



Cornell University Caribbean Students' Association Petitions to Cornell Administration

To University President **Martha Pollack**, University Vice-President of Student and Campus Life **Ryan Lombardi**, The Members of the Office of the Dean of Students, Dean of Arts & Sciences **Ray Jayawardhana**, Chair of Africana Studies and Research Center **Olúfẹmi Táíwò**, Director of

Undergraduate Studies of Africana Studies and Research Center **Grant Farred**, Director of Latina/o/X Studies Program **Vilma Santiago-Irizarry**, Director of Undergraduate Studies of Latina/o/X Studies Program **María Cristina García**, Director of Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies **Rachel Beatty Riedl**, Director of Latin American Studies Program **Ken Roberts**

Introduction

The ongoing crisis of the socio-political climate of the United States has caused an uproar in minority communities nationwide. Numerous instances of unnecessary police brutality amongst other heinous acts of discrimination have led students to advocate for themselves, their friends, families and other counterparts. As a result, we, the Caribbean Students' Association of Cornell University, urge that those to whom these petitions and demands are addressed uphold the motto of this institution: *Any Person, Any Study*. As a small minority group on campus, we feel our culture, history, and contributions of the Caribbean people are diverse and complex within the Cornell community and beyond. The Caribbean is a dynamic region, that, by our geo-culturally based definition, includes over 40 nations. Cornell is a part state school, drawing a majority of its undergraduate students from the state of New York. It is important to note that approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ of the NY population of NY is of Caribbean descent¹. We believe that this institution should be reflective of this, especially through their main purpose, academics. The Caribbean Students' Association's (CSA) members, both current and alumni, have recognized that their own personal experiences with xenophobia, discrimination, and erasure are enhanced by the lack of education that the majority of the student body has concentrated on the Caribbean. The demands of the CSA consist of the creation of a Caribbean Studies minor, the hiring of academic and advising staff members with direct academic ties to the Caribbean through their primary research, improving intersectionality in introductory courses, recognizing June as *National Caribbean-American Heritage Month* and add to the official University calendar, increasing the allocated funding for the Africana, Latina/o/X, and LATA Einaudi studies programs dedicated to Caribbean Studies, and to form an articulation agreement with the Caribbean Examination Council, which would use their standardized examination scores as credit for incoming freshmen and transfers.

Thus, we hope you will consider the information outlined below as well as our demands.

¹ Statistics on the New York State Caribbean population:
<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/caribbean-immigrants-united-states-2017>

Section 1

Background of International & Diversity Programs at Cornell University

The Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies and College of Arts and Sciences is the umbrella for international programs at Cornell University. The Language Resource Center, the History Department, the English Department, the Asian American Studies Program, the Africana Studies and Research Center, The LatinX Studies Program, the Music Department, the Economics Department, Department of History, and Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program to name a few that are similarly positioned to represent international programs. Additionally, all of the programs and departments formerly listed are associated with the College of Arts & Sciences². We believe that all of these centers, departments, or programs have the ability to consistently offer a program of courses on the Caribbean.

To highlight a few of these Departments and Programs' connection to the Caribbean, we will start with the Africana Studies and Research Center (ASRC). As you may know, Cornell's ASRC is the first of its kind and began in 1969 after the Willard Straight Hall Takeover. Africana's mission, as stated on its official website is as follows³:

Africana studies is the multidisciplinary analysis of the lives and thoughts of people of African ancestry on the African continent and throughout the world. It embraces Africa, Afro-America and the Caribbean but does not confine itself to those three geographical areas. Africana studies examines people of African ancestry wherever they may be found — for example, in Central and South America, Asia and the Pacific Islands. Its primary means of organization are racial and cultural. Many of the themes of Africana studies are derived from the historical position of African peoples in relation to Western societies and in the dynamics of slavery, oppression, colonization, imperialism, emancipation, self-determination, liberation and socioeconomic and political development. (African-American historian and emeritus professor from this department, Robert L. Harris)

In early 2020, the current director of the undergraduate studies for Africana, Grant Farred, told a small group of students completing their major or minor in ASRC the following: Since three of the twelve academic members of the academic faculty of the ASRC, are of Caribbean descent, 25% of the department, they can handle the scholarship and research relating to the Caribbean diaspora. However, the Africana center does not have the **time or resources** to do it⁴.

Some may argue this as a useful justification for the lack of available resources, however, the ancestral descent of the individual professor should not be conflated with their academic field of education. There should be a clear distinction between Caribbean descent and research, which is demonstrated through the rich intellectual appointment of Professor

²Information on the College of Arts & Sciences: <https://as.cornell.edu/departments-and-programs>

³ The Africana Studies and Research Center Mission statement via <https://africana.cornell.edu/node/1421>

⁴ Paraphrased personal anecdote received from Aurora McKenzie '21, Africana Minor (ADM279@cornell.edu)

Carole Boyce-Davies and Professor Gerad Aching, both of whom are esteemed leaders in the field.

Even with the previously stated *Africana* definition, each semester, ASRC states that it offers “approximately 23 graduate and undergraduate courses examining the African, African-American and Caribbean peoples in the areas of history, sociology, political economy, Swahili and Yoruba language, music, literature, visual arts, education and gender studies”⁵. However, for the Fall 2020 semester, only approximately four out of forty-six undergraduate courses (8.7%), not including honors thesis or independent study courses, either explicitly mention the Caribbean in their title or their descriptions⁶. This does not equate to supposed 25% effort from ASRC, nor should it be the work of only those three professors. Additionally, until the recent addition of appointments of Tao Leigh Goffe, assistant professor (on a tenure track), there was little to no cross-listing of courses from the Africana department with the Asian-American Studies Program or similar departments.

The Latina/o/X Studies Program (LSP) was the result of an expansion of the Hispanic American Studies Program due to the demands of students who conducted the 1993 Day Hall Takeover. The purpose of this minor is to allow students to “... explore the rich histories and contemporary life of Latino communities in the United States,” according to the LSP website⁷. However, for Fall 2020, LSP provides limited courses, in terms of content and number, there is cross-listing but not much with ASRC unless the professor has academic appointments in ASRC. According to the archival and current LSP course roster⁸, none of its introductory courses are cross-listed with ASRC, and from a survey of some students’ personal experiences, the *Latinos in the US* course nor the professor explicitly teaches about the AfroLatinidad communities, which can be found across the entirety of the Caribbean (South and Central America included).

The Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies: Latin American Studies Program (LATA), celebrates its 60th anniversary in 2021. LATA is committed to providing its students and the Cornell community with a deeper understanding of Latin American and Caribbean societies through teaching and research across humanities, science, and social science disciplines. LATA also organizes campus activities and international experiences through study abroad programs, short-term course visits, and internship opportunities. In the LATA list of currently offered Fall 2020 courses, there is some cross-listing between ASRC and LSP⁹. LATA continues to provide the Cornell Steel Band (as a class and extracurricular activity for students). However, two of their courses, (LATA 2381) *Corruption, Collusion, and Commerce in Early America and the Caribbean* and (LATA 1802) *Introduction to Latinos in U.S. History*, which explicitly include the word *Caribbean* in the course name or short description, do not cross-list with ASRC.

⁵ The Africana Studies and Research Center Statement about the overview of Undergraduate program via <https://africana.cornell.edu/node/1371>

⁶ Course information received via <https://africana.cornell.edu/courses>

⁷ Statement on the purpose of the LSP minor from <https://latino.cornell.edu/undergraduate>

⁸ Information on the LSP courses via <https://latino.cornell.edu/undergraduate>

⁹ Information on LATA courses from <https://classes.cornell.edu/browse/roster/FA20/subject/LATA>

Below is a personal testimony concerning how the lack of academic focus on the Caribbean can affect Caribbean students at Cornell¹⁰:

The history of the Caribbean and its people is very rich and deserves to be highlighted. Unfortunately, there is a general lack of attention towards Caribbean Studies at Cornell and this makes me uneasy. There is a lack of courses that cover Caribbean history, or highlight Caribbean scholars. Additionally, there is no Caribbean Studies minor, major, or department. While there are several classes that focus on the Caribbean, there are not nearly enough. Classes that I have taken, such as Caribbean Worlds, do an excellent job at touching on so many different aspects about Caribbean culture and history, but throughout a semester, there is not nearly enough time to indulge in one particular topic. Whether it be a class focusing on Indian Indentureship, the Haitian Revolution, Carnival Culture, or even Caribbean Literature, there is a dire need to expand our course list to include courses that are more fine-tuned towards the Caribbean; this may involve hiring professors who are academic Caribbeanists. I know that there are others beyond myself who feel strongly about Caribbean history, are fascinated by the scholars it has produced, and enamored by its culture, but are unable to adequately explore this interest at Cornell. The strong Caribbean population in New York State should also further incentivize Cornell's decision. This is why it is important for Cornell to not only expand its class roster to include more courses focused on the Caribbean, but to also offer a Caribbean Studies minor, and hopefully in the future, a major.

There are a number of institutions across the United States that have Caribbean Studies Departments, and offer a Caribbean Studies minor or major. Some of them include: Rutgers University¹¹, Brown University¹², University of Michigan-Ann Arbor¹³, NYU¹⁴, University of Wisconsin-Madison¹⁵, Brooklyn College¹⁶, Duke University¹⁷, and Columbia University¹⁸.

In conclusion, Africana Studies is not complete without a focus on the Caribbean. Programs and courses about Latin America need to include the Caribbean and be distinct. The history and culture of the Caribbean is multifaceted and can be included across many academic departments. It is important to make the education of the Caribbean accessible to students across the colleges of the University. It is important to have Caribbeanists educating about the Caribbean, not solely as a subset of another course. The complexity and the people of the Caribbean, especially those studying, working, or teaching at Cornell University, deserve their recognition.

¹⁰ Personal Anecdote received from Matthew Arthur '21 (A&S, Neurobiology)

¹¹ More information can be found at <https://latcar.rutgers.edu/>

¹² More information can be found at <https://watson.brown.edu/clacs/>

¹³ More information can be found at <https://ii.umich.edu/lacs>

¹⁴ More information can be found at <https://as.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/as/research-centers/clacs.html>

¹⁵ More information can be found at <https://lacis.wisc.edu/>

¹⁶ More information can be found at <https://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/web/academics/schools/socialsciences/interdisciplinary/undergraduate/caribbean.php>

¹⁷ More information can be found at <https://latinamericancaribbean.duke.edu/>

¹⁸ More information can be found at <http://bulletin.columbia.edu/columbia-college/departments-instruction/latin-american-caribbean-studies/>

Section 2

Background on Caribbean Secondary Education and Examinations

Cornell University accepts students from the Caribbean on a yearly basis. Consequently, the CSA has received members from the international Caribbean community and Caribbean American diaspora. Although we have come together at Cornell, the path to our arrival was distinct academically. The foundational difference lies in the examinations and curricula existing exclusively in the anglophone Caribbean. Currently, there are sixteen Caribbean countries and territories who participate on the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC)¹⁹ which is a regional secondary and post-secondary examining body. CXC was derived from the General Certificate of Education (GCE) examinations exercised in England and some other members of the Commonwealth. It was formed under the 1972 agreement among the Participating Governments in the Area. The sixteen countries within the Council include: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, and Turks and Caicos Islands. The examinations and certificates offered by CXC are the Caribbean Primary Exit Assessment (CPEA), the Caribbean Secondary Education Certification (CSEC) and the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations (CAPE). CSEC is commonly taken by students after 5 years of high school to mark its ending and is used by employers as sufficient qualification. Meanwhile, CAPE is taken to continue studies post-secondary education and prepare for tertiary education. These examinations prepare and test students in a variety of subjects and vocations which is expected to lead them to pre-professional and professional opportunities in the future.

Since many American universities accept students from the region, they have acknowledged CXC examinations when considering applicants. An articulation agreement is an official document that outlines the transition of coursework and credits between CXC and another institution. Current American universities with articulation agreements are SUNY Plattsburgh and University of South Florida. The document allows prospective students to have an easy transition from the secondary school to tertiary education. Other universities have equivalency charts for CSEC and CAPE with specific requirements for rewarding credits. Universities with charts include, but not limited to, University of Michigan-Flint, University of Arkansas, St. Leo University, Florida Institute of Technology, Savannah College of Art and Design²⁰ and University of New England. In fact, Cornell's peer institutions such as New York University²¹ accept CXC/CAPE as transfer credits.

¹⁹ More information can be found at <https://www.cxc.org/about/about-cxc/>, <https://www.cxc.org/about/background/>, and <https://www.cxc.org/about/history/>

²⁰ More information can be found at <https://www.scad.edu/admission/admission-information/transfer/caribbean-advanced-proficiency-examination>

²¹ More information can be found at <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://cas.nyu.edu/content/dam/nyu-as/casNewStudents/images/2017-2018advisingpresentations/transfers/2017InternationalStudentVirtualAdvisingPresentationTransfers.pdf&sa=D&ust=1598043452006000&usg=AFQjCNEg6DRikhlM6SZ3nFPbu9e5rqJzGA>

Cornell is proudly an institution that accommodates international students from all around the world; Cornell prides itself with being an *International Campus*²². We urge the admissions committees and administration who accept applications from students in the Caribbean to educate themselves on their previous educational experience and recognize it at a similar level of accreditation as AP, IB, French Baccalaureate and GCE A-level exams.

Section 3

Academic, Administrative and Program Demands

Part One

In order to improve the lack of formalized Caribbean education programs available on campus and recognition of Caribbean identities, these are the following demands in the short-term:

- I. The creation of a Caribbean Studies minor (separate and apart from the Latin American Studies Program of the Einaudi Center, and minors available through LSP and ASRC).
- II. Hiring of academic and advising staff members with direct academic ties to the Caribbean through their primary research, including the Anglophone, Francophone, Creole, Dutch and Spanish-Speaking countries (specifically *Caribbeanists*)
- III. Increased research funding opportunities within the Caribbean with Cornell academic staff and otherwise. Through the College of Arts and Sciences, an independent study can be established as an equivalent to a major or alternatively credits for the college or a minor.
- IV. Review of the present curriculum with introductions to the Caribbean and Latina/o/X Studies and improve intersectionality, both within the United States and locally at Cornell.
- V. Recognize June as *National Caribbean-American Heritage Month* and add to the official University calendar
- VI. Include “Caribbean” and allow students the ability to choose the country(s) that represent their cultural heritage, as an ethnicity and region on applications prior to acceptance (i.e. Common Application) and applications during enrollment at Cornell (i.e. an application for an on-campus job)

The following are our long-term demands:

- VII. The Anti-Racism Center and programs about history, racism and colonialism to be established by Cornell should include an adequate module on the Caribbean’s contribution to represent the interconnectedness with the region.
- VIII. A Caribbean Studies Center or Institute accessible for staff and students alike.

²² Cornell’s commitment to and celebration of International Students:
<https://admissions.cornell.edu/apply/international-students>

- IX. Increased funding for the Africana, Latina/o/X, and LATA Einaudi studies programs dedicated to Caribbean Studies as indicated above.

Part Two

The following demand is exclusively related to the CXC examinations:

- X. We encourage Cornell University to form an articulation agreement with the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) which would use their standardized examination scores as credit for incoming freshmen and transfers. Otherwise, an alternative is to publish Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) and the Caribbean Secondary Examination Council (CSEC) equivalency charts thus making incoming Caribbean nationals eligible for transfer credit provided they received a certain grade in their examinations and or were credited with an associate degree.

Signed by,

Faculty & Staff Members

Prof. Carole Boyce Davies, Faculty Advisor, CSA
Tao Leigh Goffe, Ph.D.

Alumni

Christine Estime '19
Elaine Caceres '20
Jael Ferguson '20

Students

Aurora McKenzie '21, President and CoFounder of CSA
Leone Farquharson '22, Treasurer and CoFounder of CSA
Matthew Arthur '21, Director of External Affairs and CoFounder of CSA
Elijah Gallimore-Repole '22, Vice President and CoFounder of CSA