When minority means one
A study in black

The University of Illinois's Afro-American Studies and Research Program (AAS) is like a weary traveler, asking itself where it is now and where it's going next. The program is in its 14th year of existence. But existing does not mean prospering and growing for this program which struggled for survival for 10 years with little support from the University. But since the program's current director, Gerald McWorter, took over in 1979, the program has finally found direction and begun to receive support from the University.

But as the program here begins to prosper, many colleges and universities face declining enrollments and financial crises: the University just finished chopping $7 million out of its own budget. These cuts intensify the questions of purpose and value of relatively new programs such as black studies.

At this point, black studies at the University is a program composed of about 25 courses, most of which are offered through different departments.

The University's program has neither a department nor a major. Only two or three students are taking cognates (minors) in AAS, but Glenn Jordan, associate director of the program, points out that AAS has not yet actively encouraged cognates.

Both whites and blacks take black studies courses, according to Jordan. Although the program does not have exact figures, Jordan estimates that most classes are composed of about half black and half white students.

The program's primary emphasis, according to McWorter, is curriculum development, although the program has "achieved success in initiating a research program."

In 1981, the University's AAS received a $264,000 Curriculum Development Grant to develop a core curriculum of black studies courses, to develop materials for, among other things, four AAS courses. Five out of six research grant proposals the program submitted between 1980 and 1982 were funded for a total of $336,000.

As for classes, this Spring, students with an interest in black studies can take a section of introduction to sociology with a special emphasis on the black experience. They can also take two more courses, in the course catalogue under "Afro-American Studies"—Special Topics in Afro-American Studies: The Black Family, and Black/White Relations, which like the sociology course, are specifically classified as AAS courses. Beyond these, courses are offered by various departments which focus on the black experience in literature, music, and similar disciplines.

The program's current status was not easily reached. Robert Eubanks, who helped form the program, said McWorter had to "fight for what he got."

The program's achievements become more impressive because they have occurred in the span of four years that McWorter has been director. Indeed, many of the program's former directors including Richard Barkdale and Robert Eubanks, believe that the key to the present and future success of the program is McWorter.

McWorter said he reached an agreement "with the University when he assumed directorship of the program in 1979. He would "build the program into a nationally recognized program," and the University would give him the necessary funding and support to accomplish this task.

McWorter's achievements include founding the Illinois Council for Black Studies in the fall of 1979, and making the University a member of the National Council for Black Studies the same year. When extreme pressure from black administrators and students forced the University to reconsider its decision, McWorter said he essentially had to rebuild most elements of the program from scratch. He said his efforts were hampered by "ignorance of the program's existence" and the program's bad reputation, which McWorter said was tied to racism.

So far, McWorter said, "The University has by and large stood by its agreement." Although the current budget crisis has caused the postponement of some of the program's funding, McWorter said he believes the program is only temporary.

McWorter's agreement represents a considerable change in University policy towards the program.

The University's dedication to Afro-American studies is "causmatic; it's showy; it's got on a good front," said Richard Barksdale, English professor and former interim director of Afro-American studies. Barksdale attributes the program's turnaround to McWorter's hard work and to the present Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, William Proksa, who assumed his position in 1979 and who "believes in supporting the program."

Those involved with AAS here, however, believe Illinois is still behind most other universities.

McWorter admitted that the program is behind others "in some respects," specifically in structure and "security of resources." And former interim AAS director, Richard Barksdale said, "The Ohio State program puts our program to shame." Ohio State's program is a department with state money spe-

photos by John Zich

Gerald McWorter
by Karen Sundfors

cifically earmarked for black stu-
dies. Barksdale noted.

"Most campuses throughout
the U.S. have an Afro-American
Studies presence," said Ronald
Bailey, executive director of Illi-
nois Council for Black Studies.
He estimated there are about 500
formal black studies department-
ments at Universities and col-
leges nationwide. According to
Bailey, there are 18 programs in
the state of Illinois which grant
either degrees or certificates.
Bailey said these universities
include Ohio State, University of
California-Los Angeles, and Ho-
ward University in Washington
D.C., which Bailey said has "the
strongest black studies program
on a black campus.

In the state, Bailey estimates
that the University's program is
probably the strongest. Howev-
er, there are differences even be-
tween University campuses.

McWorter said a major in
AAS was approved by the Board
of Trustees at the University's
Chicago-Circle campus in April
of 1971. He hopes to have a "re-
cognized major" here—at least
through the University's Indi-
vidual Plans of Study program—
in the next few years.

McWorter said the Chicago
Circle campus has a major for its
program because there are ab-
out 1.5 million blacks in Chi-
cago, and there was "a great de-
al of student activism" at the cam-
pus in 1971.

While budget-cutting has
made all programs at the Uni-
vational potential targets for re-
ductions, McWorter hopes to
have "hard money" to use to
build up the program in the next
few years.

Currently the program has
two positions to teach AAS.
McWorter, an associate profes-
sor in sociology, has a half-time
appointment. A visiting profes-
sor is said to teach AAS part-time,
but McWorter said he wants to
replace this position with a
permanent half-time position.

Courses in AAS are rigor-
ous, according to Paul
Davis, junior in economics
(LAS) with a cognate in AAS. "I
find them very difficult," he said.
"The professors really keep me
on my toes.

Davis said the professors
allow the freedom for creativity
in class assignments by allowing
him to integrate parts of his ma-
terial into the class assignment.

Doug Burch, senior in LAS
with a specification in AAS, com-
ments that the black studies pro-
fessors vary, but said, "I've had
some really fantastic teachers.

Burch said that some black
studies professors' styles are a
bit impersonal. "I like a more
personal relationship with my
teachers," he said.

Burch also said, "Black pro-
fessors feel they have to prove
something." According to
Burch, black professors don't
want black students to think
their classes are easy just be-
cause they are black. So some
professors are very difficult. "I
haven't met an easy black pro-
fessor yet," he said.

The death of Martin Luther
King "broke the back of seg-
gregation in the South and
opened white inclusions in the
North"—Richard Barksdale.

The history of Af-
ro-American studies at the
University turns on the question
of the establishment of what
James Anderson, a graduate
student in the history of Amer-
ican education at the University
in the late 60's, calls an "appeasement" to black stu-
dents.

Black studies first became
an issue at this University when
"Project 500," the University's
first active recruitment of black
students, occurred in 1968.

According to Anderson, now
associate professor of educa-
tional policy studies, the Uni-
versity began this active recruit-
ment "without a plan for the de-
velopment of black student life.

Anderson said the University
gaged in a "mass scramble" when they realized that the Un-
ion had been surrounded by
police. Only during this period of confusion did a black movement to the Union occur, Anderson said.

About 262 of the students
present at the sit-in were
arrested, and several thousand
dollars of damage occurred.

The repercussions of this in-
cident continued into the Spring
of 1962. Black students con-
tinued to protest the arrests, and
to demand that the University be
more sensitive to their needs.
Anderson characterized the de-
monstrations at the University
during this time as "non-
vioent.

On February 13, 1969, five
major college campuses were
hit with demonstrations and sit-
ins. Black students occupied the
administration building of Duke
University for 12 hours, and a
similar occupation of the admi-
nistration building by 100 stu-
dents of the City College in New
York City occurred.

In the midst of these nation-
wide demonstrations, the Black
Student Association, on Feb. 15
directed a list of demands—in-
cluding the establishment of a
black studies program—to the
University chancellor.

But according to Robert
Eubanks, professor of engineer-
ing involved in AAS's formation,
the University had already
formed the Faculty-Student
Committee on Afro-American
Life and Culture, consisting of 3
faculty and 2 students, to study
the possibility of a black studies
program. One of the two stu-
dents who was told of his ap-
pointment to the committee,
got together a group of students
to demand the establishment of
the committee so the students
would look good when it actually
happened, according to
Eubanks.

The Afro-American studies
program went through a
couple of directors before Pro-
fessor John Stewart was hired
in 1974, and the offices were
moved from the Chancellor's office
to LAS.

Stewart said his term as
director of the program from
1974 to 1978 was problematic
because of "bad faith" between
the dean's office and the pro-
gram. Stewart said money for a
quarter appointment in political
science "disappeared" from Afro-American studies budget.

In addition, while Stewart
was on leave from the program
in the fall of 1976, a psychology
proposal on "institutional rac-
ism" was presented to the
National Institute of Mental
Health in Washington. The
University's program, according
to Stewart, was instrumental in
the formation of this proposal. But
Stewart said Vice Chancellor for
Research George Russell,
"didn't want Afro-American Stu-
dies representing the Universi-
ty," so the program was never
given credit for the proposal.

Stewart said that during his
leadership of AAS, department
hearts were "openly critical" of
the program. "What they were
afraid of was that Afro-American
studies would introduce a bunch
of easy courses into the curricu-
lum," he said.

In describing his experi-
ences, Stewart said, "The Uni-
versity is a very racist campus.

In the face of impending
budget cuts, the program was
evaluated in the spring of 1978.
Stewart also was planning to
resign because the 'relationship
between the program and the
dean's office needed to be
to be dramatized.”

According to Stewart, the program had already asked for and received a positive evaluation. But a second evaluation by the College of LAS Task Force recommended the withdrawal of funds from the program.

Tom Eckman, assistant to the vice president of academic affairs, who was a member of the task force committee, said the recommendation was made because Afro-American studies was “administratively topheavy” and below “a critical mass of faculty and staff to sustain an academic and research program.”

Eckman said every program in LAS was evaluated and that he, as well as the committee, recommended AAS funds be put into teaching and research efforts rather than into administrative functions.

Eckman attributes the program’s difficulties in gaining acceptance at the University to its origins in social disruption. Eckman said that Stewart’s directorship might have been problematic because he had to split his time between Afro-American studies and anthropology, and Stewart could not devote enough time to “satisfying” his colleagues in anthropology.

Stewart called Eckman’s reasoning “totally nonsense” and said, “That to me is a racist remark.” Stewart questions whether Eckman would have said the same thing about the Latin or Asian studies programs, which also have part-time directors.

However, due to pressure put on the University by Stewart and black student groups, the Executive Committee of the College of LAS rejected the recommendation of the task force.

According to Stewart, the task force had been “surreptitiously” and “quietly” trying to disband the program, and if he had not resisted the evaluation and “recruited opinions from black students and faculty,” the program would have ceased to exist.

Opinion on this turn of events differs. Eckmann said Bob Rogers, Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the time, did not bow to anyone’s pressure and said Rogers had “sound academic reasons for keeping (the program).”

After Afro-American studies endured this crisis and Stewart left for a new position in California, Richard Barksdale became AAS’ interim director in 1978-’79 for what he said was “one gruesome, painful year.” During this time a nation-wide search for a permanent director was conducted.

Barksdale said the program was on the verge of collapse when he became its acting director. The program was continually overspending its budget, according to Barksdale. “I could never get any explanation of it,” he said.

Barksdale attributes his problems to the “genuine budgetary crisis” LAS was undergoing. He said Stewart thought that AAS was singled out in a “discriminatory” manner through its budget problems. But Barksdale said, “I didn’t feel that way.”

In 1979 Gerald McWorter, who had then been teaching at the Chicago Circle campus with a doctorate degree in sociology, assumed the position he has held to the present as director of Afro-American Studies and associate professor of sociology.

According to McWorter, the program is currently under evaluation, and results will be available next fall.

Part of the question that the evaluation may try to answer is whether it’s necessary to have a department and major in Afro-American studies.

Last year, Western Illinois University in Macomb, whose black studies program has been a department since 1973, lost its major in Afro-American Studies after a two-year evaluation by the Illinois Board of Higher Education and the Board of Governors, according to director of the department, Essie Rutledge.

Rutledge said the department lost its major because it failed to meet the criteria set for the number and frequency of graduates with a major in AAS.

However, Rutledge said the Board of Governors set a precedent by approving a minor in AAS, which is not usually its responsibility.

“There were no students majoring in it (black studies), nor had there been for the last two to three years,” said Ron Messina, assistant executive director for governmental relations on the Board of Governors.

A minor was maintained in the department because the Board thought that students would be interested in the classes. Messina pointed out, that if no students enroll in the courses, the courses will be eliminated also.

However Rutledge said the program still feels threatened because of the loss of its major, and for this reason Robert EuBanks feels AAS should not be a department. He said, “(AAS in a department form) is much too easy to attack in the case of financial problems.”

But in whatever form, most students and administrators associated with black studies see value in taking black studies courses.

For Paul Davis it is part of his recovery of “what it means to be black.”

Some administrators involved with black studies feel that black studies should be for white students—so they can learn about blacks. But Ronald Bailey feels every student should be required to take black studies courses.

That may be the next battle for the administrators of the Afro-American studies program who have traveled far; using black studies to its real value: educating white students about the black experience.

K.S.
Group starts events about black culture

by Beth McCurdy

The University Afro-American Studies and Research Program is sponsoring several local events this weekend designed to promote black culture, according to program spokespeople.

The Midwest Region of the National Council for Black Studies is conducting its first meeting of the year today at the University. The program, which started Friday, is meeting from 8:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. in rooms 263-279 Illini Union and involves representatives of 50 colleges and universities in the Midwest.

The purpose of the meeting is to establish a specific and uniform program in black studies for all schools in the country. At present, no specific curriculum exists for black studies majors. The council is developing guidelines for a definite and nationwide program.

Speakers at the conference include Douglas Davidson, former director of black studies at Amherst College, Boston, Mass., and nationally known leaders and scholars in black studies and several University faculty members.

The Afro-American Studies and Research Program is also presenting an art exhibit which started at 4 p.m. Friday and is on display through Dec. 1.

Prints by five internationally known black artists can be viewed from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday at the Afro-American Studies Building, 1204 W. Oregon St., Urbana. All exhibits are for sale.

The Women’s Studies Program is co-sponsoring a workshop with the Afro-American Studies and Research Program on “Racism and Women’s Studies: Materials for Black Women’s Studies,” from 9 a.m. to noon Monday in 299 Illini Union.

Eleanor Smith, black studies scholar from the University of Cincinnati, will conduct the program, which is designed for those who teach or are involved in women’s studies.

According to Beth Stafford, coordinator of the workshop, the purpose of the event is to raise people’s consciousness of black history. “Women’s studies is currently being taught as if all events take place in a white woman’s world,” Stafford said. “Actually, white women are a minority in the world.”

Smith will present pieces of literature which are racist and analyze them. She will also present current literature which is acceptable for teaching an objective women’s studies class, Stafford said.

The workshop is the first in a planned series on minorities by the racism sub-committee in women’s studies.
Black columnist urges young to battle racist political myths

by J. Kathleen Curry

Young blacks should take the opportunity to dispel traditional—but erroneous—beliefs about the black community, says Vernon Jarrett, a black columnist for the Chicago Sun-Times.

Jarrett, who had been a columnist for The Chicago Tribune until recently, said Tuesday in a campus forum that people generally have believed that blacks are so emotional that they "can become mesmerized into causes, that we don’t have to think...that we have to be overwhelmed."

That belief is not true, Jarrett told a group of predominantly black students in his speech about common myths of black leadership sponsored by the Afro-American Studies and Research Program.

Jarrett’s columns generally focus on racial issues. Jarrett said it is wrongly assumed that a black leader "must not only have charisma. He or she must be pretty. They must be dramatic and have a lot of other qualities in order to capture the masses. As if we had to be captured...as if someone had to come in from the outside and say, ‘look you’re unemployed.’"

"It’s an insult to me the way we blacks have been defined and the way we permit other people to define us," Jarrett said.

Harold Washington’s election as mayor of Chicago is proof that real black leadership works at the grass-roots level and not merely by the efforts of one or two "charismatic" leaders, Jarrett said.

Washington was not such a charismatic leader. Jarrett said, and did not run for mayor on his own initiative. "Washington was pushed into running for mayor. I don’t have to guess about it; I was one of the pushers," Jarrett said.

Washington refused to run until 50,000 new voters were registered in Chicago to ensure a large black voter turnout, Jarrett said. Several independent grass-roots level voter registration drives brought in 250,000 new voters, he said.

The presidential candidacy of the Rev. Jesse Jackson would only add to the myths about black leadership, Jarrett said.

Jarrett said Jackson probably could not win. His candidacy would only support white beliefs that blacks will not vote unless there is a black candidate, he said.

Jarrett aimed a rhetorical question to Jackson: "You mean to insult me to say you have to have a fictitious campaign to get people that are unemployed to register to vote?"

Jarrett’s speech was the first in a series of six lectures on black Chicago leadership sponsored by the Afro-American Studies and Research Program. Last year, Washington was the first speaker in a similar lecture series.
Black History Month to include speeches, honorary receptions

by Kathie Henschler

Two University organizations are planning speeches and other programs to commemorate Black History Month.

The Afro-American Studies and Research Program is sponsoring a lecture series that starts Monday. U.S. Rep. Charles Hayes, D-Ill., the first labor leader elected to Congress, will speak on the growing political power of Chicago blacks at 7:30 p.m. in 407 Lewis Faculty Center.

Journalist Lu Palmer and Warren Bacon, vice president of Inland Steel and member of the Illinois Board of Higher Education, will speak later this month.

Rep. Hayes and Chicago artist/photographer Bill "Fuudi" Abernathy will be honored at a reception at 4 p.m. Monday in the program's offices, 1204 W. Oregon St., Urbana. Abernathy documents everyday black culture in his photographs, which will be displayed until March 30.

Another University group, the Afro-American Cultural Program, will sponsor a voter-registration drive from 1 to 5 p.m., Feb. 1-3 to commemorate the opening of Black History Month. It will be held at 708 S. Mathews, Urbana.

Carter Woodson founded Negro History Week in 1926, according to Gerald McWorter, director of the studies and research program. It was planned to coincide with the week that includes President Lincoln's birthday and was intended to pay special tribute to black achievers, he said.

Bruce Nesbitt, director of the cultural program, said that in the 1960s Negro History Week became Black History Month.

"After the 1960s, it seemed proper to expand this recognition to the whole month of February," he said.