NEW DEPT. WILL FOCUS ON AFRICAN STUDIES

KIM PDPIOLEK //ACADEMICS

The MSU Board of Trustees has approved the establishment of a Department of African-American and African Studies, which will be part of the College of Arts and Letters. The new department will support the work of students, faculty and staff associated with the existing African-American and African Studies, or AAAS, program and will help re-establish MSU’s position as a national leader in Black and Africana studies.

“Establishing a Department of African-American and African Studies has long been the goal of the unit since its founding,” said Glenn Chambers, associate professor and director of the African-American and African Studies program. “I’m elated that the faculty, students, staff and all the units in the College of Arts and Letters get to see the fruition of our efforts. What has transpired today has truly been a collaborative effort and all involved should be proud,”

The board voted on Feb. 16 to support the creation of the new department. The emphasis on gender and sexuality studies and critical feminist approaches as they relate to African peoples and African-descended peoples — which are major areas of study for the department — are lacking at other higher education institutions and will position MSU to be a leader in the discipline, said Christopher P. Long, dean of the College of Arts and Letters.

“This is a landmark moment for the college and university,” Long said. “We are putting our commitment to equity into practice by creating a department that will support the intellectual lives of scholars and students in African-American and African studies for generations to come.”

A major goal of the new department is to establish an undergraduate major within the next five years. The bachelor’s degree in AAAS will provide opportunities for graduate students in AAAS to acquire much-needed experience teaching in their discipline. The AAAS undergraduate minor, which recently was revised to streamline courses and allow more course options for minors in the College of Arts and Letters and the College of Social Science, will continue to be offered with no changes anticipated.

Also, no changes are anticipated to the AAAS offerings of the graduate program, but the new department will help re-establish the AAAS Ph.D. program as a national and international leader in the field."
VETERAN PROFESSOR NAMED FACULTY GRIEVANCE OFFICIAL

Francisco Villaruel, an associate chair in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies, has been approved by the Board of Trustees to serve as the university's faculty grievance official.

His appointment was recommended by a University Committee for Faculty Affairs search committee after serving as the responsible administrator for the Faculty Grievance and Dispute Resolution Office for the fall 2018 semester.

The office responds to inquiries from MSU faculty, academic staff and administrators concerning alleged violations of MSU policies and practices, attempting to informally resolve grievance members. Members of the faculty also conduct formal grievance hearings when necessary, work with the General Counsel and Provost offices and the University Committee on Faculty Affairs to help resolve disputes and review and recommend changes in MSU Human Resources policies.

Villaruel, who joined MSU in 1998, is the associate chair for education and outreach and a University Outreach and Engagement Senior Fellow. His research interests include juvenile justice system reform and disproportionate minority contact, youth development and Latino youth and families.

He has been active on many academic governance committees, including Athletic Council, Academic Council, Faculty Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs, University Committee on Faculty Affairs, Undergraduate Academy and MSU’s University Naming Committee, as well as numerous college and department committees.

The MSU Fraunhofer Center for Coatings and Diamond Technologies is developing a scalable treatment option for PFAS-contaminated wastewater.

The MI Spartan Impact initiative, a data program used to illustrate the university’s impact on the statewide economy, is part of the Spartan Advocacy program. MI Spartan Impact is used largely to encourage legislators to make decisions with higher education and MSU's land-grant mission in mind.

In 2018 alone, the university contributed $5.1 billion in total economic impact statewide.

“I encourage all my district staff to sign up for this program,” Warner added. “They have expedited the proposal writing of their local representatives and made it easy to stay in the know on issues we face in higher ed.”

Jeremy Reuter, director for statewide advocacy for MSU, oversees the Spartan Advocacy initiative and its database of 1,500 highly engaged advocates.

Reuter keeps advocates in the loop through a series of email and social media communications, but he plans to expand efforts by connecting with departments on campus and alumni groups across the state.

“From a government relations perspective, campus is very strategically positioned,” he said. “Because we’re only a few miles away from the Capitol, it’s easier to host state officials and encourage advocacy from the Spartan community as a whole.”

At the Spartan Caucus on March 5, alumni legislators were invited to campus to dine with MSU’s Government Relations team at Brody Square. The governor’s proposed budget was a topic of discussion along with partnerships between MSU and the state and ways MSU can help support various legislative committees through research and expertise.

“The face time our team gets with legislators is important to keeping advocates informed on the current priorities,” Reuter added. “It’s also a great opportunity to connect research and expertise on campus with the various committees our Spartan Caucus legislators serve.”

David Bertram, associate vice president for State Relations, sees polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, being an immediate topic that MSU will be working with the legislature on in the coming year, as it’s been identified as a priority by Whitmer and others. PFAS are a group of harmful man-made chemicals that are very persistent in the environment and in the human body. PFAS have been discovered in several water sources across the state.

“MSU is poised to provide significant research and remediation resources in partnership with the state to address this PFAS issue,” Bertram said.

Now is a great time to become a Spartan Advocate, according to Reuter; there are 28 elected officials currently serving in Michigan’s 100th Legislature. Anyone with an interest in advocating for MSU and higher education can become a Spartan Advocate at mispartanimpact.msu.edu.

You can also explore the MI Spartan Impact data and read stories about Spartans making a difference across the state.

The MI Spartan Impact program at MSU was founded in 2010.

“MSU already has tremendous faculty and students with research and interests in the focus areas of the new department, and we can only continue to grow,” said Kristie Dotson, associate professor of political science, who has been leading the AAAS vision process, bringing interested faculty together to imagine and construct the new department.

“Having official department status means greater support for research, teaching and engagement beyond the campus that promises to be transformative,” she said.

Focusing on the study and production of knowledge of Africa and the African Diaspora, especially in the United States, the Caribbean and Latin America, the new department will bring the experiences of regional African-American and African-descended peoples to the forefront in Michigan and/or the Upper Midwest into dialogue with the broader African Diaspora.

“We must embrace the intellectual substance of African-American and African studies by building curriculum and support- ing an organizational structure that conveys with clarity and urgency, how important Black and Africana studies is to Michigan, from Detroit to Muskegon, from Lansing to Detroit, from the United States to Africa and the broad African Diaspora,” Long said.

The current AAAS program at MSU was founded in 2002.
folk FOCUS

The Community Engagement Scholarship Lifetime Achievement Award program was established to provide university-wide recognition for senior faculty members of outstanding sustained accomplishment in community-engaged scholarship through research, creative activities, teaching, service and practice. Due to the highly selective nature of this recognition, it is intended to be conferred rarely, by a truly exemplary body of work. Given Carl Taylor’s long years of collaboration and leadership designed to improve community life, MSU is honored to present him with the award.

“Taylors work has evolved over the years,” said Taylor, “focused in the beginning on urban America, and in particular, Detroit.”

Taylor says “That means we’re looking at post-industrial America, post-industrial Detroit. It’s a very conflicted viewpoint, my work. It started with me looking at reality — I don’t like the word inner city — because Detroit is designed funny — but it definitely is the urban location and urban schools.”

“Taylor told me that he’d changed over the years. "One of my major pros is that I was in my very young career," he said. Taylor said students have changed over the years. "One of my major prots is that I was a professor in the classroom — and it’s the whole society — so we don’t read newspapers. Even if we get our information has changed. I think that’s hurt us tremendously. I see it in the students. We used to have more contact of one, or even collectively, with human beings.”

Taylor, though, is somewhat optimistic about the future as he proposes solutions. “I think our two greatest challenges are, first, family. The reality is that we need to come together with agreeable, functional, basic training and understanding. That’s what we have to use. Families are the foundation for everything else. I also think that more public education is important. And public education goes beyond the bricks and mortar. Public education is in our spiritual faith-based institutions, but is also about the atmosphere that we create.”

MSU Today airs Sunday afternoons at 4 p.m. on 105.5-FM and AM-870.

MSU UPDATES RETIREMENT FUND OPTIONS

Megan Maggregor // Human Resources

MSU, after periodically reviewing the investment options available for the 403(b) Retirement Plan and the 457(b) Deferred Compensation Plan, will be making a pair of changes to the core investment menus, effective in April.

The Principal Real Estate Securities Fund, a real estate investment fund, will be added to both the Fidelity and TIAA core investment menus.

For the Fidelity core menu, the Principal Real Estate Securities Fund will replace the Cohen & Steers Institutional Realty Shares Fund. On the effective transaction date, the balance will be transferred from the current fund to the new fund, and any future contributions will go into the new fund.

For the TIAA core menu, the Principal Real Estate Securities Fund will be added as a new investment option. The TIAA Real Estate Account variable annuity that is currently on the core menu will be frozen, meaning any new contributions or transfers will be allowed into this fund after the effective transaction date and any balance in this fund will remain in the fund (and will NOT be transferred to the new fund).

Participants will receive communications with more detail, including the April transaction date, from their retirement vendor.
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INSIDEMSU

INSIDEMSU STAFF
//ADVANCEMENT

RESEARCH WEBSITES SERVE AS RESOURCE FOR FACULTY

TRUMP’S CLIMATE EXPERT IS WRONG: THE WORLD’S PLANTS DON’T NEED MORE CO2

Plants on Earth have flourished for hundreds of millions of years, yet President Donald Trump’s pick to lead his new climate team insists that they need more carbon dioxide to thrive.

“CO2 does ‘fertilize’ plants and by itself causes plants to grow faster, but unchecked CO2 release into the atmosphere will lead to reduced yields and the consequences could be catastrophic,” said Thomas Sharkey, a plant biochemist at Michigan State University.

WANT LOVE? SWIPE RIGHT FOR ‘NICE’ AND LEFT FOR ‘NEUROTIC’

Similar interests, similar personality — that’s what matters for long-term happiness in a relationship, right? Not so, according to a new study by researchers at Michigan State University. “The more conscientious, agreeable and emotionally stable both you and your partner are, this is associated with a more positive sense of well-being,” said William Chopik, director of the Close Relations- ships Lab and the study’s lead author. His research group is part of the Department of Psychology at MSU.

HOW THE SAMSUNG GALAXY S10’S COOL NEW FINGERPRINT SENSOR WORKS

Anil Jain, a professor of computer science at Michigan State University and expert in bio- metrics, says that the sound waves are typically around 200 kilohertz when measuring something like a fingerprint. At higher frequencies, ultrasonic waves are too weak to penetrate deeply: your fingerprint. Samsung says that the sensor can see your print in three dimensions. “Three-dimensional simply means that they can look at the depth of the ridges and valleys,” Jain says.

POPULAR SCIENCE

go.msu.edu/LMH

SOCIAL SCIENCE MAKES NEW HIRES AS PART OF RESEARCH INITIATIVE

Gabriel Sanchez holds a monkeyface prickleback while discussing coastal ecology with the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band on the California coast. PHOTO/ COURTESY OF THE COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

REBECCA JENSEN //RESEARCH

Four new research associ- ates have been hired in the College of Social Science as part of the Dean’s Research Associate Program, established in 2009 as a major college initiative aimed at promoting an inclusive scholarly environment.

The four associates have a minimal teaching load while being mentored and sup- ported and participating in the Dean’s Research Asso- ciate Development Program, with the goal of a possible transition into tenure-sys- tem positions at MSU after two years of productivity.

Nwando Achebe, the Jack and Margaret Sweet endowed Professor of History and the Faculty Excellence Advocate for the college, is leading the initiative.

“The College of Social Science’s strategic priority of building a diverse and welcom- ing, deriving strength from a plurality of identities and lived experiences is embodied in the scholarly contributions of these four talent- ed social scientists,” Achebe said. The college is com- mitting significant resources to support the program, including salaries, research and travel space and faculty time in mentoring the individuals. The scholars are:

• Monique D. A. Kelly, Department of Sociology, is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Sociology Department at the University of California Irvine. Her research focuses on racial and ethnic identi- ties, attitudes and inequality, as well as on immigration processes connected to those social dynamics.

• Danielle Lemi, Department of Political Science, is a postdoctoral fellow in the Latino Public Policy and the Latino Center for Leadership Develop- ment and the John G. Tower Center for Political Studies at Southern Meth- odist University in Dallas, where she teaches Amer- ican politics. Her current research interests revolve around understanding how identity informs formal politics.

• Nakia Parker, Department of History, is a doctoral can- didate in the Department of History at the University of Texas at Austin. Her project, “Fails of Tears and Freedom: Slavery, Migration, and Emanicipation in the Indian Territory Border- lands, 1830-1907,” exam- ines the forced migrations, resettlement patterns and labor practices of people of African and black Indian de- scent enslaved in Choctaw and Chickasaw communities in the 19th century.


• Joseph Kuszai Jr., history and design pro- fessor, died Feb. 12. Kuszai joined the staff in 1964 and retired in 2015.

ROBERT HUBBARD

Robert Hubbard, College of Engineering pro- fessor, died Feb. 5. Hubbard joined the staff in 1977 and retired in 2006.

MYRON KELSEY


EVELYN HOWE


HELEN HEAD

Helen Head, College of Osteopathic Medicine Dean’s Office administrative assistant, died Jan. 22. Head joined the staff in 1965 and retired in 1989.

WILMA GILLESPIE


NORMALEE FISHER


J. RAY GILLESPIE


J. ROBERT HUBBARD

Robert Hubbard, College of Engineering pro- fessor, died Feb. 5. Hubbard joined the staff in 1977 and retired in 1983.

EVELYN HOWE


JOSEPH KUSZAI JR.


BRUCE MITCHELL

Bruce Mitchell, associate professor in the Department of Teacher Education, died Jan. 11. Mitchell joined the staff in 1972 and retired in 2002.