanding” and “I really was appreciative of the fact that you made the course flexible with the current situation but still engaged us throughout.”

- Professor (AAS and Sociology and Anthropology), Dr. Winnifred Brown-Glaude’s students speak of her pedagogical skills. In AAS 280-01, *Women of African Descent in a Global Perspective* (Fall 2019), students can’t hide their appreciation of her and her class: “Professor you are AMAZING!!! **You are one of the best that I have had here at TCNJ.** You constantly reinforce material week to week and I could not live without that. You are constantly engaging and your notes on the PPT really solidify everything for me and allow me to pull out the important pieces of the works we read. Keep it up! This was an outstanding class.” Another student acknowledges how important taking this AAS class was to them: “Dr. Brown-Glaude is very passionate, engaging, and encourages students to share their viewpoints. Her classroom is comfortable and the discussions were excellent. As a graduating senior, I can honestly say **she is the best professor I’ve had so far at TCNJ.**”
- Associate Professor (AAS and WGSS), Dr. Leigh-Anne Francis’s course evaluations illustrate the reasons she was selected to receive the First Seminar Program’s *Outstanding Course Award*. Her students offered praise and gratitude for her teaching, passion and commitment. In AAS 470: *Advanced Special Topics* (Spring 2020), students’ comments provide context for the high scores she received: “Dr. Francis runs this course from her heart. She works enormously hard to teach content that would be difficult for anyone, much less someone who has experienced and is part of the communities whose oppression she teaches about.” Students also affirm the centrality of this AAS course to the entire educational experience at TCNJ: “**Dr. Francis has been a life-changing professor for me**, without being dramatic. I had my WGS 200 course with her and I knew I had to take another course with her at least once...Dr. Francis has been one of the people who has made this dream a reality.”
- Visiting Assistant Professor (AAS and Criminology), Michael Mitchell’s students were immediately impressed with him. In AAS 150: *Introduction to Social Justice* (Fall 2020), which is an elective in the AAS major and a required course for the Social Justice minor, students praised Professor Mitchell’s innovative pedagogical practices which weave the personal, political and intellectual: “**This has been by far my favorite class ever!** Professor Mitchell shares personal life experiences which I feel helped make me and my classmates more understanding of the topics covered in class and willing to share our own personal experiences...I felt very comfortable, safe, and respected during class and the class material was very interesting to digest. **10/10 !**” Professor Mitchell engaged students while also challenging them: “I really like how you challenged the white students especially to think about their privileges and to kind of be put on the spot and think a little.”
- Chair and Associate Professor of AAS, jointly appointed in English, Dr. Piper Kendrix Williams’s students gave AAS 499 from Spring 2019 and Spring 2020 stellar ratings. Student comments reveal why: “**This was one of the greatest learning experiences I’ve had in my life**, the information I will take away from this course is so important and content I am disappointed I didn’t get earlier than now but I will carry this course with me for the rest of my life.” “Dr. Williams is a massive asset to this college and to the lives of her students. TCNJ is lucky to have her and I have been lucky to take her for the past two years. She is kind, encouraging, intelligent, supportive, and genuine; these qualities and more contribute to her excellent instruction, and make her an exemplary role model. She contributed to my growth not only as a student, but as a whole person.”

As instructors we are proud of our interdisciplinary scholarship and our primary research. Our teaching and research is symbiotic. In our seminars (AAS 470, 494, 495 and 499) students learn how to use and apply multidisciplinary research methodologies. Our courses teach students to understand and analyze the ways in which diverse identities and contexts intersect. In addition, many of the courses at the 300 level are specialized, reflecting the instructor’s expertise and consistently expanding research interests. AAS faculty truly embody the Teacher-Scholar model. We have also utilized our affiliated faculty in new and exciting ways by inviting them to teach courses that reflect their professional areas of expertise.

A sample of the 300 level courses that full time and affiliated faculty have offered over the past 3 years include:

AAS 321 - RACE, GENDER, AND THE NEWS
AAS 338 - AFRICAN LITERATURE
AAS 351 - ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL AFRICA
AAS 353 - ADVANCED CRIMINOLOGY: RACE & CRIME

AAS 376 - AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S HISTORY
 AAS 362 - HISTORY OF BLACK LIVES MATTER: INTERSECTIONAL ANTI-RACISM & VIOLENCE STUDIES
 AAS 373 - SLAVERY AND BLACK WOMANHOOD
 AAS 375 - BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT
 AAS 377 - AFRICAN-AMERICAN LITERATURE TO 1920
 AAS 378 - AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE 1920-1980

We place a premium on Faculty/Student collaboration. In summer 2020, Dr. Piper K Williams and her student, Kameryn Richardson (International Studies Major, Spanish and AAS minors, and honors), participated in MUSE (Mentored Undergraduate Summer Experience). Their project, “Black Slave Girls and Women Fight for and Claim their (Afro)future,” was accepted and presented at the South Atlantic Modern Language Association conference in November 2020. In AAS 393/Independent Research in Fall 2020, Dr. Williams and Ms. Richardson continued the project, co-writing a 5000 word chapter, submitted January 15, 2021 to be considered for publication in a book on Afrofuturism. These projects provide students with an opportunity to strengthen their research, critical inquiry and writing skills. Our emphasis on interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinary and critical inquiry has contributed to a number of our students’ acceptance to Masters and doctoral programs at prestigious universities such as NYU, University of Pennsylvania, Rutgers and Brown University. Our students have also gone into applied graduate programs, including law school, medical school, public affairs, public health, and education.

Our commitment to excellence in teaching reaches beyond our majors. All our faculty are jointly appointed and active participants in interdisciplinary minors and majors in Women’s Gender and Sexuality Studies, English, Sociology, and Criminology. Our professors teach in the EOF program and serve as advisors and mentors in the Cooperman Scholars Program. Our most popular courses are: AAS 150/Intro to Social Justice, AAS 179/African American History to 1865 and AAS/African American History to 1865 to Present. We offer more than 15 electives that satisfy liberal learning requirements for gender, race, ethnicity, global or community engagement.

II. Academic Excellence by Prolific and Recognized Scholars

The academic excellence of our five faculty members is evident in their creative and scholarly publications.

- Much of these works have been nationally recognized, including the *Toni Morrison Book Club* (Wisconsin University Press, 2019), co-authored by AAS faculty Dr. Winnifred Brown-Glaude and Piper Kendrix Williams, AAS affiliated faculty, Dr. Cassandra Jackson and English Professor, Dr. Juda Bennett. The book was named a “Best Book” by the Library Journal in 2020. Reviewers of the Library Journal state, “Four thoughtful and incisive academics approach Toni Morrison’s novels as catalysts for personal and societal analysis, and, like the very best book groups, their observations are insightful, wide-ranging, and often profound. Goethe described the string quartet as like ‘listening to four rational people conversing among themselves.’ These four are sublime.” The four authors have been invited to give numerous talks on their book throughout New Jersey, these include: here at TCNJ to celebrate the book’s publication, an event that filled Mayo Concert Hall on February 5, 2020; Labyrinth Book Store in Princeton on March 5, 2020, Cincy Book Bus on July 1, 2020 as part of Melanie Moore’s traveling book bus library: *The Toni Morrison Book Club* was mentioned in a Forbes Magazine profile of Ms. Moore; Princeton Theological Seminary for “Conversation with the Authors of *The Toni Morrison Book Club*,” on September 16, 2020; the Maplewood NJ Library System’s “Ideas Festival” on October 26, 2020; for the Town of Lambertville on January 21, 2021 and with the Friends of Princeton Library on February 28, 2021.
- Dr. Brown-Glaude and Dr. Williams, along with their co-authors were also invited to speak about their book outside of New Jersey at Uncle Bobbie’s Coffee & Books in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on Feb. 18, 2020, at the University of Texas, El Paso” “Mining Books Discussion Series.” on 11/18/ 2020, and at TEVA Pharmaceuticals as part of their Black Heritage Resource Groups event on February 23, 2021.
- Dr. Leigh-Anne Francis’s article in *Meridians*, “Playing the “Lady Sambo”: Poor Black Women’s Legal Strategies in the Post-Civil War South’s Civil Courts” “was selected as the *Honorable Mention* for the 2021 Paula J. Giddings Best Article Award from Volume 19 of *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism*.”
- Dr. Zakiya R. Adair has been accepted to two Competitive National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) summer institutes. Additionally Dr. Adair has been invited by the Chair of Urban Education at TCNJ to give a talk at the *Reinventing Your Classroom: Imagination, Innovation, and Inquiry* 2021 Summer Institute. Most recently

she was nominated and accepted as a Visiting Scholar in Spring 2022 at Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany. She will teach two classes: an undergraduate seminar and a graduate seminar centered on the long history of black American cultural and intellectual experiences in Germany. In addition to her term as a visiting scholar Goethe is very enthusiastic about sending one of their faculty to teach in AAS in the fall 2022. This would be the first time that AAS would host an international visiting scholar from Germany.

- Professor Michael Mitchell was invited by Eastern Michigan University to be a part of a panel discussing "The Future of Criminal Justice Education" on April 1, 2021. He will join established scholars in the field to discuss calls for criminal justice reform and now abolition with criminologists who are confronting the complicity of the field in addressing systemic racism (among other issues) and its role in supporting law enforcement and the carceral state. In this webinar, professor Mitchell will discuss how we, as educators, can use the classroom and our programs to better confront these issues and whether educational institutions should continue to offer a major in Criminology.

The AAS faculty has published articles in top refereed journals in our fields, including *The Journal of Women's History*, *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism*, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *The Journal of Women's Gender and Families of Color*, *Journal of African American Studies*, *Radical Teacher*, and *African American Review*. Our faculty have given numerous presentations at highly competitive national and international conferences, institutes and other venues. These include The Caribbean Studies Association, American Historical Association, Zora Neale Hurston Festival of Arts and Humanities, National Women's Studies Association, The Association for the Study of African Life and History, American Society of Criminology, American Studies Association, South Atlantic Modern Language Association, African American Intellectual History, Northeast Modern Languages Association, and Colloquium for African American Research.

A. Publication in peer reviewed journals

- Dr. Zakiya R. Adair: *Journal of African American Studies*, *Journal of Women, Gender and Families of Color*, *Radical Teacher* and *Rejoinder*
- Dr. Winnifred Brown-Glaude: *Caribbean Quarterly*, *Small Axe: A Caribbean Platform for Criticism, Social and Economic Studies*, and *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism*
- Dr. Leigh-Anne Francis: *The Journal of Women's History*, *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* and *Thresholds in Education*
- Dr. Piper Kendrix Williams: *African American Review*, *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* and *Canadian Woman Studies*
- Prof. Michael Mitchell, *The Prison Journal* and *Decolonization of Criminology and Justice*

B. Book Publications

- Brown-Glaude, Winnifred. *Toni Morrison Book Club*, co-authored with Piper Kendrix Williamson, Cassandra Jackson and Juda Bennet. (Wisconsin University Press 2019).
- Brown-Glaude, Winnifred, *Higglers in Kingston: Women's Informal Work in Jamaica*. (Vanderbilt University Press, 2011).
- Brown-Glaude, Winnifred. *Doing Diversity in Higher Education: Faculty Leaders Share Challenges and Strategies*. (Rutgers University Press, 2009).
- Williams, Piper Kendrix. *Toni Morrison Book Club*, co-authored with Cassandra Jackson, Winnifred Brown Glaude, Juda Bennet, (Wisconsin University Press 2019).
- Williams, Piper Kendrix. *Re-presenting Segregation: Toward and Aesthetics of Living Jim Crow*, co-edited with Brian Norma. (SUNY University Press, 2010).

III. Department Impact

2021 will mark 50 years of organizing and sponsoring major programming on campus during Black History Month (BHM). Every February, we invite an array of visitors to campus to perform, lecture and lead workshops. The attendance at these events has been impressive, with many of the event spaces, including Kendall Theater and Mayo Concert Hall, filled to capacity. In the past several years, invitees have included such world-renowned activists and scholars as activist Angela Davis, Princeton Professor and Author Eddie Glaude, Jr, Educator, community activist and black bookstore owner, Marc Lamont Hill, and former NAACP President, Benjamin Jealous. Some of our standout Black History Month events featured Alicia Garza, the cofounder of the Black Lives Matter Movement in 2020. And in 2019, The "Mothers of the Movement" round table discussion occurred, where Tamir Rice's mother Samira and Eric Garner's mother, Gwen Carr discussed their

activism and commitment to end police brutality and seek justice for their sons. This year was the the first annual “African American Studies Teach-In,” which featured presentations focused on the experiences of TCNJ’s black students, privileging the voices of incarcerated black people in qualitative research and how graffiti of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution teaches us about current society, culture and politics as well as the desires and imagined futures of those risking their lives for change.

Despite our department’s extremely small size we have had a great impact at all levels of the campus community as well as the national community. Our department is the only department on campus that has always been anti-racist. While TCNJ currently has disciplines examining systemic racism in their fields, the African American Studies department’s curriculum is focused on the presence and contribution of Africa and its diaspora. We cover the 400 years people of African descent have been in the New World, generally but more specifically in North America and the Caribbean. In addition, we have courses on Africa that go back thousands of years. Our courses reflect the AAS’s activist tradition and we offer classes that count for the Social Justice Minor, including “Intro to Social Justice” and “The History of Black Lives Matter.” The AAS curriculum attends to the intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality and many of our courses are cross listed.

We have helped to lead and govern the college:

- Dr. Adair serves on the Council for Community Engaged Learning, The Culturally Responsive Teaching Task Force, The William Green Plantation Committee, AAS/CRIM visiting professor hiring committee
- Dr. Francis serves on the HSS Curriculum Committee
- Dr. Brown Glaude, Chair of AAS, AAS/WGS Assistant Professor Hiring Committee, AAS/CRIM Assistant Professor Hiring Committee, AAS/CRIM Assistant Professor Hiring Committee
- Dr. Williams: Chair of AAS, AAS/CRIM Assistant Professor Hiring Committee, AAS/CRIM Visiting Assistant Professor Hiring Committee, LOAC, Liberal Learning, AAS/WGS Assistant Professor Hiring Committee, Liberal Learning Taskforce, Faculty Senate, HSS Anti-Racist Taskforce
- Professor Mitchell: Faculty Advisor for SPEAR (Students for Prison Education and Reform), Intercultural Center - Strategic Planning Committee

Our faculty members are engaged in community and professional organizations:

- Dr. Adair served on the program committee for the Black Women’s Historical Association’s conference in 2019 and has also served as a graduate student mentor for the National Women’s Studies Association.
- Dr. Brown-Glaude is a member of the Board of Trustee for Mercer County Community College and serves as Treasurer for the Association for Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars.
- Dr. Francis has volunteered as an instructor at Mountainview Youth Correctional Facility for Men in New Jersey
- Professor Mitchell was appointed to the New Jersey State Intensive Supervision Program as a community board member and also serves as a board advisor for the Women and Families Ascending Association in New Jersey.

Conclusion

As our application demonstrates, the Department of African American Studies has been a leader in teaching and scholarly excellence, and departmental impact. If selected for the Mildred Dahne award, we will sponsor course development, speakers, conferences and projects that focus on interdisciplinary studies, with a special emphasis on anti-black racism. To commemorate the AAS department’s 50th anniversary, the award would provide honoraria for leading scholars and activists whose lectures and training sessions would be open to the campus and surrounding communities. These speakers would reflect our department’s excellence and impact in the interconnected domains of teaching and scholarship.

Additionally, we will launch an AAS faculty-student collaborative project on the history of the AAS department at TCNJ and build an accessible digital archive to highlight TCNJ’s role in the national black studies movement. We will also use the funds to research and apply for external grants such as the NEH Summer Institute Grants. This award provides significant funding to the host institution and would bring world-renowned scholars from across the nation to TCNJ. Finally, we will create a leadership and honor society for AAS at TCNJ. We hope that the Mildred Dahne Award committee will recognize that the department of African American Studies is an exemplar of the teacher-scholar-citizen model at TCNJ. Although we are small we are mighty.