

The deadline for feedback is the end of day on March 15, 2021.

### **Black Studies: Charting Our Path**

UNO Strategic Investment: Social Justice, Inequality, Race, and Class, March 1, 2021

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#### **Project Description**

Fall 2021 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of UNO's Department of Black Studies, making it one of the oldest continuous departments of Black Studies in the country. The roots of Black Studies at UNO can be connected to events that were happening in the nation, Omaha, and on our campus. The event perhaps most decisive to the founding of Black Studies at UNO was the activism of the Omaha 54 – Black students who demanded equity, access, and respect from their university and society. We propose that the university support Black Studies: Charting Our Path. An initial research focus on the 54 Black students arrested by the Omaha Police Department during the 1969 campus protest will lead into the research, dissemination, and celebration of the impact and resiliency of the Department of Black Studies and the UNO Student experience through connection with current students, alumni, and community members.

Black Studies: Charting Our Path will provide multiple avenues for students, faculty, staff, alumni, and members of the Omaha community to understand the history of the department, celebrate its present, and reckon with UNO's past. This will be accomplished through a multi-faceted educative, collaborative, and outreach approach that interweaves historical research with active community engagement. The 1960s were a time of great change and unrest across the country, and Omaha was no different with FBI surveillance and extrajudicial killing of members of the Black community, including 14-year-old Vivian Strong the summer before the Omaha 54's protest and arrest. The proposed project will support the description, digitization, and preservation of relevant historical records held by UNO Libraries' Archives and Special Collections, community partner the Great Plains Black History Museum, and individual community members. In addition to planning campus and community talks and events, the proposed project will engage with the UNO and Omaha communities through temporary and permanent exhibitions and displays on campus, at the Great Plains Black History Museum, at community events such as Juneteenth and Native Omaha Days, and online.

Student researchers will be mentored by Black Studies and Library faculty as they examine the history and mutual support between the department and the community. The student researchers will include UNO student employees, students working under the mentorship of faculty (as part of courses and research awards and grants), and OPS high school students. Research findings will be disseminated through academic research and creative activity venues as well as community outreach and engagement activities such as workshops, presentations, as well as creative and artistic performances. Faculty and students will conduct research placing the Department of Black Studies and the Omaha 54 within its relevant local and national historical and contemporary contexts, while engaging with students, alumni, and community members and organizations. While the primary sources used for researching these topics may be perceived as structured content, this project will provide opportunities for students and the community to bring creativity to their study, enjoyment, reckoning with, and re-use.

The Department of Black Studies has always had a close and inter-connected relationship with Omaha's Black community. Community members advocated for the department's founding in 1971 and over the decades attended public meetings at UNO, providing testimony before the Board of Regents to support its continuation.<sup>1</sup> Archives and Special Collections acknowledges that more could have been done to preserve and share the history of student activism, especially Black student and community activism. Archives and Special Collections is committed to undertaking the reparative archives work necessary to remedy these conscious and unconscious omissions from the university and other local archives. Part of this work includes digitizing and publishing collections online, increasing access to material already in archives, recording oral history interviews, and advocating for community archives. Other elements include strengthening the existing relationship with the Great Plains Black History Museum to highlight its related collections through description and digitization, supporting service learning

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<sup>1</sup> Testimony Prepared for the University of Nebraska Board of Regents, "[A Question of Racism and the Absence of Political Will](#)," A.B. Buddy Hogan, President Omaha NAACP, 1984, Department of Black Studies Records, UNO Libraries.

opportunities, and offering free workshops to community members who wish to maintain their own personal archives. We propose this project in part to reckon with past failures as part of moving forward to embrace authentic diversity, equity, access, and inclusion for UNO, Omaha, and the wider community.

### **Partnerships and Funding Opportunities**

**Campus Partnerships:** The Department of Black Studies and the Library are the primary partners with potential partnerships with other academic departments and units as well as the Alumni Association. Internal funding such as Affordable Content Grants, FUSE, GRACA, and other awards may support faculty and students.

**Community Partnerships:** The primary community partner will be the Great Plains Black History Museum, which will host a traveling exhibit, collaborate on the description and digitization of relevant historical material from its collection, and partner to record oral history interviews. The project will also collaborate with individual alumni and community members, those who have primary sources and stories to share, and community radio and newspapers. We intend to work with OPS's Making Invisible Histories Visible program to recruit their high school students to also work on the project.

**External Funding Opportunities:** Humanities Nebraska (exhibits, lectures, and collections), National Historical Publications and Records Commission (Public Engagement with Historical Records), Mellon Foundation (Community-Based Archives).

**Philanthropic and Community Organizations:** Iowa West Foundation (Place-making), corporate foundations.

### **Student-Related Outcomes**

**Black Studies: Charting Our Path** will provide UNO students opportunities to undertake research and creative activity under the close mentorship of faculty. This may include traditional research such as following historical or sociological methods as well as work with alumni and community members that results in musical, theatrical, artistic, and other creative works. For this project, faculty and student employees will collaborate and engage with a wide student audience through existing student organizations, learning communities, and other formal and informal campus networks. Service learning opportunities may include supporting museum and UNO programs with K-12 school children and older adults. Collaborating with the museum may offer students interested in museum studies and non-profit management experiential opportunities in curating exhibitions, developing communication and marketing plans, and leading workshops. Working with alumni to learn and share their experiences as UNO students will not only give current students insight into university history and the resiliency of their forebears, but also contribute to a network of community supported by the project.

### **Metrics for Evaluating Success**

<b>Objective</b>	<b>This Objective Will Be Met By:</b>
Encourage and support student research opportunities.	Mentoring that results in at least four FUSE grant applications, one GRACA application, and three submissions to the Student Research and Creative Activity Fair.
Contribute to a university that knows, values, and is understanding its history of diversity, equity, access, and inclusion.	At least five exhibitions on and off campus about the Department of Black Studies and the UNO student experience curated by faculty and students with collaboration from alumni and community members. A plan developed for the ongoing communication and celebration of the history of the UNO student experience to new generations of students, alumni, and the community.
Increase awareness of the Black student experience and the Department of Black Studies at UNO including its place in local and national historical and disciplinary landscapes.	At least three proposed presentations at regional and national conferences, at least two journal articles, at least three news stories, and public engagement with regularly-published social media posts.

Expand access to primary sources about UNO's Department of Black Studies, Black students, faculty, and staff, as well as the larger Omaha community.	Increase the number of UNO courses that incorporate relevant primary sources from Archives and Special Collections and the Great Plains Black History Museum. Create at least four lesson plans for middle and high school students integrating primary sources from the repositories. Increase the amount of historical material available to the public from Black students, alumni, faculty, staff, and the community in the archives and museum.
Encourage increased engagement with students and alumni of UNO.	Year over year increase in the number of contacts with alumni by the partners and hosting at least one virtual, one in-person, and two community events each year focusing on Black alumni and the Omaha community. An alumni advisory board is created and meets regularly. A student advisory board is also created. A further marker will be successful collaborations with the Alumni Association to identify and steward relationships and events.