



**REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON
AFRICAN AND BLACK STUDIES**

MCGILL UNIVERSITY

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ESTABLISHMENT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON AFRICAN AND BLACK STUDIES

In September 2020, as result of a series of consultations with the Dr. Kenneth Melville McGill Black Faculty and Staff Caucus (the Caucus), the Principal and Vice Provost of McGill University mandated the creation of the Working Group on African and Black Studies (the WG, or the Working Group). The Caucus has played an important role in the creation of the Working Group, the ideas underpinning its mission, and in defining its terms of reference. Its involvement is fitting as the Caucus, building on decades of work of both students and faculty, was integral in spearheading for the inclusion of an expanded focus on African and Black Studies in McGill's Plan to Address Anti-Black Racism (ABRP). From the outset, the Caucus has insisted that its expertise and the collective voice of its members be fully recognized in the pursuit of this ambitious and timely initiative.

I. Working Group: Mandate, Terms of Reference, and Membership

The Terms of Reference for the Working Group set clear guidelines for its establishment and the work it would undertake, culminating in this report.

Terms of Reference and Mandate:

- To propose a collective vision for African and Black Studies at McGill.
- To identify strengths, weaknesses, and gaps of the African Studies Program (ASP).
- To address the present gaps of the ASP while also building on its strengths in the development of curricular and programmatic offerings related to African, African Diasporic Studies, and Black Studies.
- To explore options for the expansion of the current African Studies Program's scope to include African Diasporic/Black Studies and to build its research capacity, including the creation of graduate programs.
- To find ways in which a broad range of Faculties across the University can play a role in the advancement of African and Black Studies at McGill.
- To position African, African Diaspora, and Black Studies in relation to the recruitment and retention of Black faculty and students.
- To recommend a structure (e.g., program, department, research institute, centre, etc.) which would best serve the intellectual aspirations of fostering excellence in these areas and to connect research and teaching in them.

Membership:

Khalid Medani (WG co-chair, Faculty of Arts)

Debra Thompson (WG co-chair, Faculty of Arts)

Michael Fronda (Associate Dean, Faculty of Arts)

Philip Howard (Faculty of Education, Dr. Kenneth Melville McGill Black Faculty & Staff Caucus representative)

Loydie Majewska (Faculty of Medicine, Dr. Kenneth Melville McGill Black Faculty & Staff Caucus representative)

Mbaye Diouf (Faculty of Arts)

Michelle Hartman (Faculty of Arts)

Vrinda Narain (Faculty of Law)

Kariuki Kirigia (graduate student representative)

Aisha Manneh (undergraduate student representative)

Iyanu Soyege (undergraduate student representative)

II. The Working Group and the Action Plan to Address Anti-Black Racism at McGill

The Working Group's mandate and its core work are centrally related to and implicated in McGill University's Action Plan to address Anti-Black Racism at McGill (ABRP). In relation to this, its work addresses a key component of the three pillars of the Caucus's demands as outlined by the open statement released on August 1, 2020.

These pillars are: (1) to establish a Task Force on Transatlantic Slavery and Colonialism; (2) to institutionalize equity and representation across McGill and in senior administration in particular; and (3) to establish targets and timetables for recruitment of Black Faculty, Students and Staff, and Accompanying Support. The WG is set with the task of specifically addressing the following demand forwarded by the Mission Statement of the Caucus:

We call on McGill to increase support to the existing African Studies Program beyond its current focus on undergraduate teaching and facilitate its development and expansion as a centre of research, learning, and documentation as well as the study and teaching of Africa and the African Diaspora across the disciplines. This call is based on our shared premise that African Studies is a foundational field with a crucial role in focusing on—and providing support to—the lives and experiences of Africans and all peoples of African descent, that is, on Black life and anti-Black racism as it occurs in Canada and globally.

The WG has understood its mandate as participating in addressing all three pillars. The WG has been centrally concerned with working on how to further teaching and research on Africa, the African Diaspora, Black life, and anti-Black racism, but also with **recruiting** – and importantly **retaining** – Black and African Faculty, Students, and Staff. The WG's central aim is to devise ways, consistent with the scholarship in these areas, to strengthen African Studies and to expand the Program's scope to include African diasporic/Black Studies and to build its research capacity, including the creation of graduate programs.

The WG and the ABRP also are working within the context of the [Scarborough Charter](#), to which McGill is a signatory. As a signatory, McGill has "undertake[n] to make the Scarborough Charter a core resource guiding policy creation and implementation, across university and college governance, in research, teaching and learning, and in community engagement" (5.3.1). The WG notes two clauses of this Charter to which our report responds directly. McGill's has made a commitment to "recognizing, engaging critically with and celebrating traditions of Black intellectual excellence across the academy, including by supporting research clusters that enable plural communities of knowledge to flourish" [2.2] and also to "encouraging the emergence of Black and Black Canadian studies programs while promoting curricular development across academic disciplines that decentres epistemic Eurocentrism, that holds open space for expansive, world-inspired learning that broadens disciplinary canons to include Black expertise and knowledges" [2.3.1]. The proposals laid out in this WG report, including its recommendation to establish an Institute, are responding to the common vision shared by the Scarborough Charter, McGill's ABRP, and the Caucus's demands.

In addition to this more recent context for the Working Group on African and Black Studies, we deem it important to locate its work in the context of a much longer history of advocacy for African and Black Studies at McGill. Even before the Congress of Black Writers that was held at McGill from October 11-14, 1968, students and faculty had advocated for Black Studies at McGill. This Congress, organized by McGill University students in collaboration with others, highlighted these issues, but demands to increase curricular offerings in African and Black Studies were regularly made throughout the 1960s and organized on an ad-hoc basis. This history continues with a sit-in by Black students and Black community members at the 1969 joint meeting of the African Studies Association and the Committee on African Studies in Canada held at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel not far from the McGill campus, calling for greater representation of Black scholars from Africa and its Diaspora in the study of Africa. McGill's African Studies Program was institutionalized in 1969 in this climate. The history of the WG includes the work in the early 1990s of the Black Students' Network at McGill to have the History Department approve a Black History course, and later to propose a Black Studies Program to complement the existing African Studies Program. The historical context of the WG includes the work of the Africana Studies Committee of the Black Students' Network, which produced a discussion paper for the University administration in November 2000 entitled *Envisioning African Studies: Tradition and Innovation at McGill*. This document called upon the administration to increase funding to the African Studies Program to make it more robust, and to expand the Program to include the study of the African Diaspora.

This rich history demonstrates the sustained thrust for African and Black Studies at McGill of which the WG is the most recent iteration, the integral relationships between African and Black Studies, and the ways that visions for both at McGill have been inextricable from each other—indeed, they are one and the same. In particular, we recognize the galvanizing role that students have played in calling for change both inside and outside McGill. The WG understands its work as continuous with, building upon, and drawing inspiration from this strong foundation laid for us by faculty, staff, students and community who have engaged in this work before us.

III. The Working Group's Methodology

The findings and recommendations contained in this report are based on research conducted by the Working Group. This includes the WG members, Research Assistants, and central stakeholders in the McGill administration, the larger McGill community – especially McGill's Black community. More specifically they are a result of the following:

- A close review of parallel departments, programs, and institutions in the United States and Canada
- Output of our workshop discussions on African Studies and Black Studies, led by experts from universities in Canada and the United States
- Consultations with key stakeholders including: McGill administration, faculty, students; the Dr. Kenneth Melville McGill Black Faculty and Staff Caucus; and members of the Black Alumni Network
- Survey of current and past McGill students' opinions
- Biweekly meetings between the members of the working group, and regular ad hoc meetings that focused on particular aspects of the Working Group's terms of reference.

IV. Research Findings

Review of the African Studies Program at McGill University: Summary

Upon review of the present African Studies Program (ASP) at McGill University, the Working Group was impressed with an enormous amount of enthusiasm and commitment to the program on the part of students and the few professors involved in it. Students who are involved with or affiliated to the African Studies program found it extremely important to their academic and extra-curricular needs. It offers Black and African students the opportunity to study the histories and cultures of Africa, as well as relate their lived experiences as Africans and Black people to broader global contexts. In addition, the African Studies program has provided an exciting academic and cultural environment for all students, given the inherent relevance of the study of Africa, Africans and the African diaspora to other disciplines within the Faculty of Arts. This includes offering very popular courses on Africa and the Swahili language as well as including students in the wide range of extracurricular events sponsored by the program. The students report that the program has provided them with a collegial, safe, and nurturing intellectual and social environment that ensures that they excel in their studies and enjoy professional success upon graduation. This itself can be a model and bodes well for the further developments of this program in the future, and the ways that it meets the ABRP goal of “building campuses wherein Black students ... feel welcomed, respected, and capable of thriving (ABRP, p. 2). One recent example of this excellence is that an African Studies major, Abdel Dicko (class of 2021) was awarded a prestigious Rhodes Scholarship from Oxford University, and two other students, Ommu Kalsoum Abdelrahman and Inyo Soyeye were named Arts and Black graduate valedictorians of their graduating class in 2019 and 2021 respectively.

The successes and achievements of the students in the ASP are clearly linked to the enormous amount of work done by the very few people associated with the program. They are especially impressive given the limited budgetary resources, the lack of any permanent faculty appointed to the Program, and the heavy workload that falls upon the few people that keep the ASP functioning. Indeed, despite what we found to be less than sufficient financial and human resources, the Program has managed to achieve considerable success and allowed many students to excel within these constraints. However, we observe that the yearly need to negotiate a budget and offer only the barest outline of courses, always taught by a rotating list of non-permanent course lecturers means that the quality and consistency of courses can never be maintained. We also note that students always, understandably, want more courses in the program to attend to the cutting-edge scholarly developments in African, African Diaspora and Black Studies, and to address broad and diverse aspects of their lives. We have seen this as a sign of commitment and enthusiasm on the students’ part, as noted above, but it also speaks to the demand and need for more expansive vision and infrastructure to house the ASP. Furthermore, the program, of course, only exists at the undergraduate level, limiting opportunities for students to continue their studies at McGill, and limiting its capacity to attract scholars who would contribute further to its development.

The WG notes the ASP’s clear and inspiring strengths in terms of the dedication and hard work of (very few) faculty members, who devote time to the program outside of their other academic commitments. Similarly, we would like to emphasize the remarkable student enthusiasm and dedication, as well as the way that the program brings significant cultural and social benefits to the entire McGill community, including specific units, departments, and groups. We therefore suggest that it is imperative that this small undergraduate program be strengthened through an expanded vision and infrastructure within which the strengths of the

program can be housed, to provide sustained scholarly and curricular attention to the study of Africa, the broader African Diaspora, and Black life in general. Our recommendations for the ideal means of achieving this will be outlined below in the more specific proposals. First, we will outline in slightly more detail the primary strengths and weaknesses of the current ASP.

Strengths

The program itself, though clearly lacking in the resources to fully realize itself as a fully functioning program that covers a breadth and depth of African Studies, has a commitment to creative and innovative teaching and research. This is carried on by the few people who maintain the program, from year to year. It is structured in a way to promote a breadth of knowledge in the study of Africa, and related fields, and emphasizes critical and creative thinking, a knowledge of methodologies and research practices, the application of this knowledge and communication skills. An awareness of the particular place and role of African Studies as a site of interdisciplinary learning in the university and the academy more generally is vital to it.

As stated above, the WG notes the strong interest and enthusiasm of undergraduate students majoring and minoring in the African Studies Program's mission and programs. After facing many challenges, in the past five years at least, the ASP has worked hard to be sure its courses were taught in ways consistent with McGill's overall mission of ensuring rigorous academic standards and excellence. In a university environment that most often is described by Black students as alienating to them, the program and its courses in recent years has provided students with a nurturing and positive social and cultural environment. We note that the ASP has worked toward providing academic excellence, but even with limited resources has also addressed social and cultural issues faced by African and other Black students at McGill, and worked to help them navigate their paths to professional success. We note that this has been achieved largely through the extra, unpaid and often unacknowledged work of very few full-time faculty members, and also often by sessional lecturers, part-time course lecturers, and TAs – many of whom have been graduate students in various departments at McGill. This collective effort waxes and wanes over time because it is not shored up by the consistency of people working in full-time positions (which will be addressed below). Many of these graduate students, course lecturers, TAs and others have produced impressive research and been excellent teachers, with networks of scholarly output. But these achievements are not ensured by the program in its current form.

The WG also noted that despite its limited resources the Program has managed to host African scholars and collaborate with alumni to conduct public service initiatives in the larger African communities in Montreal. This is clearly linked to its role as an interdisciplinary program that has ties to many departments and programs in the university, including Islamic Studies, History, Geography, Sociology, Economics, Development Studies, Political Science, and French Language and Literature. Perhaps more importantly is the way that the Program in recent years has worked closely with three student groups on campus: the African Studies Student Association (ASSA), the Black Students Network (BSN), and the McGill African Students Society (MASS). This has a pedagogical as well as community impact. The ASSA launched and maintains a flagship student journal, *Uhuru: The McGill Undergraduate African Studies Journal*, demonstrating how a collegial social and cultural environment for students from a wide diversity of ethnic, national, and racial backgrounds can enrich scholarship and knowledge production.

Finally, the WG concurs with the results of the student survey that the ASP also has played an important role, however partial, in addressing systemic racism on campus. We note that the program has afforded students unique educational opportunities that other programs on campus do not. As one student put it, the African Studies faculty afford students an understanding of “subaltern perspectives,” and “point us in different and unique directions.” Many pointed to the support that specific professors gave them outside as well as inside the classroom by building a strong community, assisting them with career planning, offering regular mentorship, and building networks with alumni.

Weaknesses

The WG was tasked with identifying strengths and weaknesses; as in all things, they exist in tandem. The interdisciplinary focus of the ASP is no doubt a strength, and one of the elements to be maintained, but it also contains one of the program’s weaknesses – that its sole focus on “Africa” considers the continent alone and therefore it does not embrace and promote the important and rich study, methods, and techniques of the study of the African diaspora/s and Black Studies. This is something noted by many students, as well as McGill community members with whom we spoke; it was one of the elements that many people would like to see addressed by the WG.

Further, the ASP’s noted strength in promoting African scholars, reaching out to the community, and other elements of its work both within and beyond the classroom means that students and other members of the community identified a desire to see the program extend more into debates associated with the history of diaspora/s, the politics of gender, queer studies, and other areas. The program is too small to fully address a wide enough range of issues to satiate the curiosity of McGill’s undergraduate community, let alone go beyond these core topics.

The most important challenge that the Working Group has noted, in consultation and study of the ASP, is its lack of visibility, a dearth of stable and regular course offerings, and an endemic need for full-time professors to mentor and work with. We noted that students report not learning of the Program until they are almost finished with their undergraduate degree, and because it is so small it is often difficult to complete the courses. Moreover, **all** student respondents to the survey emphasized that there is never a stable roster of course offerings in the Program in ways that would encourage incoming students to major or minor in it, and they complained of the lack of any courses in Black/African Diasporic topics that are not directly tied to the continent. Students emphasized their desire to hire more permanent faculty and to provide more consistent and coherent collaboration with other departments and units in terms of cross-listing courses so they could have greater course offerings. One solution offered by students in their survey is that the program should be developed into a Department. Students suggested that because the ASP is not a department, it is seen as a teaching rather than as a research unit and that this perception undermines its prominence at McGill and stifles the research agendas of students associated with the ASP.

Based on this analysis, a summary of issues to be addressed:

- Lack of visibility
 - Underfunding
 - Limited course offerings
 - Leads to large enrollments in classes but relatively low numbers of majors and minors
 - Lack of courses in Black Studies and African Diaspora studies
 - Lack of permanent faculty
 - No regular roster of courses
 - Difficulty in finding regular supervision
 - Challenges of cross appointment
 - An imbalance of courses available
- Courses only in social sciences, but meant to be an interdisciplinary program
 - No graduate program

Reviews of Black/African Diaspora Programs in North America

Process

Student researchers employed by the working group produced reports for our review and study process. These reports surveyed and summarized parallel programs in colleges and universities across the United States and Canada. The universities studied in most detail were those deemed to be the most similar to McGill in research intensity, size, and study body, though we did look at other institutions as well. The WG members read and discussed these reports in detail, in developing recommendations for McGill.

Findings

The role of Black studies in North America has greatly evolved over the last few decades. Especially in more recent years, we have seen an increasing emphasis on the intellectual virtue of multidisciplinary, particularly in the rich scholarly synergies between African, Black, Caribbean, and other Diasporic Studies. Throughout the United States, most of McGill's peer institutions have vibrant Black Studies/African Diasporic Studies/Africana Studies programs. In most of these programs, however, we may also observe the frequent splitting and splintering of programs into African Studies, Black Studies, Caribbean Studies, etc. There are significant academic, institutional, and resource problems that attend such separation, and that undermine the advancement of all the sub-areas so defined.

Additionally, in Canada, there are growing numbers of Black academics who study the African diaspora and teach classes on it, but few actual Black Studies/African Diaspora programs. Black/African American Studies programs in the United States can be traced to the student-led activism of the 1960s; in spite of similar demonstrations and calls for dedicated programming in Canada, universities largely failed to address this consistent demand. Canada currently only has two established Black Studies programs. The first is the Black Canadian Studies certificate program at York University, announced in October 2018, and the second is the Black African Diaspora undergraduate minor program at Dalhousie University, established in 2016. Dalhousie has recently announced that its program will be expanded to a major. Queen's University is also in the final stages of establishing their Black Studies undergraduate minor, as is X University (formerly Ryerson). Both minors are set to launch in fall 2022, and both programs appear to apply a skeletal programmatic structure to pre-existing courses relating to Black Studies rather than developing an entirely new curriculum. Other Canadian schools such as University of Toronto and University of British Columbia, have along with McGill, programs such as African Studies, Caribbean Studies, or Diaspora and Transnational Studies (though only the University of Toronto has all three). Additionally, several other institutions have announced efforts to establish Black Studies programs, with working groups formed at Concordia and the University of Toronto. The University of Toronto has recently hired a professor as a Founding Director of the Centre for Black Studies in Education.

The relative paucity of attention to Black life across academic programs in Canada is not just reflected in the very small number of Black Studies programs that have been established, but the development of such programs as well. The American programs that were researched all have established undergraduate

programs offering both majors and minors. In addition, a number of them had graduate programs, and several have developed well-regarded PhD programs.

Other than Dalhousie's undergraduate minor program and York's certificate program, Canada has little to show in comparison, **especially at the graduate level**, though Canadian schools have a few graduate programs in the fields of African Studies. There are still no graduate programs focusing on the African Diaspora or Black Studies in this country, and none that acknowledge the synergies between, and inseparability of, the study of Africa, the African Diaspora, and Black life.

The disparity between the development of Black Studies in the United States compared to Canada is also reflected in faculty size. A number of universities are now in the midst of recruiting and hiring more faculty whose work falls under the broad disciplinary umbrella of Black Studies, though often not into a defined Black Studies unit. In contrast, programs researched in the United States average around thirteen faculty members, with larger programs also having a number of affiliated faculty.

Conclusions

Because the program we intend to build at McGill would be the first of its kind in the country, it has become abundantly clear that we will be working largely without a blueprint. This is an opportunity to create something unique, impactful and transformative.

Firstly, it is clear from Black Studies programs at other schools that there is no lack of interest in such programs. For this reason, it is preferential to build a larger program from the beginning, rather than being forced to revisit the program's structure within the first few years of its installation. In addition, it will be necessary and beneficial to have a sizable Black Studies faculty rather than cross-appointments or only associated faculty. This will allow for the creation of Black Studies courses rather than having to "borrow" courses from other departments as other Canadian Black Studies Programs have been forced to do. New course and curricular development will be imperative in order to realize the vision for Black Studies at McGill; we cannot limit the creation of a new, unique, one-of-a-kind program by limiting it to pre-existing conceptions of Black Studies, African Studies, or Caribbean Studies, rather than allowing for innovation and collaboration among all these fields and other analogous disciplines and faculties.

Furthermore, the relationship between African Studies and Black Studies at McGill must be shaped purposefully and carefully. We recognize the necessity of emphasizing and building integral intellectual linkages between African, African Diasporic and Black Studies. This is something that was clearly lacking at many of the programs researched across North America, both in the United States and Canada. Rather than separate African Diasporic Studies and African Studies, as has often been done in the past, we see an opportunity to bring these together at McGill. Combining these two interlinked fields of study is intellectually innovative, academically fruitful, and opens creative possibilities for generating a wide range of resources to the benefit of the entire McGill community. Because Africa is conceptually and epistemologically foundational for the study of African diasporic and Black life globally, and this idea is often obscured in the context of broader visions in the academy, we want to be certain to have Africa as central to the McGill program.

Additionally, the study of Black life, from a Black Studies perspective, must be an integral part of our study of the African Diaspora.

In order to fulfil this compelling vision for African and Black Studies at McGill, we must begin by hiring scholars who share this overarching and unifying vision and work with the synergies between these areas, rather than a hiring plan that sees these disciplines and scholarly traditions in exclusive terms. This is especially important to keep in mind when hiring due to the fact that the new hires we propose below will largely be the ones shaping the program once it is out of its early developmental stages.

Research and Consultations

Process

Between September 2020 and December 2021, we held five consultations in the form of workshops with national and international scholars of African, African Diaspora, and Black Studies. These sessions were up to several hours long and included presentations of scholarship, debates, and joint sessions. Members of the WG attended and participated in these interactive sessions, which brought expert knowledge to bear on the issues of how to best develop African, African Diaspora and Black Studies at McGill, as well as the contested issues involved in this process. The WG convened these sessions over Zoom, because of the ongoing pandemic.

Findings

The WGs research and consultation were marked by a recurrent theme: the relationship between African and Black Studies has been conceptualized and/or employed in a manner that has hindered the full intellectual development of both fields. Historically, the two fields have been separated and one or the other is disregarded while the other is considered as the primary framework into which the other must be incorporated. This separation has not only acted as a limitation on whichever one is considered to be secondary to the other, but has also worked to pit African and Black Studies against each other. Despite this, the reality is that there are deep synergies between and among studies of Africa, the African Diaspora (including Caribbean Studies), and Black life in general which are, in fact, inseparable in a holistic account of Black/African peoples worldwide. Black Studies and African Studies are thus inseparable, not in a hierarchical framework, but rather a symbiotic one.

Additional roadblocks to the development of African and Black studies include Area Studies frameworks, which have been problematic in relation to the study of Africa, the African Diaspora, and Black Studies, including the study of Black life globally. This is because Area Studies tends to misunderstand and limit the scope of what the fields may accomplish. African and Black Studies also routinely confront the related problematic view of African and Black Studies as identity studies/politics. Nevertheless, the study of Africa, African intellectual thought/Black Studies and Black radical thought are relevant not just to African/Black people. Rather, such notions are imperative to broader notions of humanity and human freedom that exceed the Western paradigms (guiding most academic knowledge) that have excluded African and Black people's knowledge, scholarship, and technologies, or treated them as peripheral or exceptional.

There has been a long history of a quest for Black Studies at McGill in addition to a view of African Studies that centers Africa and Africans/Black people both as its main concerns and as the scholars who best define its directions. The reason why there has yet to be a Black Studies program at McGill, and why we have only been able to see the establishment of an African Studies program is rooted in problematic histories and colonial logics. To be frank, the WG recognizes that this is simply the latest effort to bring Black Studies to McGill, and the need to contribute more solid resourcing to the African Studies program has been clear for

decades. This is a problem that the African Studies Program under African/Black leadership has been successful at beginning to overcome.

Conclusions

Working against the historical separation of the two areas of study, the WG wishes to bring together Black and African Studies rather than divide them. We see an opportunity to combine our efforts to strengthen African Studies and build Black Studies in a unique and forward-looking way that reflects their integral relationships on the ground. From this, **we also see the opportunity for McGill to have the first graduate program in this unified vision of African/Black Studies.** It would also be the first Canadian graduate program that includes Black Studies, which will have the important effect of producing scholars who can expand African/Black Studies across Canada during this opportune moment. Given that Africa often gets left behind when a broader vision is embraced, we are committed to centering Africa as central to, without being the totality of, African diasporic experiences. This can be achieved through careful attention in the processes of establishing hiring priorities, post-doctoral opportunities, student admissions, and course offerings. Additionally, in order to address the other barriers to the progress of Black and African Studies, the WG suggests an approach that will eschew a limited Area Studies framework, and that will allow the inherent multidisciplinary of the field to flourish.

In order to build such a new and unique program, the WG believes that its structure must be just as distinctive. The future of Black and African Studies at McGill thus requires a unique institutional structure to allow this vision to thrive. Our first hires will be scholars who already have the kind of unified vision described in this document, and who work with the synergies between these areas that are often seen in mutually exclusive terms. Additionally, we must consciously choose to maintain a focus on the balance between the areas, topics, and approaches at all times. This will require that faculty be hired exclusively to work with and develop the expanded African/Black Studies structure, so that the development of the program does not become secondary or restricted due to joint appointments or limited-term faculty.

V. Proposal: Establishment of an Institute

Based on these findings, months of concentrated study, and significant deliberation, the Working Group deems it imperative that McGill University create an **Institute for the Study of Africa, the African Diaspora, and Black Life**. The study of Africa, Africans, and people of African descent is indispensable to any comprehensive, equitable study of humans, human society and human innovation. This is not only so because the histories and physical/human geographies of the African continent and the African Diaspora should be equitably represented in comparative scholarship, but also because of the singularity of the experiences of African peoples within the human story.

Additionally, McGill University, situated as it is in the cosmopolitan city of Montreal, is in an unparalleled position to house this institute. Montreal has long cemented its place as a substantive part of the Black world and of Black struggle: as the site of Marcus Garvey's 1917 visit to Canada leading to the still standing Montreal branch of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA); as the place of the meeting and marriage of Malcolm X's parents in 1919; as a major hub of the jazz scene during the prohibition years in the United States; as the site of the 1968 Congress of Black Writers (held at McGill); as the site of the 1969 Sir George Williams Affair, the ripple effects of which defined the moment globally; as the site of an important arm of the anti-apartheid struggle; and of course, currently as the site of a very significant portion of the Haitian Diaspora, and as a city where African and Caribbean people of multiple languages and cultures converge in a manner not easily replicated elsewhere. The Montreal context fosters multiple entry points into the study of Africa, the African Diaspora, and Black life which notably include, among many others, the complex social and political positioning of Black and African people in this city historically and in the present, and the rich linguistic tapestries that attend the ways African/Black life is lived here.

As a leading, world-renowned university, it is a glaring omission in the intellectual life of McGill that there is not already a vibrant unit dedicated to African, African Diaspora, and Black Studies. Given current world events and considering McGill University's recent stated commitment to fighting systemic anti-Black racism, the establishment of such an institute is even more crucially relevant today. The establishment of such an Institute is fitting at this juncture and fulfils the great interest and long-standing aspiration to build the study of Africa, African Diaspora, and Black Life at McGill. McGill again has a unique opportunity to be a leader in this scholarly charge. This Institute will advance the objectives central to McGill University's mission, its reputation, and now the ABRP in particular. Our view is that such an Institute will do many things: it will be an academic and scholarly home, a community hub and support network, a teaching centre, a centre for innovation in the field, as well as a powerful symbolic institution for Africa, the African Diaspora, and Black Studies. Our vision for this Institute is bold and expansive – it would be one-of-a-kind in Canada and North America.

This Institute will be multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary in its core mission and foundation and dedicated to the study of Africa, African Diaspora and Black life more broadly. We have carefully considered and studied many possible names for the Institute and propose the working name *The Institute for the Study of Africa, the African Diaspora and Black Life*. Crucial to the vision and mission, any name for the institute has to include *Africa* to signal that the study of Africa is central and foundational to our endeavours and must include the word *Black* to signal the ways in which Black people and Black life exceed traditional geographies

and the imaginary boundaries of the nation-state. It is equally important to the WG and everyone we have consulted that Black Studies, Black radical traditions, and the study of African Diasporas and Black life be central and seamlessly integrated. We also seek unity and not to separate into strands or streams. The vision of this Institute, in line with an intellectual mission of fostering the most forward-looking and cutting-edge work in the field/s, is to ensure that these diverse threads come together intellectually, culturally, and socially. Africa and African Studies are foundational, as per the mission statement of the Caucus. The Institute's vision must also include the many worlds of the African diasporas and the diversity of Black life and Black worlds more expansively and thus should be integrated and central to its research and teaching mission.

Our vision for this Institute includes a broadened offering of the current African Studies Program but also involves a much more expansive and important reshaping of what these studies will mean at McGill in the future. Our proposal is bold and innovative, and attempts to maintain a series of basic principles while putting McGill on the map in Canada by developing, at its outset, the first Graduate Program (MA and PhD) in this area of scholarship in the country. We elaborate on this below, but the research, teaching, and community mission of this Institute should be tightly integrated and linked in a way that an institution like McGill can and should be able to support like no other in Canada.

To be clear from the outset, our research as a WG has come to the emphatic conclusion that any vision going forward for African Studies, Studies of the African Diasporas, and Black Studies at McGill cannot be achieved by simply expanding course offerings or hiring part-time faculty. Our goals and mission cannot be achieved by simply gathering people who have been hired into a diverse range of disconnected departments. The WG recognizes the university's efforts to hire Black faculty in a range of departments in the past two years and commends this long-overdue institutional priority. These new colleagues will have departmental commitments and considerations, pressures of time, and exigencies placed on them that would undermine the vision we present here. We will elaborate on this further below but seek to clarify here, from the outset, that we are proposing something entirely new.

Moreover, we would like to reiterate that the hiring and **retention** of African and Black faculty must be a key component of any hiring that is done in relation to the ABRP initiative. This is a central mission of the Caucus and the WG proposes it would be a key tenet of the proposed Institute. Based on our research, the Working Group strongly believes that a stable, dedicated academic institutional structure would best achieve this aim. The Institute would accomplish several objectives that are key to faculty retention. These include:

- The opportunity to hire a critical number of African/Black faculty, thereby fostering a less isolating and alienating atmosphere for African and Black faculty at McGill.
- Ensuring that African/Black faculty are not 'overcommitted' in terms of service obligations in other Departments since it is well known that African/Black faculty are often called upon disproportionately to serve on committees and perform other, more, and less recognized, service obligations.
- Creating a conducive and nurturing environment for the mentorship of faculty members, as well as students. This would include providing new hires with clear guidelines, especially with respect to tenure and promotion and helping guide them through this process, as well as navigating the university.

- Establishing an institutional locus for academic lectures, social gatherings, and social and cultural events to provide an inclusive and welcoming environment essential to productivity and satisfaction.
- Ensuring that the scholars associated with the Institute are in a strong position to incorporate the input and concerns of African/Black faculty who work in other departments/units where their concerns are often overlooked or ignored. Research shows that the experiences of African/Black faculty differ vastly from those of non-Black colleagues. The establishment of an institute would also provide African/Black faculty members an infrastructure designed to help them succeed.

VI. Recommendations

A stand-alone unit with dedicated resources

The recommendation to create an Institute, as a “stand alone” unit with its own dedicated resources, responds both to the current moment at McGill, and in Montreal, Quebec, and Canada and also the challenges and issues that the African Studies Program has faced over the years. Indeed, as we underlined above, the major challenge facing the program has always been its under-resourcing, especially lack of full-time, permanent staffing of faculty. This has consistently impeded the ASP’s ability to function properly, fulfil its mission, or grow. It cannot regularly offer courses outside of the bare minimum. This lack of dedicated resources was commented upon by every single stakeholder consulted by the WG. It is crucial to emphasize that a number of respondents indicated that the weakness of African Studies at McGill is directly linked to the university’s history of systemic racism, which has limited its growth and prevented African Studies from developing into a robust unit.

Our recommendation to create this Institute is thus linked to a substantial request for resources, the most important of which is the hiring of fully appointed tenured and tenure-track professors who are not jointly appointed to other units. We begin with a recommendation of six hires, to be hired over two years (three in the first, and three in the second), four tenured and two tenure-track. This is elaborated on in more detail below, as are other linked requests for resources.

An Interdisciplinary/Interfaculty Institute

One of the most important core ideas of this Institute, unanimously agreed on by all WG members – from the beginning of our work and all the way through the process – is that it be truly multi- and interdisciplinary. It is important to the WG that this is understood to mean that it is also **interfaculty**. This is a key principle and one of the main things we have insisted upon. Faculty members appointed to the Institute thus could be grounded in one or more disciplines in a variety of ways, but they must not be so disciplinarily bound that their participation in forming and shaping this Institute’s work would be difficult. Further, the initial hires in this Institute should be scholars whose work is recognized within African, African Diaspora, and Black Studies. They must be committed to working together to shape the Institute for the future. We also strongly suggest that, as much as possible, they be scholars already working synergistically across the artificially imposed boundaries that seek to separate African Studies and/or Black Studies and/or Caribbean Studies etc., and that this be written into the job postings and lists of responsibilities.

Because of this unique and ground-breaking formation, which will be the only unit of its kind in the country, the WG also proposes that in its nascent phase the Institute not be assigned to one pre-existing McGill Faculty. We understand that this is unorthodox, but we suggest this for a series of reasons. The first is so the Institute does not become *de facto* a part of one Faculty or disciplinary approach above others, enabling it to maintain a true commitment to the inter/multidisciplinarity central to its mission. While we recognize the important role that the fields in Arts will inevitably play, we are extremely aware that important and ground-breaking work in African, Black, African Diaspora Studies is being done and has been done in Law,

Education, Medicine, Music and so on. Another reason for this somewhat unusual request is that we would like the Institute not to be immediately immersed in a university “scramble” and competition for resources on a faculty level when its goals and mission is to work outside and beyond any one faculty. In order for the Institute to become fully established, we suggest that it be administered directly out of the Office of the Provost for a period of five to ten years, perhaps five years renewable to ten years, with the intention of finding and assessing a permanent, viable institutional home for the Institute that will not detract from its dedication to interfaculty collaboration.

Please note, however, that we insist, as a group of primarily African and Black faculty, that this Institute should not be folded into an office of equity or “EDI,” which we feel would undermine its establishment as a true academic and scholarly centre for research and teaching. It should not therefore be marginalized from other units in this way.

Dedicated, Fully-Appointed T/TT Hires and Administrative Staff

Hiring dedicated staff is needed to make the Institute a reality, and also to make it a success. The WG has paid close and careful attention to the issue of underfunding and under resourcing initiatives, especially those experienced by racialized faculty members in university environments, and thus, though our recommendations do require significant resources. These resources are appropriate, necessary, and will lead to the success of the Institute.

The Institute will also require dedicated staff members who can navigate the administrative side of the university. In addition to a staff member who can handle the usual operational and administrative work of finances, space coordination, student requests, etc., we propose hiring a community liaison with the capacity to and responsibility of broadening the scope of what the Institute does, discussed further below.

Timeline and mechanisms of hiring

The timeline for hiring the required faculty and the mechanisms by which they are hired are a crucial part of our proposal to form a dedicated, stand-alone Institute at McGill. As with other targets set out in the Action Plan to Address Anti Black Racism at McGill, we would like to emphasize the importance of short, achievable timelines. We therefore suggest that the six initial dedicated hires in the Institute be completed in two years, with three hires in each year – two tenured and one untenured per year if possible. This would be complemented by a minimum additional four hires over the next four years, for a total of ten members fully appointed to the Institute. These faculty appointments are a modest request that can easily be drawn from the stated commitments by the university to hire a minimum of 40 Black faculty by 2025 and 85 by 2032.

The rationale behind this number of hires, and the pace of hiring, is based on a number of factors drawn from our extensive research into parallel programs at peer institutions. We have balanced here the need for a unit that is large enough to cover a range of teaching needs and desires of a new graduate and strengthened undergraduate program, as well as the increased service load that comes with not only developing an Institute but one in this area of study. As the first visibly Black and African dedicated space on

campus, this Institute will inevitably do a great deal of work with Black and African students and other community members.

We are careful to propose the hiring of three people at a time, so as to bring people to McGill in cohorts, fostering community and building collaboratively, working against the isolation so often reported by new faculty of colour, especially Black faculty, at the university. Retention is also on our minds in this hiring process. People with a positive hiring and initial experience in a university hire are more likely to stay than those with a negative experience. Hiring in small groups and relatively rapidly, creating a critical mass of scholars can provide the kind of excitement that a newly developed Institute like this will generate. It is crucial that with the additional loads that Black professors carry that this is taken into account at every level of the hiring and development of the Institute for the tenured and tenure-track faculty alike.

The mechanism for hiring and appointments will necessarily need to be worked out in more detail, with the establishment of a new unit. Given that the Institute will exist outside of any one Faculty, it will be necessary to create guidelines for promotion, tenure, and annual reviews that attest to McGill's commitment of transparency, recruiting excellent scholars, and retaining more Black faculty members. In addition, resource commitments (for example, T/TT hiring licenses, administrative staff) should be earmarked specifically for the Institute. Our firm recommendation is that the positions be hired to work in an open search for scholars of African/African diaspora, Black studies, Caribbean Studies, etc., who take an integrated approach both to their research and teaching agendas. The specific areas they work in need not be predetermined or set, but rather coordinated in the hiring process. Preference should be always given to those with research and teaching interests that encompass the Institute's broader vision. With this in mind, it is crucial that the main areas of concentration and interest of hires in the Institute, initially and as it develops and grows, be equally divided (50-50) among those with a primary focus on Africa and those with a primary focus on Black Studies, Black life, and the diaspora. We anticipate that the university will continue to build upon this firm and solid basis, by maintaining a strong commitment to the growth of the Institute through additional hiring. This should be determined by the needs articulated by the unit itself, as its momentum and reputation grow.

There would be a single hiring committee for all three positions each year that would remain the same and review applications together, interviewing to bring in all three people with attention to their primary areas of focus. Our rationale for this is twofold. First, this approach will streamline the hiring process and make it easier. As we have few professors at McGill with such research and teaching interests, we are aware that the service load is heavy. This unique hiring committee plan will address this and avoid the already high service loads of these colleagues. Second, this committee structure will be more coherent for the shape of the Institute and avoid disjointed hiring processes that undermine the overall integrated and unified vision for the institute.

This committee might be somewhat larger than a typical committee to ensure the kind of breadth and representation needed for such a complex hiring situation. The members of the hiring committee must be chosen from the current faculty who work in the African Studies Program, current faculty working in African Diaspora and Black Studies at McGill, and must include some members of this WG. Moreover, a minimum of 3 members of the Caucus, recommended by the Caucus, should serve on the committee/s. The shared job description for these hires should be formulated in line with the vision outlined by this report, put together by the WG, and take its principles into account.

The WG is acutely aware of the extra service loads borne by Black professors and especially those hired to work to develop a new unit such as this. We would like from the beginning to emphasize that there should be a minimal or zero teaching requirement for the new hires for a minimum of one, and up to two years, so that the new hires can fully establish their research programs and build up the infrastructure needed for the Institute to succeed and thrive. While the details would need to be worked out, the requirement to teach only minimally would help to integrate the colleagues into the life of the university before giving them extra responsibilities. This would be a moment as well to determine where Institute Associate members could be called upon to help form the future of the Institute with the new hires.

Pathways to Belonging: Associates and Affiliates

The WG has been clear that though we propose the staffing of the Institute must be made up of faculty with dedicated lines within the new unit, that we have staff at McGill currently – and we are recruiting more – whose research and teaching interests will overlap those of the Institute. We want to be sure that we design the Institute in a way that it is fully successful and vibrant. This is one reason that we have worked with and consulted the Caucus so closely. We want to be sure that faculty members, especially Black faculty at McGill, have a place and role in the Institute if they choose to.

We suggest that the Institute be founded, from the beginning, with a program of Associate Membership, a specific mechanism for which can be developed later. Our recommendation is to provide a way for current and future faculty hired at McGill to be formally a part of the program. This would be tailored to people who have research and teaching interests in African Studies/African Diaspora/Black Studies/Caribbean Studies, etc. The Associate Membership program would require a formal application and would be a modality that empowers faculty to participate in research, graduate teaching and mentorship, have their courses cross-listed, and so on. Based on our research and consultations there is a moderate but firm demand for this type of system.

The WG further suggests another level of Institute participation, a program of Affiliate Membership, that would be appropriate for people who want to participate in the Institute in a more informal way. This could be open to community members, supporters, allies, and others with an interest in African Studies/African Diaspora/Black Studies/Caribbean Studies, but without the expertise or experience to participate formally to be a part of the Institute. Based on our consultations there is a wide interest in this kind of possibility, and creating Affiliate Membership would respond substantively to the community outreach visions of the ABRP plan.

Based on our consultations and research, we propose an option to address the needs of a much smaller – very small – but potentially important number of people who might truly want to change units or be cross appointed to this unit when it is established. There will be few, but we encourage the development of a specific, clear, and transparent pathway for faculty who might wish to pursue this option. Especially to retain excellent African/Black faculty, we feel that the possibility of helping people transition to working in an established Institute if this is important to them should be made a possibility and will go a long way to preventing the kind of discord that frequently occurs in university environments when new units are established.

Graduate Programs

The WG did not arrive at the conclusion to recommend the development of a fully-fledged graduate program (MA and PhD) lightly. After much consultation, study, and reflection of other programs, as well as looking at McGill's profile and other programs, we determined that this was a bold and necessary path for us to recommend. Graduate study is one of the cornerstones of research excellence at McGill. Our graduate programs are renowned worldwide and part of what draws excellent professors and students to the university. The ability to work with world class graduate students also helps to retain faculty and encourages them to stay here.

Establishing an Institute with a graduate program, moreover, truly will make McGill stand out. It will be a one-of-a-kind program, even now when many initiatives around Black Studies are proliferating around the country. It is perhaps fitting that at a university with the track record of research excellence that we have the proposal would not focus only on a small, undergraduate teaching program, but to imagine ourselves as leaders in the country, ready to begin forming and training the scholars and teachers of the future by creating a graduate program. Through a variety of course options and supervisors built as the Institute develops, students in the graduate programs, and eventually the undergraduate program, will have had the opportunity to engage in study that is integrated rather than siloed in the traditional ways that African, Black, Caribbean Studies etc. have been, while yet allowing them latitude to pursue academic, professional, and personal interests that may be more heavily informed by one or other of these aspects. Graduates from the programs will be fully equipped to, if necessary, take up faculty positions in academic units that are more traditionally defined.

Having an MA and PhD program, in fact, would allow for a synergy between newly hired faculty, current faculty who would become associates and others, as well as providing better support for the expansion of the undergraduate program with time. Developing a proper graduate program also would allow for more possibilities to develop once the Institute is more established, such as an option or certificate in African and/or African Diaspora and/or Black Studies to be a part of a degree in another disciplinary unit. This type of option already exists in Women and Gender Studies at McGill and is very popular. A recent survey of students showed many students in a range of fields chose to come to McGill because they could pursue this option. This collaboration with other departments would also allow for more productive integration of the study of Africa and African diasporas and Black life across the university. A full graduate program can also help to generate funding from external and private sources, as well as post-doctoral fellowships, providing a dynamic and rigorous scholarly atmosphere.

For the Institute to launch itself as a viable research unit with a graduate program, there must be a commitment to funding graduate students in its early years, especially as we are proposing it be housed for a period directly under the auspices of the Provost's office. This commitment to funding is crucial given that building the Institute's graduate program is a response to the ABRP's call to recruit and retain excellent graduate student applicants from some of our most underrepresented groups on campus. A secure and regular commitment to funding graduate students is crucial to the program's success and the success of graduate students who embark in a new program in a new unit at McGill.

Strengthening the Undergraduate Program

Though we are proposing and emphasizing a new graduate program and the research and scholarly foundation of the Institute, we would like to emphasize strongly that we envision a flourishing and vibrant undergraduate program to develop. The participants in the current AS undergraduate program will necessarily be key and core members of this and of developing this program, especially the faculty members who have sustained it and kept it running in the past years. We see that in the first phase of the establishment of the Institute that the ASP as it stands must be maintained and strengthened. It should still be run by a Chair and a committee of professors working in the field but housed within the new Institute as its administrative home. This will keep continuity in the program and allow the undergraduate students to be advised and mentored. As the undergraduate program grows, broadens, and strengthens in later phases, changes will be made as deemed necessary by the committee.

The undergraduate program can be expanded and grow from what already exists in the ASP, and this will only be enhanced by the development of graduate studies. The new focus of the Institute and its related teaching programs can be achieved with revised course descriptions; course offerings will be planned and built and added to the existing program, in conjunction with the development of the graduate program. An expanded and strengthened undergraduate program will become robust and flourish with the hiring of new members of the Institute and as the graduate program expands. This will mean regularization of budgets for TAs, the training of graduate students through TAships, and the expansion of course offerings in this way, as well as in courses offered by full Institute members as the Institute is built. The undergraduate program will also be able easily to take advantage of courses offered by Associate Members, and these will be updated and centralized more easily than they are currently because of this status. No longer will the course offerings rely on short term course lectureships and courses from outside. In this vein the WG notes that the AS program has regularly taught Swahili and relied on short term course lecturer contracts to staff the teaching of this important language. For the program to maintain language teaching, crucial to African Studies, we suggest that a full time Faculty Lecturer be hired to teach Swahili to better support the growth and maintenance of this language program.

The Working Group is aware that there will be a transitional period until the establishment of an Institute bringing together African studies, Diasporic studies, and Black studies together and so we recommend that the ASP be maintained and strengthened in the period while the Institute is being built, including providing a stable budget allocation to the program, so that a more appealing contract might be offered to people offering the core courses in the undergraduate program, including language courses (Swahili) and constituted financial support for *Uhuru: The McGill Undergraduate African Studies Journal*.

Community Engagement and Alumni Relations

Our vision for this Institute includes substantial connections and collaborations with the diverse Black communities of Montreal and beyond. We do not seek to create an Institute in the echo chambers of the Ivory Tower, with only tangential connections to those in the community that we purport to study and whose lives matter. Rather, the WG is intent that this Institute exist as a hub for Black people both within McGill and in excess of it. An explicit and dedicated commitment to community development, advocacy and engagement will make this Institute unique among its peers.

Community partnerships can take many forms, and we envision a flexible approach that can adapt to changing local, national, and international circumstances. At a minimum, we seek to create an intellectual space for community members to access research and expertise in African Studies, Black Studies, and African Diaspora Studies, a venue for collaboration between scholars and community organizers and organizations, and hub that can connect students, faculty, and staff to community members, and community members to brilliant students, opportunities for funding and/or collaboration, innovative research, artistic expression, and creative thought. In addition, the Institute can tap into the extensive network of African and Black alumni of McGill University, many of whom have been waiting for years for precisely this kind of institutionalized commitment to African and Black Studies to be realized.

In order to ensure that the Institute is serving our immediate and often most precariously positioned people in the Black communities of Montreal, we recognize that many of our events and outreach activities will need to be fully accessible in both English and French.

Funding

The university must commit to initially providing sufficient funding for this institute to succeed. An underfunded project sends a message. Having said this, the WG has been thinking consistently about ways to connect such an Institute with interested donors and other external sources of funding. As a bold project and seeking to be “one of a kind” in Canada through inter and multidisciplinary, innovative, timely, and original research and artistic expression, and a commitment to graduate training as well as undergraduate program development, there are many possibilities.

The ABRP states that it will “work, through University Advancement, with our alumni and donor communities to increase scholarships and student aid opportunities that will enhance supports for students – at the undergraduate, Master’s and Doctoral levels – from McGill’s most underrepresented student demographic groups.” We suggest that the proposed Institute is the ideal location for recruiting both students and also funding to the university. The plan also calls for a fund earmarked to support Faculty-level initiatives tied to recruitment, outreach, and engagement. This is to increase representation throughout McGill’s student body. The proposed Institute will be a hub and centre for these initiatives.

Space

Consistent with the above commitments, it will be important for the Institute to have an identifiable physical location on campus where its meetings and some of its main activities can take place. Understandably, this space initially might not be able to house all of the faculty that will be hired into the Institute, but the three hires in the first year (and to the extent possible, all six hires in the first two years) should be located close to each other and within/close to the physical centre of activities of the Institute.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our recommendations are rooted in our commitment and dedication to the frame of the Caucus Demands, McGill's ABRP, and the Scarborough Charter. The establishment of this Institute responds to the long history of the call for a substantive and expansive approach and institutionalization of African, Black and African Diaspora Studies at McGill. Our work as evidenced in this report offers a clear direction to fulfil this goal. Now is the time to be bold, to be resolute, and to reinvigorate our commitments to African, Black, and African Diaspora Studies at McGill University.