For the past year the African Studies Program (AFST) was characterized largely by strengthening both faculty and student involvement, as well as in conceiving long-term goals. We are highly optimistic that the investments will pay off well in the coming years.

Existing AFST faculty were active nationally and internationally, among other activities in: exercising leadership positions in professional organizations; participating in important academic gatherings; serving as journal editors; providing peer review feedback; offering expert services to businesses and government; and writing nationally-competitive funding proposals.

Indeed, the College of Charleston’s AFST visibility at the national level was far greater than its numbers would lead one to expect, and this fact presumably played a role in the African Literature Association (ALA) electing to host its annual conference in Charleston in 2013, a decision that represents a major coup for the College in terms of international scholarship visibility.

In terms of students, while the year started on a pessimistic note following major losses to graduation, a good group of new minors signed up – including incoming freshmen with previous experience in Africa. Largely on their own initiative, our minors have subsequently revived the long-defunct African Studies Club. While their doing so was technically informal, several of the elected officers will be returning in Fall 2010 and plan to petition the Student Government Association (SGA) for formal recognition and access to an operating budget that will facilitate their ability to offer various political and cultural projects on campus. For many years we faculty have been hoping for a crop of students to attain this level of interest and engagement, and we are eager to nurture the forces that are now clearly in motion.

Course Offerings

Despite the small number of Africa specialists on campus, AFST credits were available through about a dozen courses in Political Science, History, English, Art History, French and German. Faculty were also generous in offering un-reimbursed Independent Study programs for students interested in specialized fields of African Studies.

The core course for the AFST minor remains “AFST 101 Introduction to African Civilization.” Previously offered in alternating terms by Jack Parson (Political Science) and Alpha Bah (History), the course has suffered since Prof. Bah’s retirement a couple years ago and looked to be even worse off following Prof. Parson’s retirement this year. (One faculty member has agreed to offer the course in Fall 2010 as an independent study, with a maximum enrollment of five, and as of July 2010 is turning away enrollment requests.) Fortunately, the incoming History Department Chairperson, Rich Bodek, has declared his enthusiastic support for allowing History faculty to help offer the course on a regular basis.

Enthused by Prof. Bodek’s support, a primary goal of the AFST program in Fall 2010 will be to coordinate between History, Political Science, English, French and possibly other departments to set up a rotating schedule of commitment ensuring that the course will be offered once each Fall and once each Spring Semester, and that the burden of the offerings will be distributed among different departments.
Such regularity will in the long-run be essential to the AFST program and highly beneficial to the new International Studies major. Of course, having an interdisciplinary course regularly offered by faculty from different departments will also affect the nature of the course, as well as encourage critical pedagogical and cross-disciplinary (and intra-continental) dialogue between Africa faculty in different departments.

Students

The period 2009-1010 has without question been the most exciting in many years in terms of student engagement in African Studies. Although many of our minors were graduating seniors, they made the time to become actively involved in resurrecting the African Studies Club, and they readily shared leadership positions with freshmen and sophomores, thereby combining experience with youthful enthusiasm. The fruit of their interactions comprises a returning group of still young students who have the confidence of guided experience and are fired to go. As stated above, the first plan will be to petition for reinstatement as a formally recognized SGA organization, a status that will come with access to funds for sponsoring campus events.

More broadly, as in past years, numerous CofC students studied abroad in Africa during the regular school year, as well as at other times, such as with CofC’s summer program in Morocco, supervised by Profs. Parson and Attafi. Many other students traveled on the continent as tourists or missionaries and returned with deeper interest in AFST offerings. Increased faculty awareness of and attention to such constituencies might strengthen interest in the AFST program in the future.

In terms of recent graduates, available news is impressive and spans the continent. For example:

- Capers Rumph continues to work at Falling Whistles, an NGO devoted to reducing the misery associated with the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Central Africa)
- Meghan Walsh is departing for a Peace Corps assignment in Sierra Leone (West Africa)
- David Callenberger is entering a Ph.D. program at the University of Wisconsin at Madison (to specialize on Southern Africa)

Other students have entered more ‘traditional’ fields, such as law school, but still cite their experiences in African Studies at CofC as fundamental in shaping their thinking and adult insight into international events and politics.

On Campus

AFST faculty worked with colleagues to help incorporate African Studies as a core component of the new International Studies major. Related to that effort, AFST faculty are also continuing to rework classes within their own departments, keeping in mind how their offerings relate to broader requirements and expectations across campus. For example, Prof. Lewis in English is in the process of clarifying distinctions between ENGL 233 and ENGL 234, courses whose content
could – were someone else to teach them – conceivably overlap and thusly affect credit distributions in various fields.

There were numerous on-campus activities worthy of note. For instance:

- "A Successful Liberal Democracy in Africa, What's Up With That?" Presentation by Dr. Jack Parson, Professor of Political Science, Sabbatical Research Presentation.
- “Yvette Christianse Speaks,” A reading exploring the rich themes of South Africa’s history – slavery and apartheid, exile and displacement, by the South African Poet and Novelist, March 19.
- “Blood Chocolate: a Valentine’s Day Awareness Campaign,” a table sponsored and staffed by AFST Minors calling awareness to the issue of child slavery in the West Africa cocoa industry and encouraging students/faculty/staff/everyone else to only buy ‘blood-free’ chocolate, 14 February.

In light of the above comments about increased student involvement in African Studies, it should be noted that the latter two events were organized primarily by AFST undergraduate minors, in the process evidencing the upperclass/underclass relationship we faculty think was crucial this year in terms of transforming the long-term interest of a few students into the core of an AFST group that will come to secure a campus presence for itself in the coming years.

**Faculty**

College of Charleston Africanist faculty participated nationally and internationally in a variety of professional capacities, ranging from scholarly association board positions to human rights organizations to journal editorships. Notably, Prof. Kea Gorden was a member of the board of the Southeast Regional Seminar in African Studies (SERSAS), a long-standing organization that just this year began forging new relations with the Southeast Africa Network (based at the University of Florida and sustained by Title VI federal funding from the U.S. Department of Education). Prof. Carmichael continued to testify as an expert witness in Department of Homeland Security Courts on behalf of asylum applicants from Horn of Africa countries.

In terms of research, our faculty published in a variety of venues and were active in reviewing both funding proposals and articles/manuscripts submitted for publication.

Prof. Parson retired from the College’s active faculty register, though it is hoped he will continue to offer courses in the future. (“At least he better do so,” is how the common sentiment has it.) The Political Science Department position that his departure created was filled by Dr. Kea Gorden, previously a well-liked and highly valued Visiting Assistant Professor here, and her existing standing and popularity at the College will make for a smooth transition. The History Department hired Dr. Assan Saar, a specialist on Precolonial West/Central African History, a position that considerably enriches the College’s geographic and temporal offerings about the continent.

Profs. Parson and Carmichael delivered lectures to a few dozen international personnel from the Cummins Engine Company, a Fortune 500 Corporation that after lengthy consultation with our
AFST faculty decided to host a management seminar in Charleston. The event evidenced the significance of Charleston to African Studies, as well as our AFST faculty’s outreach abilities in appealing to a non-academic constituency.

The Major Achievement

Amidst the many events and developments that occurred over the year, the most exciting news was certainly the success of Prof. Lewis’ proposal for the College of Charleston to lead a local hosting of the African Literature Association’s annual meeting in 2013, under the theme “Literature, Liberation and the Law.” As a major Tier One research level conference customarily lasting five days and including thousands of participants, the annual ALA meeting is a major scholarly event and will bring considerable visibility to the College of Charleston and our African Studies program. Of course, Dr. Lewis already enjoys many campus accolades, but this achievement adds substantially to his growing international reputation and draws exceptional visibility to the College of Charleston and our African Studies program.

Future Plans

In Fall 2010 we intend to host Dr. Chege Githiora, Chair of African Studies at the University of London’s School of Oriental and African Studies. Dr. Githiora authored the only Swahili-Spanish dictionary in existence, and he has published a book on the history and culture of Afro-Mexicans. The intention of inviting him is not just to enrich African Studies, but to bring together faculty from Hispanic Studies, African Studies, African American Studies, History, Anthropology, English, Linguistics and other fields to explore the interstices of epistemological inquiries that connect many of us on campus in ways that we generally do not recognize or take the time to acknowledge. Moreover, as SOAS’s Senior Lecturer in Swahili and a Kikuyu-language author who works with the famous Kenyan novelist and poet Ngugi wa Thiongo, and others, it is hoped that Dr. Githiora will be able to meet with relevant administrators to discuss the challenges that a school like CofC would likely face were it ever to offer instruction in an African language.

Owing to the active participation of CofC faculty in the Southeast Regional Seminar in African Studies (SERSAS), including Prof. Gorden’s membership on the SERSAS Organizing Board, we have been well placed to intervene meaningfully in ongoing discussions about forging relationships between SERSAS and SEAN (a similar group founded more recently at the University of Florida). A major concern for many of us Southeastern college Africanists has been that the Tier I Research schools not totally dominant the agenda. Fortunately, their better-funded faculty have been very open to our concerns. Thus, at this point it appears that the two groups will in the near future combine forces and host two annual meetings, one at a regional college each Fall, and one each Spring that will alternate between the Title VI African Studies Centers of the University of Florida – Gainesville and the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill. Alongside UNC-Charlotte, the College of Charleston seems to be widely viewed as a popular destination for future Fall meetings.