



Department of
Africana Studies
UNIVERSITY *of* PENNSYLVANIA

GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK

Handbook Preface

This handbook is provided to graduate students in the Department of Africana Studies as a resource for navigating their studies within the department.

For University policies related to graduate study, please refer to the Office of the Provost's Graduate Policies for additional academic rules:

<https://provost.upenn.edu/education/graduate>

NOTE: Portions of the content in this handbook have been paraphrased or taken directly from institutional websites of departments and programs at Penn to ensure detailed, accurate presentation of services offered in other parts of the University. Those offices and programs are referenced within the appropriate sections. However, the information provided here is intended as an overview and students should consult the staff and administrators responsible for those services.

About the Department of Africana Studies and the Graduate Group

Africana Studies at the University of Pennsylvania is an interdisciplinary, global Black studies program. Established in 2012, the Department takes a cross-regional approach to the study of African and African Diasporic peoples, cultures, and histories. The Department offers an undergraduate major and minor, a doctoral program, and a graduate certificate for students pursuing degrees in other departments and schools at the University of Pennsylvania. Africana Studies at Penn also houses the Center for Africana Studies, which supports research initiatives and provides institutional and public programming related to learning about race and the lives, cultures, and history of people in Africa and the African diaspora.

Standing Faculty in the department are those who hold a primary appointment in Africana Studies (some of these faculty also hold primary appointments in other departments and/or schools). The Standing Faculty, along with department staff members are responsible for developing and administering all policies related to graduate study within the department, including admissions, funding, curricular and pedagogical instruction, student advising, and evaluation. The Africana Studies Graduate Group includes all Standing Faculty, and faculty from other departments or schools who have a formal affiliation with the department.

Location and contact: Department of Africana Studies
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Advising

Graduate students are assigned a primary advisor based on their research interests and goals at the time of admission. Faculty advisors, along with the Graduate Chair, work with students to assess their progress throughout their time in the program, to set goals, and to plan next steps. As students progress through coursework, they should identify two or three additional faculty members whose work and research interests align with their own who may serve on exam and dissertation committees.

Graduate students who are joint with another department or school are expected to work with a primary advisor in each of their programs. Upon admission, the Graduate Chairs of each department will work with the student to plan a specialized program of study.

Funding and Fellowship Requirements

All incoming Africana Ph.D. students will be notified of their funding package at the time of admission. Whether Africana students receive the standard University graduate package, or the Benjamin Franklin Fellowship, funding provides five academic years of support, as well as a base stipend. The package covers tuition, stipend and fees for the academic year, health insurance costs for twelve months, and basic membership in Penn's athletic facilities.

For remaining summers, students can compete for funding at Penn or externally or seek employment. Information about available funding opportunities is circulated to students as they become available. Students taking a sixth year to complete their dissertations apply to a range of internal and external competitive fellowships to fund their final year.

As a condition of the funding package, graduate students are expected to establish residency near enough to campus to fully participate in the curricular and extracurricular offerings of the department. As they progress through the program, students may receive permission from the Graduate Chair to live elsewhere.

Benjamin Franklin Graduate Fellowship

The Benjamin Franklin Fellowship, named for Penn's founder, is the School of Arts and Sciences' standard funding package for Ph.D. students. It includes five years of guaranteed support.

University-Based and External Funding Opportunities

For graduate students seeking funding to help defray costs related to qualified conference attendance and research, the University of Pennsylvania offers several competitive grant programs throughout the academic year. Students should monitor the funding schedules for each program to ensure that application materials are received on time, as each program's funding cycle and process is structured differently. Graduate students can also receive assistance with identifying and applying for external fellowships and funding opportunities from advisors at the Center for Undergraduate Research & Fellowships (CURF), the Graduate Student Center, and Career Services.

GAPSA: The Graduate and Professional Student Association awards individual research grants to Master's-level and Ph.D. students across the University on a competitive basis. Students are invited to apply whether they are attending or presenting at the conference, although the maximum award for each category will vary. GAPSA runs two funding cycles per year. Letters of recommendation are required.

SAS Dean's Travel Subvention: Each academic year, Ph.D. students in the School of Arts & Sciences are eligible to receive a Dean's Travel Subvention, a grant designed to support conference participation. Students must be actively involved in the conference, either by presenting a paper or serving as a panelist. Although the funding is guaranteed for all full-time Ph.D. students, prior approval from both the Graduate Chair and Faculty Advisor is required before travel. Applications are accepted and reviewed throughout the year.

SAS Graduate Division Research Awards (DRA): Students whose dissertation proposals have been approved by their committee, and are engaged in early or intermediate stages of dissertation research, may be nominated by their Graduate Group for the combined Penfield, Teece, and SAS Dissertation Research Award competition, with award amounts determined by the student's submitted research budget and the committee's evaluation, based on available annual funds.

Penfield Awards support students in "diplomacy, international affairs, and belles-lettres" who need to travel abroad for research, with 'belles-lettres' broadly interpreted to include many humanities topics.

Teece Awards are intended for graduate students in the physical and social sciences conducting applied, empirical, or field-based interdisciplinary research, and may cover expenses such as travel, books, data acquisition, and tuition. SAS Dissertation Research Awards (DRAs) assist students who are ineligible for Penfield or Teece Awards and may also be awarded to otherwise eligible students if Penfield and Teece funds are depleted and they rank higher than remaining candidates.

SAS Graduate Division Dissertation Completion Fellowship (DCF):

As its name suggests, the Dissertation Completion Fellowship (DCF) is designed for students who will complete their dissertations during the fellowship year. Each award includes a standard academic-year stipend, general fee, tuition, and health insurance.

To emphasize the focus on completion, recipients of the SAS Dissertation Completion Fellowship are not eligible for any future fellowship funding from SAS. The strongest candidates are those who will spend much of the fellowship year actively working on their dissertations, rather than those who are already near completion.

Recipients may not accept employment while receiving the stipend unless they receive prior approval from the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies. Additionally, any external awards must be reported to the Associate Dean to ensure proper coordination of benefits.

Fellows are expected to remain in residence at Penn throughout the fellowship year, unless the Graduate Group Chair determines that working elsewhere would significantly support the successful completion of the dissertation.

Additionally, Africana graduate students have been awarded external grants and fellowships to support all stages of doctoral research. In consultation with their Graduate Advisors, students can begin to identify potential sources of funding best suited for their research plans, and for assistance with writing grant proposals. Students are encouraged to begin seeking external funding early in their tenure at the University as many grant and fellowship competitions allow multiple attempts.

Please see the websites below for individual eligibility and application requirements and deadlines for fellowships that may be of interest to students in Africana Studies:

[National Science Foundation](#). Provides grant programs for students in STEM fields and social sciences.

[Andrew W. Mellon Foundation](#). Offers pre-doctoral, dissertation completion, and postdoctoral fellowship competitions.

[The Luce Foundation](#). Offers graduate student research funding for projects related to Asian Studies and/or American Art.

[AAUW American Fellowships](#). Offers support for women scholars at the dissertation and postdoctoral levels.

[National Endowment for the Humanities](#). Supports scholarship, research and professional development through a range of funding and summer study opportunities.

[The Woodrow Wilson Dissertation Fellowship in Women's Studies](#). Supports doctoral candidates in final year of social science or humanities research related to women.

Departmental Support for Conference / Research Travel

After the first year, the Graduate Group may provide Africana doctoral students with additional financial support each academic year to help defray the cost of conference and research related expenses. To access these funds, students must make a request to the Africana Graduate Coordinator in writing before the date of travel. Each student is eligible for a maximum of \$500 per academic year.

[Harold J. Haskins Research Grant for Graduate Students at The Center for Africana Studies](#). Supports research-related costs for graduate students affiliated with The Center for Africana Studies. Each student is eligible for a maximum of \$1,500 per academic year.

Africana Graduate Certificate

The Graduate Certificate in Africana Studies provides students with an interdisciplinary, comparative, cross-regional approach to the social sciences and humanities. This approach enables participants to address their research interests from a wide variety of perspectives than is typically allowed in traditional academic disciplines. The Graduate Certificate Program—particularly participation in the Proseminars—gives students a familiarity with the essential social, historical, cultural, economic, and political background for studying issues that are central to the Africana experience and offers them the ability to produce richly contextualized analyses while maintaining their focus within one discipline.

The Certificate Program expands the professional options of its graduates by providing interdisciplinary training and exposure to the totality of the African Diasporic experience. Such training provides graduates with the flexibility to teach in both traditional academic departments (e.g., one of the cognate disciplines such as Sociology or History) as well as in programs in African American Studies, African Studies, Africana Studies, Black Studies, Ethnic Studies, or American Studies. The Certificate Program is open to students from departments within the School of Arts and Sciences as well as from other schools, including Nursing, Engineering, and the Graduate School of Education.

Requirements

Students in the Certificate Program participate in two semesters of the Africana Studies Proseminar (AFRC 6400), which includes readings from a variety of disciplines in addition to independent research. Students usually take the Proseminar during their first or second year of graduate study. In addition to completing the Proseminar, students must complete four Africana Studies-related courses selected in consultation with the Graduate Chair. These courses may originate in Africana Studies or may be cross-listed with Africana Studies by one of its cognate disciplines. There may be instances, however, in which courses not cross-listed with Africana Studies will be suitable for a student's certificate program subject to the Graduate Chair's approval.

Students may apply to the Graduate Certificate Program in Africana Studies during their first or second year of study. A maximum of 15 students are admitted to the program per academic year. Applicants are evaluated based on both their academic record and the appropriateness of their interests in the program.

Application to the program requires a letter of interest, a current CV, and any additional materials that demonstrate an interest and commitment to Africana Studies. Acceptance into the certificate program does not generate additional funding for students.

The application for the Graduate Certificate Program can be found at:

<https://africana.sas.upenn.edu/department/graduate/certificate-program>

Joint Degree Program

It is possible to be admitted to the University of Pennsylvania as a joint degree student. Students with such an interest apply to only one department or school and indicate their interest in being joint with another department or school.

Graduate students admitted solely to the Africana Studies department are eligible to apply to pursue a joint Ph.D. with other doctoral degree-granting departments or schools (e.g. English, Music, Sociology, Education, History, and Anthropology). If interested in pursuing this option after they have been admitted, students should contact the Africana Graduate Chair or the Graduate Coordinator for information about the appropriate procedure. Students will then contact the other department and follow its application procedures. Students pursuing joint degree programs are responsible for ensuring that they meet the requirements for both departments.

Students admitted to other programs and seeking a joint degree with Africana Studies should reach out to the Africana Studies Graduate chair or the Graduate Coordinator for application instructions. Students will not be admitted into the joint degree program in Africana Studies in their first year at Penn. **Applications are due by October 15 of the student's second year.** Application to the program requires a letter of interest that includes a statement of purpose, a CV, a Penn Transcript, and one letter of support from a Penn faculty member in the student's home department.

Please note that students already enrolled at Penn who are accepted into the joint degree program must have at least a total of five years of funding and will not receive any additional funding from Africana Studies.

As requirements vary broadly, the Graduate Chairs of each program will work with each student individually to identify requirements and timelines for the joint degree.

Doctoral Program – Requirements for Obtaining Ph.D.

To obtain a Ph.D. in Africana Studies, graduate students are required to meet all the following requirements. Each requirement is explained in further detail in the sections below:

1. Receive admission to the Graduate Program;
2. Complete a total of 14 courses that include: two Africana Proseminar courses, three core courses, and two methodology courses by the end of the fourth semester;
3. Pass any required language examinations;
4. Pass the 30 Book Exam administered at the end of the fourth semester;
5. Complete four semesters of departmental service as a teaching assistant during the second and third years. With approval of the Graduate Chair, a student may meet the service requirement by serving as a research assistant in one of the four semesters;
6. Complete the written and oral components in a minimum of three (3) fields of Candidacy examination with passing grades;
7. submit and defend a dissertation proposal;
8. Submit and defend a dissertation, which must be evaluated and approved by dissertation committee.

Phase I: Coursework

Graduate level coursework in Africana Studies allows students to gain a deeper knowledge of foundational concepts, methodologies, and theoretical approaches in the field. Africana Studies requires a total of 14 courses. First-year students are expected to take four course units each semester. Students in the second year will take three course units per semester and serve as teaching assistants.

Ph.D. Core Course Requirements

AFRC 6400: Proseminar in Africana Studies

Students must enroll during their first term unless they are joint with another department and the primary department has a required course that conflicts with the Proseminar.

AFRC 6401: Proseminar in Africana Studies

Students must enroll during their second term unless they are joint with another department and the primary department has a required course that conflicts with the Proseminar.

AFRC 7060: Introduction to Africa and African Diaspora Thought

This course examines the processes by which African peoples have established epistemological, cosmological, and religious systems both prior to, and after the institution of Western slavery.

AFRC 7080: Cultural and Literary Theory of Africa and the African

Diaspora This course introduces students to the theoretical strategies underlying the construction of coherent communities and systems of representation, and how those strategies influence the uses of expressive culture over time.

AFRC 7100: Political Economy and Social History of Africa and the African

Diaspora This course provides the opportunity for students to investigate the relationship between the emergence of African peoples as historical subjects and their location within specific geopolitical and economic circumstances.

Second Tier Courses (2 c.u.)

Methodology

Methodology

Independent Study

Graduate students who require in-depth study of a subject not offered by the Department may elect to take an independent study or tutorial with a faculty member. In some cases, students may wish to take upper-level undergraduate courses as an independent study with instructor permission. Students must request permission from the faculty member with whom they would like to work and design a plan of study and method of evaluation. The student must also complete the Africana Studies Department online Independent Study form. Students who enroll in an undergraduate course without applying to take it as an independent study will not receive graduate credit for the course.

The independent study request form can be found at:

<https://africana.sas.upenn.edu/department-africana-studies/undergraduate/undergraduate-independent-study-application>

Phase II: Candidacy Examinations

Comprehensive Exam

Passing the Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam is required of all students before they can begin to undertake dissertation research. Taken in the first semester of the third year, the exam consists of: (1) a written component, the specifics of which are determined by the members of each student's exam committee; (2) an oral examination that will not exceed two hours. Students prepare for their exam by compiling a comprehensive list of texts for each field in consultation with each of their examiners. Once approved, students read the texts on their lists with the objective of demonstrating in-depth knowledge of the scholarly debates that define each field, as well as an expectation that they can discuss their future research and teaching goals in relation to those debates.

At least one member of the Comprehensive Exam Committee must be a member of the Africana Studies Standing Faculty.

Students' performance will be evaluated and graded, as either pass, pass conditionally upon specified further work and re-examination at a later date, or fail.

The Comprehensive Examination should be completed by the end of the first semester of the third year, and no later than the third week of the spring semester of the third year.

Phase III: Dissertation Proposal, Research, and Writing

A doctoral dissertation in the program is expected to be a substantial work of original scholarship demonstrating theoretical sophistication and intensive research. Doctoral students submit a dissertation proposal which they will defend to their Committee Members before they can begin independent dissertation research or fieldwork. Joint degree students are responsible for making sure that the dissertation proposal meets the requirements of both of their departments.

The process for producing and defending the proposal is as follows:

The student convenes a Dissertation Committee in the second semester of the third year. This Committee may have the same members as the Comprehensive Exam Committee or may be constituted differently. However, the Chair of the Dissertation Committee and at least one other member must be members of the Standing Faculty of the Africana Studies Department. In the case of joint degree students, the Chair of the Committee must be a Standing Faculty member of either Africana Studies or the other department, and at least one member of the Committee must be a member of the Africana Studies Graduate Group.

Throughout the semester, the student will work closely with the Dissertation Committee Chair in conceptualizing and shaping the proposal. An oral defense of the proposal takes place with the full Committee. Students are expected to defend the proposal and transition to ABD status by the end of the second semester of the third year.

Note: Failure to meet the deadlines for the Comprehensive Exams and the Dissertation Proposal exams will result in notification to the Graduate Division that the student is not making satisfactory progress toward the degree.

Once they have successfully completed the Comprehensive Exams and defended the Dissertation Proposal, students are admitted to candidacy for the Ph.D. and are considered ABD (all but dissertation). Candidates are expected to begin full-time research on their dissertation projects once admitted to candidacy.

Upon advancement to candidacy, each student has a Dissertation Committee consisting of at least three faculty members (including at least two members of the Graduate Group). At least two the members of the Dissertation Committee must be members of the Graduate Group at the time of appointment to the Committee.

The Chair of the Dissertation Committee must be a member of the **Standing Faculty** in the Graduate Group. If the Chair of a Dissertation Committee leaves the Standing Faculty before the dissertation is completed, then a new Chair from the Standing Faculty in the Graduate Group must be appointed as Chair. The Dissertation Committee Chair is responsible for convening Committee meetings, advising the student on Graduate Group and University expectations, and assuring the Graduate Group Chair that the Group's requirements have been met. It is required that the Dissertation Committee meet with the student, as a committee, at least once per year to assess the student's progress in the program and to provide advice on future work.

Note: Joint Degree students' dissertation committees must include at least one member of the Africana Studies Standing Faculty.

At the University of Pennsylvania, the student presents the dissertation publicly, defends it, and, with the approval of the Dissertation Committee submits the final manuscript to the Office of the Provost. The student is responsible for scheduling a time with the Office of the Provost to deposit the dissertation. The PhD degree is awarded to the candidate upon the recommendation of the Graduate Council of the Faculties.

Annual Evaluations

Evaluations are administered to assess student comprehension and development over the course of the program. Students are also required to complete a **self-evaluation** each year that includes courses taken, progress toward benchmarks, presentations and publications, and academic needs.

Coursework Evaluations

At the end of the first and second years, the Graduate Chair solicits feedback from faculty they have worked with on their overall performance in seminar including their grasp of important concepts, writing, and class participation. Each student is also asked to complete a self-evaluation that includes courses taken, conferences attended, challenges, and needs.

The Graduate Chair discusses this information with each student and addresses any areas that need improvement.

Second Year Examination

Students in the second year in the Africana Studies doctoral program will be expected to develop a reading list of **30 books**.¹ Ten of these are selected from the master list of books that are deemed to be integral to the field of Africana Studies. Ten books are prescribed by the faculty as foundational texts. The remaining 10 books, selected in consultation with their Africana Studies Faculty Advisor, reflect students' research interests and must be approved by their Faculty Advisor. Students must submit their complete booklist to the Graduate Chair for approval by September 15 of the second year.

¹ Note: Students who are in the joint degree program with Africana Studies and another department or school will only be required to respond to the first two questions based on books from the master list

Students must have completed all coursework and be in good academic standing in order to sit the Second-Year Exam. The Second Year Examination consists of **three (3) questions**:

- a. One question on the 10 books the student selected from the master list meant to test the depth and breadth of knowledge of the field of Africana Studies (students should request the master list from the Graduate Coordinator).
- b. One question on the ten books and articles from the foundational texts list.
- c. One question developed by the student in consultation with the Africana Studies faculty advisory that includes a rationale for why the question is pertinent to the field of Africana Studies and how it reflects the student's research interests.

Content of the Examination

The ten books from the master list should:

1. Cover the wide geographic spread reflective of Africana Studies (i.e. the list should include representative texts from African Studies, African American Studies, and Caribbean Studies).
2. Cover, insofar as possible, the wide spectrum of disciplinary orientations characteristic of Africana Studies (i.e. the list should include examples of history, anthropology, sociology, literary criticism, critical race theory, gender studies, etc.)
3. Create a framework for significant intersectionality across these geographic and disciplinary contexts (i.e. the books should be chosen for the extent to which they illuminate and challenge each other and for the degree to which they, when read together, can suggest new possibilities).

Students should think strategically about these three key areas as they make their selections, bearing in mind that the general question they will be tasked with answering will inevitably be broad, wide-ranging, and concerned with the foundational approaches and theoretical possibilities of Africana Studies.

The ten books and articles from the foundational texts list are prescribed, and at least two of them will be included on the syllabus of the fall Africana Studies Proseminar (see list of books below).

and the foundational texts list. They will not be required to develop and answer a question related to their own area of study. Time allowed to complete the written exam will be less than time allowed for those who must respond to three questions.

The final ten books will allow students to address scholarly issues and debates they deem to be pertinent to their own research. The ten works selected by students should be directly related to the field(s) of study they hope to pursue as they progress through the program. Students will develop a question (in consultation with their Faculty Advisor) that includes a rationale for why the question is pertinent to the field of Africana Studies, and how it reflects their own research interests.

Oral Examination Component

Students taking the Second-Year Examination will also be expected to complete a 30-minute oral examination with members of the Graduate Committee. The oral examination will present students with the opportunity to receive feedback from the committee, to elaborate on their responses on the written portion of the exam, and to respond to questions posed by the Committee regarding the book list or the exam itself. There will not be a separate grade for the oral exam.

Logistics

The written examination will be administered on the Wednesday following the University of Pennsylvania Commencement exercises. Students will have one week to write their responses to the questions. Responses should be typed, double-spaced, on regular white paper with 1" margins and no longer than 3500 words each. It should include a Works Cited page. Oral examinations will be scheduled for the week following completion of the written portion of the exam. The exams will be graded by the Graduate Studies Committee and then submitted to the Graduate Coordinator. The exam will be graded on a Pass/Fail basis.

In the event that a student's performance is determined to be substandard, the Graduate Committee will consider, on a case-by-case basis, whether it is appropriate for the student to be discontinued from the doctoral program.

Foundational Texts

1. Césaire, Aimé, *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955)
2. Collins, Patricia Hill, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (1991)
3. Du Bois, W.E.B., *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899)
4. Gilroy, Paul, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (1993)

5. James, C.L.R, *The Black Jacobins: Touissant L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938)
6. Jones, Claudia, *A Fighting Dream: The Political Writings of Claudia Jones* (2024)
7. Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty* (1993)
8. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *The Language of Languages* (2023)
9. Rodney, Walter, *Groundings with My Brothers* (1969)
10. Wynter, Sylvia, *Let's Sit Down Together and Talk a Little Bit about Culture: Decolonizing Essays 1967-1984* (2022)

Language Requirements & Evaluation

Graduate students whose research is conducted in a language other than English are required to pass an examination in a language of library research. In order to pass, the candidate must translate into English at a level that demonstrates an ability to do library research reliably in the language. Students should take the examination in a language that they are likely to need in their doctoral research. The examination can be taken in any language spoken in Africa or the African Diaspora except English. To receive an A.M. degree, the student must demonstrate proficiency in at least one non-native language relevant to his or her program.

Students may request a language proficiency test through the Penn Language Center. <https://plc.sas.upenn.edu/students/language-proficiency-testing>

Grades

While overall evaluation in the program is performed within the department on an ongoing, case-by-case basis, graduate students should be aware that there are university-wide policies related to grades and academic standing, as follows:

"The grading system is as follows: A, excellent; B, good; C, fair; D, poor but passing; and F, failure. At the graduate level, the grade of C, while passing, does not constitute satisfactory performance. Letter grades may be modified by a plus (+) or minus (-) sign at the discretion of the school. The minimum standard for satisfactory work for the graduate faculties is a B average in each academic year, but the graduate group may set additional requirements that determine advancement; these requirements may require a student to withdraw despite a satisfactory grade average, if the quality of the student's work is not at a level that predicts successful dissertation research.

The mark of S is used to indicate satisfactory "progress." It may be used as a permanent grade for 9999 courses only. It is a temporary grade for all other courses.

The mark of I is used to designate "incomplete." Students who fail to complete a course and do not withdraw or change their status to auditor within the prescribed period shall receive at the instructor's discretion either a grade of I (incomplete) or F (failure). It is expected, in general, that a student shall complete the work of a course during the term in which that course is taken. The instructor may permit an extension of time up to one year for the completion of the course. In such cases, any course which is still incomplete after one calendar year from its official ending must remain as "incomplete" on the student's record and shall not be credited toward a degree."
[Source: Office of the Provost]

Note:

Bs are not considered satisfactory grades for Africana Studies Graduate Students.

Students in Africana Studies students are discouraged from taking Incompletes.

Paid Work

Students must receive approval from the Graduate Chair before undertaking any paid work. This includes work at Penn or away from campus and includes serving as an RA in the Africana Center Summer Institute Program. In making a determination, the Graduate Chair will take into consideration the student's academic standing and the number of hours required to complete the work. The amount of pay will also be considered to ensure that the student does not exceed the dollar amount permitted by SAS. Students with one or more Incompletes in a course will not be approved to undertake paid work.

Leave of Absence

A student who desires a leave of absence must notify the Graduate Chair and Graduate Coordinator who will coordinate with the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies (SAS).

Teaching and Research Assistantships

Graduate students in their second and third years can gain experience with university-level teaching and, in some cases, research, through the completion of the

service requirement to the Department. Students generally serve as Teaching Assistants in lecture courses. They work closely with the faculty member, and in some cases, lead their own weekly recitations. With the approval of the Graduate Chair, students may work for a semester with Africana Studies faculty whose research or teaching interests them. In making a determination, the Graduate Chair will consider the teaching needs of the department. Students who gain approval are responsible for making arrangements with the faculty member.

During the August prior to the start of the student's second year, the Penn Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) holds a required, three-day training for new teaching assistants. This training presents graduate students with the policies, procedures, best practice and technology guidelines necessary to fulfill their teaching assistant requirements. Students seeking additional support with pedagogical training as they progress through the program may wish to participate in the Center for Teaching and Learning's on-going teaching workshops throughout the academic year. In addition to the training provided by CTL, the Africana Studies Graduate Chair provides an orientation session for second-year graduate students.

Exchange Programs

The University participates in doctoral exchange programs in which Africana Ph.D. students can register to take courses at partner universities for a semester or an academic year. While enrolled in the program, students will be covered for tuition, fees, and health insurance as a University of Pennsylvania student. Participation in the program requires the approval of the Chair of Graduate Studies and the Graduate School Dean at both the home and host institutions.

Students who wish to enroll in a course exchange program should submit all application materials approximately three to six months in advance as coordination of the registration process between universities can take a significant amount of time. For more information or to register for an exchange program, please contact the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies (SAS). Students should take into consideration their obligations such as teaching, or other courses in the Department of Africana Studies and at Penn more generally.

Ivy+ Exchange Scholar Program: Penn students are eligible to enroll in courses at the following universities: UC-Berkeley, Brown, Chicago, Columbia, Cornell, Harvard, MIT, Princeton, Stanford, and Yale. Students must complete their first year of coursework in residence at Penn. <https://pan-school.sas.upenn.edu/graduate-division/programs/exchange-programs>

Graduation

Graduation takes place in mid-May. The University's graduation policies are governed by the Provost and the Dean of the Graduate Division. Students are responsible for obtaining information from those offices regarding relevant dates and requirements.

Suggested Schedule for Fulfillment of Ph.D. Requirements

<i>First Year</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 4 courses each semester (core + specialization basics) ○ First-year evaluation (late spring)
<i>First Year (Summer)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Read texts for Second-Year Exam ○ Language study ○ Preliminary research for dissertation project
<i>Second Year</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 3 courses each semester ○ Language study ○ Complete course requirements ○ Teaching Assistantship each semester ○ Begin reading for comprehensive exams ○ Second-Year Exam administered (late spring) ○ Assemble committee for candidacy
<i>Second Year (Summer)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Conduct preliminary research related to dissertation project ○ Prepare for Comprehensive Exams (to be taken in fall)
<i>Third Year</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teaching Assistantship each semester ○ Prepare for and complete Comprehensive Exams (fall) ○ Assemble dissertation committee ○ Submit Dissertation Proposal (spring) ○ Defend Dissertation Proposal (spring) ○ Admitted to Candidacy (ABD)
<i>Third Year (Summer)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Begin dissertation research
<i>Fourth Year</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Dissertation research ○ Apply for dissertation research grants (including Graduate Division award)
<i>Fifth Year</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Dissertation research & writing ○ Complete dissertation writing ○ Apply to jobs and dissertation completion/postdoctoral fellowships
<i>Sixth Year (if necessary)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Complete and defend dissertation ○ Enter job market ○ Postdoctoral applications ○ Graduation (mid-May)

Penn Libraries

The University of Pennsylvania has twelve libraries on the main campus. In addition to the millions of books and reference materials housed on-site within Penn's University library system, students are able to access a number of technological and support services to assist in their research and teaching including: access to electronic books and articles, additional study space, course reserve materials, EZ-Borrow and Interlibrary Loan programs, digital media equipment rentals, and software and technology training. On the third floor of Van Pelt Library is the Class of 1979 Africana Resource Room, which houses texts related to Africana Studies and is available for student meetings and study. Graduate students may contact the Africana Studies librarian to reserve the space ahead of any scheduled events.

The designated Africana Studies librarian in Van Pelt Library helps with selecting and purchasing materials for the department or for individual research.

For more information about Penn library services, visit

<https://www.library.upenn.edu/>

Libraries of Interest:

Van Pelt – Dietrich Library (Main Campus Library)
3420 Walnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Includes Africana Resource Room, Music Library, and Weigle Information Commons and Digital Media labs

Kislak Center (Special Collections, Rare Books, Manuscripts)

Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center, 6th floor
3420 Walnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Fisher Fine Arts Library (Art, Architecture, Historic Preservation)

220 South 34th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Annenberg Library (Digital and print media, communications)
3620 Walnut Street
Philadelphia PA 19104

Biddle Law Library (Law, public policy and administration)
3501 Sansom Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Additional nearby sources of material include:

The Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection at Temple University
<https://library.temple.edu/blockson>

The Library Company of Philadelphia
<https://librarycompany.org/>

Pennsylvania Historical Society of Pennsylvania
<https://www.portal.hsp.org/>

Departmental Colloquia, Workshops, and Working Groups

Africana Studies Graduate Colloquium

Africana Ph.D. students coordinate the Annual Africana Graduate Colloquium, featuring guest scholars doing cutting edge work in the field of Africana Studies. Working with the Graduate Chair, the Graduate Coordinator, and their peers, the planning committee selects a theme for the year and invites speakers to present new work and engage one another around questions of interest to graduate students in the department. The Colloquium coincides with the Department's graduate student recruitment events.

Previous years' themes:

- "Gendered Spatiotemporalities: Black Political Assertions of Self" (2025)
- "Black Queer Placemaking: Methods, Histories, Diasporas" (2024)
- "Exploring Africana Methods" (2023)
- "Black Women and Rebellious (Archival) Acts" (2022)
- "Roots/Routes to Freedom: Beyond Elsewhere-ism and the Academy" (2021)
- "Citizenship, Belonging, and Knowledge Production" (2019)
- "Black Aesthetics: Expression and Interiority" (2018)
- "Black Agency: Expressions of Life & Movement" (2017)
- "Subversive Voices: The Black Body Across the African Diaspora" (2016)
- "Allies, Archives, and Activism in the Academy" (2015)

- “Africana Studies and Transdisciplinarity: Questions in Methods and Discourse” (2014)

Graduate Student Professional Development Workshops

Each year faculty and or post-doctoral fellows in Africana Studies host a workshop series for graduate students to work on various aspects of the professional skills necessary to pursue a career in academia. Students receive mentorship and advice from fellows who have recently completed or are in the process of pursuing academic job searches.

Recent topics include: applying for grants and fellowships, comprehensive exams and dissertation proposals, preparing for academic conferences, and teaching the Introduction to Africana Studies course.

Black Cultural Studies Collective

An interdisciplinary working group jointly led by graduate students in the English and Africana Studies departments, created to foster discussion and presentation of scholarship and creative work by people of African descent. Black Cultural Studies Collective (BCSC) is open to all within the Philadelphia community interested in learning about Black cultural production, cultural history, and literature. For more information or to join the group’s mailing list, contact bcscollective@upenn@gmail.com