



African American & African Studies

Department Newsletter / july 2022

Message from the chair: Professor Mark Jerng

Dear AAS Community,

It is with great pleasure that I am sharing the UC Davis African American and African Studies Department newsletter for 2021–22. This is our first newsletter after the pandemic-induced pause and there have been a lot of changes in the department. You will hear all about them as well as the many accomplishments of our undergraduates, our PhD Designated Emphasis students, and our faculty below. A special thank you to Stacey Baran, PhD Student, for her work in writing and organizing the features below.

I am immensely grateful to be serving as chair for such a wonderful community of students, researchers, teachers, and higher education professionals. I have been especially delighted this past year to see folks in person. I've had the privilege of seeing students conducting focus groups for

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Find Us Online!



Follow the AAAS Department socials at the links below to stay updated on current events, announcements, and connect with others.

[Twitter](#)
[Instagram](#)
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Click to learn more about the [undergraduate program](#) and for more information about the [Designated Emphasis](#) in African American & African Studies.

To reach out to the department and for more contact information, click [here](#).



AAAS seniors at the department graduation
(see more on page 5)

Message from the chair

[continued from page 1]

their research projects, as well as student meetings with faculty. I've had the pleasure of participating in faculty meetings where we could talk (and indeed, laugh) while carrying out our departmental business. I've enjoyed sitting in on roundtables convened by our faculty, and hearing about their brilliant projects. And I've enjoyed connecting with alumni at the UC Davis homecoming game where alumni Darryl ('83) and Lois Goss ('85) annually host their tailgate party. There is of course more departmental joy to touch upon, but a few heartfelt expressions of thanks and congratulations will have to suffice from me.

First, a huge congratulations to our graduating seniors who have personified resilience, persistence, and drive over these last few years. Best of luck on your exciting new adventures after college!

Second, a big thank you to all of our faculty, lecturers, and teaching assistants. These past two years have been a mixture of deep sorrow and anger as well as hope: national and international protests against racial injustice; a global pandemic that disproportionately affected historically underserved communities and laid bare structural inequities in health care and safety nets. Through it all, faculty have consistently addressed the challenging times with both compassion and focused, historically engaged, and rigorous analysis. They have striven to make the classroom empowering spaces to better think about our shared local and global realities.

Third, as you will read below, we have welcomed new staff (Anna Juline and Katherine Ampaw-Matthei) and faculty (Dr. Benjamin Weber and Dr. Shingirai Taodzera) to the department since 2020. They entered the university under unbelievably trying circumstances, and yet their energy, care, and compassion have suffused the department. We are very much looking forward to another year of building on the strengths of the AAS community.

Finally, I'll end not with a look back but with a glimpse forward. We'll be giving our student lounge a make-over. Please come and hang out in the room in the Fall! We're very excited to be offering a First Year Aggie Connection Seminar in the Fall to connect new students, current students, alumni, and faculty, and share all of the wondrous possibilities of the major and the college. We will be re-convening our student-led AAS Majors club, continuing to build community and activities for our majors and minors. And we will be starting up a donation-based food pantry in the Fall. We have those as well as other projects in the works. Looking forward!

With gratitude,
Mark Jerng, Interim Department Chair



Mark Jerng at the department graduation

Student Accomplishments

The department recognizes the African American and African Studies Class of 2022 for all their hard work and great accomplishments during their time at UC Davis.

Graduating Seniors

Anastacia Lee Dobson Bell
 Lalah Aminah Dunham
 Kanya Devon Curd
 Luisalberto Guzman
 La’Nae Leilani Jackson
 Larishia Shaunta Johnson
 Kyerah Jessica Kyles
 London Legree
 Micah Sid’Neice Turner

STUDENT AWARDS

Goss Academic Achievement Award:
Kerah Hunter

Outstanding Performance in
 the Department:
La’Nae Leilani Jackson

Department Citation for Academic
 Excellence:
London Legree



Student Spotlight

Anastacia Lee Dobson Bell

Anastacia graduated this year in spring 2022, looking ahead to begin a master’s program at San Francisco State University in the fall. While she first came to UC Davis intending to study psychology, she took a few classes in the AAAS department and quickly realized how engaging the curriculum and the professors were. Anastacia also found the faculty supportive and encouraging, and decided to pursue the African American and African Studies major.

During her time at Davis, Anastacia recalls Professors Milmon Harrison and Benjamin Weber as some of the faculty who were especially influential and supportive in her studies. She was also a Student Assistant in the Center for African Diaspora Student Success in her last year. The department is proud of her ambition and achievements, and we wish her luck as she pursues her master’s degree at SFSU! 🍀



Anastacia at the AAAS department graduation

Graduating DE Students

The department proudly recognizes its
Designated Emphasis students:

Rashana Lydner, PhD
(French Department)

Genesis Lara, PhD
(History Department)



**Drs. Rashana Lydner and Genesis Lara at the
Designated Emphasis celebration**

Dr. Bettina Ng'weno, Chair of the Designated Emphasis in African American and African Studies, convened a dissertation celebration event, where two graduating DE students presented on their work and offered reflections on their time here at UC Davis.

Dr. Rashana Lydner finished her dissertation titled “Performing Otherness in Guyanais Dancehall: An Analysis of the Embodied Stylization of Bamby and Jahyanai’s Rude Bwoy and Bad Gyal Personas.” AAAS faculty Dr. Moradewun Adejunmobi served on her dissertation committee. Dr. Lydner spoke about learning to integrate her loves for both linguistics and dancehall music and performance in her dissertation.

Dr. Genesis Lara finished her dissertation titled, “Revolutionary Dominicanidad: The Dominican Republic and the Caribbean Radical Imaginary.” AAAS faculty Bettina Ng'weno served on her dissertation committee. Dr. Lara spoke about negotiating ways to think through the agency of Dominican women in her practices of historiography.

Congratulations, Dr. Lydner and Dr. Lara – the department wishes you the best going forward! 🍷

AAAS department welcomes new faculty, new staff, new changes!

OVER THE PAST two years, the African American and African Studies department has been making strides and growing even amid the pandemic. Reintroducing the annual newsletter now in 2022, the AAAS department is proud to update on new faculty, new roles taken on by current members of the department, and numerous student accomplishments.



**Anna Juline and Katherine Ampaw-
Matthei**

Mark Jerng, Professor of English and Asian American Studies, assumed the role of interim department chair in 2020, and Associate Professor Milmon Harrison was appointed Associate Vice Provost for Academic Programs, Office of Undergraduate Education, in 2022. Two new faculty members have also joined the department since the start of the pandemic, Assistant Professors Benjamin D. Weber and Shingirai L. Taodzera, who began their teaching at UC Davis in 2020 and 2021 respectively (see faculty spotlights on pages 7 and 8).

Katherine Ampaw-Matthei joined in January 2022 as the Student Affairs Officer of the department (see spotlight on page 8), along with Dorian Mendoza in Spring 2022 as the AAS Peer Advisor (see page 9). Finally, Anna Juline became the department's Program Coordinator in September 2021 (see page 9). 🍷

Department Announcements

In the fall, be on the look-out for...

- the First Year Aggie Connection Seminar (FYAC), run through AAAS and facilitated by Katherine-Ampaw Matthei
- a newly-renovated community lounge
- the AAS Majors Club, which will be looking for a new President, Vice President, and Secretary
- a donation-based Food Pantry, run out of the AAAS department

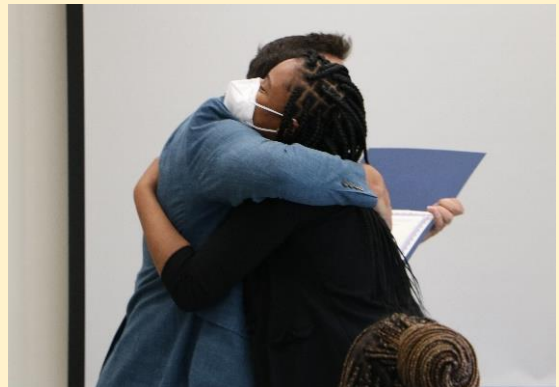
Follow on our socials to stay updated on these upcoming features and more!

African American and African Studies 2022 Department Graduation

This year's department graduation in Hart Hall celebrated the hard work and accomplishments of the graduating class of 2022. Honoring both the graduating students and the achievements of the faculty, the celebration commemorated the end of a challenging but remarkable year for the department.



**Professor Milmon Harrison at the
department graduation**



**London Legree and Professor Benjamin
Weber**



graduating seniors after accepting their cords



**Mark Jerng, Katherine Ampaw-Matthei, La'Nae
Jackson, and Anna Juline**

New Faculty Spotlights

Benjamin D. Weber

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR BENJAMIN Weber began his teaching at UC Davis in 2020. Originally from the Bay area, Weber made his return to California with a continued appreciation for the emphasis on public education in the UC system. At Davis in particular, Weber cites the diversity of the student population across different back grounds as one of the many reasons to appreciate the school.

The students at Davis “challenge the assumptions of their own disciplines,” especially within the AAAS department, Weber says. In this space, everyone’s individual experiences contribute to a richly engaging and connected classroom environment.

Weber’s research interests center on African American history, carceral studies, and Black sociopolitical thought and tradition. He is especially interested in the classroom as a space for thinking “beyond allyship,” he says, where his approach to interactive collaboration encourages thoughtful approaches for both Black and non-Black students to think about Black studies’ theories and frameworks.

In the classroom, Weber aims to break down the typical student-teacher conventions of hierarchy and supports “horizontalization”: the ongoing process of treating everyone’s ideas and opinions equally, regardless of “roles.” Weber emphasizes feedback as the most important part of a student’s learning experience and encourages frequent discussion, like in his AAS 183B class, Global Police and Prison. He also advocates for the recognition of students’ lived experiences as a foundation for theories of knowledge, placing less focus on knowledge transfer and instead prioritizing the notion of meeting students where they are in their process.

Some of Weber’s most current projects include the grassroots Bay Area nonprofit, California Coalition for Women Prisoners (CCWP). The CCWP was recently awarded \$10,000 by the Public Impact Research Initiative to support a special-issue publication of the prison newsletter, *The Fire Inside*, which featured the writing that came out of their year-long Open Letters prison correspondence pilot program.

In his academic work, Weber continues to serve as a peer reviewer for several presses and journals including Cambridge University Press, *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, and the *Journal of Global Slavery*. He has also enjoyed reading and commenting on drafts of his colleagues’ work, such as Kyras Malika Daniels’ article on mortuary rituals in Haiti and Clint Smith’s *New York Times* bestseller, *How the Word Is Passed* (2021).

Weber’s most current forthcoming publication, *American Purgatory* (The New Press), engages in a 400-year reckoning with the racial and colonial origins of the carceral state in the US and prison expansion.

The AAAS department is extremely proud of the work Benjamin Weber has been doing thus far. We look forward to the other thoughtful and interdisciplinary projects he will pursue in the future, and we are happy to have him as a member of the department! 🍷

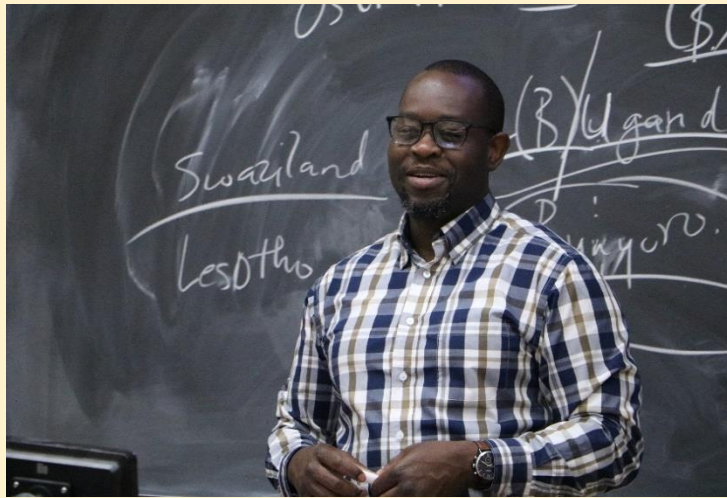


Weber teaching at the Manetti Shrem Museum



Weber’s students at the Shrem Museum exhibition, “From Moment to Movement”

New Faculty Spotlights



Professor Taodzera during lecture

Shingirai L. Taodzera

■ SHINGIRAI TAODZERA JUST finished his first year of teaching at UC Davis, having joined in the fall of 2021 as Assistant Professor in the AAAS department. Taodzera earned his PhD from the University of Ottawa and came to Davis following his postdoctoral position at Wellesley College. A Mellon Mays Fellow, he also co-ordinated the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship at Wellesley and has been a mentor at Bowdoin College, Amherst College, and the University of Witwatersrand.

Taodzera was drawn to UC Davis, he says, because of the emphasis on support and encouragement as well as mentorship in diversity. He appreciates the strengths of Davis' public education and also feels at home surrounded by compassionate colleagues in the AAAS department in particular. He notes that

although the department is small, it is experiencing a resurgence of significant growth and development, which he is happy to be a part of.

Here at Davis, Taodzera has already begun teaching a number of courses in the department such as AAS 190 – Kingdoms in Africa – which provides an in-depth survey of the indigenous governmental systems which have existed before, during, and after colonialism in Africa. The course aims to understand the sociopolitical aspects of African civilizations in the context of geopolitics and capitalistic exploitation specifically.

In the classroom, Taodzera underscores the importance of facilitating an open environment for students to share their views safely and exploratively.

He is equally focused on accommodating students in order to build trust and encourage closer and richer conversations, all of which contribute to an enthusiastic collaborative space. In AAS 190, for example, Taodzera regularly facilitates conversation between students and plays contemporary African music during designated discussion times.



Taodzera's students in AAS 190



Taodzera's primary research revolves around explorations of the political economy in East and South Africa with an emphasis on natural resources and their globalization, extraction, and postcolonialism. His writings have been published in numerous edited collections such as *L'Afrique des grands lacs* (2019) and *Corporate Social Responsibility, and Canada's Role in Africa's Extractive Sectors* (2020).


Taodzera is currently working on turning his dissertation, "Nations Within a State" (completed in 2020), into his first monograph, which examines the ownership of oil after it was discovered in Uganda between the years of 2007 and 2018. This working project examines the subsequent tensions between the Ugandan state and the Buganda and Bunyoro kingdoms over natural resource ownership and the global matrix of resource extraction and dispossession.

We are happy to support Shingirai Taodzera's work in the department and are excited to have him as a part of AAAS at Davis! 🍌

New Staff Spotlights

Katherine Ampaw-Matthei, Student Affairs Officer



 Katherine “Kat” Ampaw-Matthei (she/her, pronunciation: Am-paw Math-thigh) is the new Student Affairs Officer (SAO) for the African American & African Studies department. She identifies as a Ghanaian American and was born and raised in Southern California. Kat obtained her Associate of Arts degree in Women Studies from Cerritos College, Bachelor of Arts degree in Gender Studies from UCLA, and a Master of Education degree in Postsecondary Administration and Student Affairs from the University of Southern California (USC).

Kat has been an educator and student affair practitioner in higher education for the last 8 years, working in several different institutions including UC Irvine, USC, CSU Fullerton, and Rio Hondo College. Prior to her current role, in 2017, she started her first position at UC Davis as an Academic Advisor for

Economics, History, and East Asian Studies. In 2019, she worked for UC Center Sacramento, an experiential learning program, as an Advisor, Outreach, and Program Coordinator. In this role, she served students in all 9 UC campuses.


As of January 2022, she started her position as the SAO for AAAS. In her role, Kat primarily oversees all student aspects, including academic advising/counseling, curriculum review, administrative support for faculty, program outreach and recruitment, departmental administrative tasks, program development and management, program implementation and evaluation and provides community building and leadership. This role is meaningful to Kat because she gets to serve students, faculty, alumni, and campus stakeholders who support and are a part of the AAAS department. Moreover, this position allows her to provide holistic advising/counseling, developing, and creating new programming and opportunities for the department.

In this position, Kat hopes to bring more awareness and visibility to the major and department. She understands the importance of the department and major and its positive impact it has on the community at UC Davis. Starting the Food Pantry, First Year Aggie Connection, bringing back the AAS Majors club are just some ways she feels will build community and provide resources for our students.

Furthermore, in these uncertain times, especially as students are coming back to campus after two years of the pandemic, students are relearning to acclimate into college or have never had the college experience before. She hopes to be able to provide the resources and create a brave and welcoming space for AAAS students. She also hopes to continue to cultivate community building in the AAAS Department and provide holistic advising so that her students are successful academically, socially, and personally during their time at UC Davis.



Dorian Mendoza, Peer Advisor

 IN THE 2022 Spring quarter, Dorian Mendoza joined the department as the AAAS Peer Advisor. Already a student majoring in both Sociology and African American & African Studies, Dorian was eager to step into this position to help other undergraduates navigate the AAAS major requirements, especially transfer students and those who want to pursue double majors.

Her firsthand experiences with double majoring made it clear how overwhelming the process can be, acknowledging the difficulties that students might face when attempting to graduate within a four-year time frame. Through this lens, Dorian provides support and encouragement to other students in similar situations such as her own, offering firsthand knowledge and encouragement as a peer advisor.


Dorian attended Venture Academy in Stockton, CA, a college preparatory school which she describes as a perfect fit because she knew she would eventually pursue higher education. She was drawn to UC Davis during her search for universities after preparatory school because of the university's prestigious reputation, but also for its welcoming environment, friendly students, and supportive faculty and staff. UC Davis additionally stood out to her because of its beautiful campus and the impression of a warm college culture.

As the Peer Advisor in the AAAS department, Dorian is an invaluable resource to students who are both new and continuing in the program. She provides academic mentoring and advising to AAAS majors and minors by helping them understand and navigate the program requirements, weigh course options, balance their workload and more, depending on the individual student's needs. Dorian offers student-centered advisement and encouragement as a knowledgeable, trustworthy peer in both the program and the department, and in working through the challenges of navigating the college space as a whole.

In her new position, Dorian hopes to help grow the major through outreach programs, recognizing that African American & African Studies can present more opportunities to students than one might think. She aims to assist faculty in facilitating department events and providing new physical spaces that will be tailored to AAAS majors specifically. She also hopes to expand the major by collaborating with other cultural studies departments, and by working with Black organizations on campus to connect with students throughout all programs in the university.



Anna Juline, Program Coordinator

 Anna Juline serves as Program Coordinator for three departments: African American and African Studies; Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies; and American Studies. Anna graduated from UC Santa Barbara with degrees in Sociology and Political Science. While at UCSB, she worked in the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center on a prison correspondence program, which was valuable work experience that spurred her interest toward working in higher education after graduation. From northern California originally, Anna had always wanted to live in Sacramento. The position appealed to her in particular because each of the departments' research and teaching missions aligns with her own values and interests. Further, having enjoyed her student experiences, she wanted to work in the college environment.

As the Program Coordinator for three distinct departments, Anna's responsibilities include creating the academic year course schedule, reporting on course data to the college, hiring Teaching Assistants and Readers, and assisting with event planning and outreach. Her goals for the position include empathizing with everyone involved across fellow staff members, faculty, and students; working closely with the Student Affairs Officers of each department to collaboratively create welcoming environments for students; and facilitating inclusive classroom experiences by encouraging people from diverse backgrounds to apply for and join the departments as teaching assistants.

The AAAS department is excited to share these updates and more in this newsletter, and we are proud of the positions in leadership that have been taken on by new and established staff and faculty alike. 🍷

Faculty Accomplishments

The Department of African American and African Studies is singularly proud of its hardworking and accomplished faculty, whose achievements, publications, and other recognitions are acknowledged with special congratulations this year.

FACULTY AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

Elizabeth Mukiibi, Michelle Obama Empowerment Award (May 2022, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Black Faculty and Staff Appreciation Brunch)

Elisa Joy White, Certificate of Appreciation (2022, African American Faculty and Staff Appreciation Event)

Moradewun Adejunmobi, [Black Leaders in Academic Publishing](#) (2022, Taylor & Francis)

Shingirai Taodzera, [CAMPSSAH Fellowship](#) (2021-2022)

Milmon Harrison, Ralph Aldredge Faculty Excellence Award (2021, UC Davis African Continuum)

Bettina Ng'weno, Faculty Development Award (2022-2023, UC Davis)



Elizabeth Mukiibi with the Michelle Obama Empowerment Award

- In addition to taking on his new position in the Office of Undergraduate Education, **Milmon Harrison's** article, "California Listenin': A Reflection on the Healing Power of Community Storytelling" was accepted for publication in the *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*. He co-organized a Public Webinar, "[Black Sacramento](#)," in partnership with the Davis Humanities Institute and the Center for Sacramento History on April 15, 2021.

- This past year, **Benjamin Weber** gave talks on campus, in the community, and out in the world at the launch of Beyond the Barriers Initiative supporting formerly incarcerated and system impacted students, UC Davis Law School's Aoki Center for Critical Race and Nation Studies, the Center for Liberating Education, and the Global Law & Society Association conference in Lisbon, Portugal. Following his review "Undoing Time: A Counter-Archive of Imprisonment," for the *Journal of American History* (2020), Benjamin Weber published "Anticarceral Internationalism: Rethinking Human Rights through the Imprisoned Black Radical Tradition" in the *Journal of African American History* (2021), two of the flagship journals in his field.

- **Moradewun Adejunmobi** gave invited talks on the concept of the vernacular in African literary/pop culture at the Institute of African Studies at Emory University (April 2021) and at the University of Pennsylvania Center for Africana Studies (March 2022). She also gave a presentation titled "Second Acts: Theatricality, State and Popular Culture in an African Setting" at the Center for Humanities, University of Wisconsin (April 2021).

- **Elisa Joy White** published her chapter, "Beyond Emergent: Creating, Debating, and Implementing African European Studies," in *Locating African European Studies* (Routledge, 2020). Her co-edited book, *Relating Worlds of Racism: Dehumanisation, Belonging, and the Normativity of European Whiteness* (2019) was published online as an open-access source in the Springer Black Lives Matter Collection (2021). She published [two articles on Medium](#) as part of a 2021 project on accessibility and user-generated scholarly content. At a virtual conference sponsored by NYU, White also gave an invited presentation entitled "Céad Míle Fáilte: When Blackness in Ireland Seemed New Again." In the AAAS department, White coordinated a speaker series

in May 2022 featuring curated readings on film and a Zoom panel to the anthology, *Not Quite Right for US*. She taught a new AAS Special Topics on Film course with the theme of “Justice on Film” in Spring 2021, examining social justice in relation to African American communities.

- In March 2022, **Shingirai Taodzera** presented at the UC Africanist Workshop at UC Berkeley with his paper, “Uganda’s oil matrix and prospects for resource-funded development”; he also gave a public talk for the Extractive Past and Hollowed Futures Series at UC Davis, entitled “Gold Mining in Tanzania: Is resource nationalism the answer to the resource curse?” (February 2022). Taodzera also received a CAMPSSAH Fellowship as a Faculty Scholar in the 2021-2022 cohort.
- **Bettina Ng’weno** was awarded a CAMPSSAH Manuscript Workshop grant and a Writing Community award, both from the P.L.A.C.E. Initiative and both toward the completion of her



Shingirai Taodzera speaking at the virtual Induction Ceremony for CAMPSSAH Faculty Scholars



Poster for NBO Litfest 8th

next monograph, *Growing Old In a New City*. She published several pieces, including “A Moment of Kinship in Unexpected Places” in *Verge*, a review of Political Violence in Kenya by Kathleen Klaus, and “[Predicting Across Time and Space](#).” Ng’weno delivered keynote speeches for the Center for African Peace and Conflict Resolution titled, “Africa Is the Future: Leadership and Demographics in a Changing World” and for the 2021 Summer Institute on Teaching and Technology at UC Davis, “A Better World on the Other Side: A Few Lessons from Teaching During a Pandemic.” She gave presentations from her book project including “Driving Anyhowly in the City that Used to Be Nairobi” at UC Berkeley, “Remnant of a Green City in the Sun” at the American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting, and “Comparative Conceptualizations of Time in Nairobi and Lagos” at Princeton University, as well as other presentations on film and artistic production such as “Documenting African History” at the *Lake International Panafrican Film Festival* and “[Last Dance in Kaloleni](#)” at the *NBO Litfest 8th*. Finally, she gave interviews on her co-authored project (“[Reimagining Indian Ocean Worlds](#)”), on the struggles of urbanization (“[Reflections of Nairobi River](#)”), and with our Hart Hall staff, Daniel Cordova, through his Hart Hall Podcasts. 🎧

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Bettina Ng’weno at the “Africa Is the Future” keynote presentation



***African American and African
Studies Department***


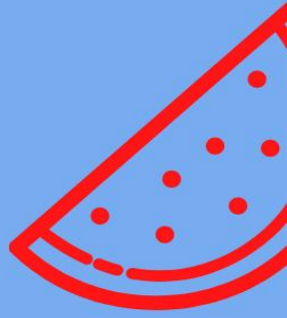
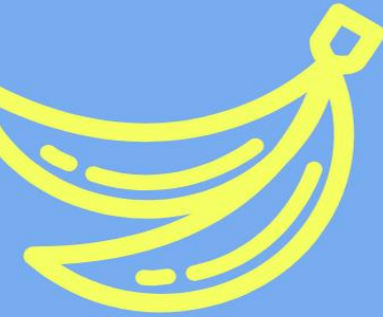
DONATE TO THE AAS FOOD PANTRY!

The new AAS pantry is looking for food donations. We hope to provide students in need with an on-campus resource for food. Please donate canned and non-perishable foods to our AAS community!

Starting Fall 2022

***Drop off your food donations at
Hart Hall, Room 2222A-AAS
Community Lounge***

***For inquiries or concerns, please email Kat
Ampaw-Matthei
Email: kampaw@ucdavis.edu***



AAS FYAC SEMINAR

DREAMING UP NEW WORLDS IN COMMUNITY WITH AFRICAN AMERICAN AND AFRICAN STUDIES



How does centering the experiences, knowledges, and life-worlds of African American, African diasporic, and African peoples provide a powerful lens for reimagining global issues and dreaming new worlds into existence? Come join this FYAC seminar with the African American and African Studies Department to learn more!

During weekly meetings, students will engage with alumni and faculty members in the department to learn about their career and academic journey, the significant work of scholars, activists, thinkers, and workers that inspire them, and the details of their current and past career or research projects. Students will build community by engaging in topics, including: global issues such as migration, human rights, housing, global and domestic incarceration, and resource extraction.

Wed, 4:00–5:30 pm
Hart Hall 2215

Lower Division CRN:

AAS 099– 20011

Upper Division CRN:

AAS 198– 20041

For more information, please email Katherine Ampaw-Matthei,
Student Affairs Officer-kampaw@ucdavis.edu

JOIN THE AAS MAJORS CLUB!

WE ARE LOOKING
FOR A:

- *President*
- *Vice President*
- *Secretary*



Come and Join Us this Fall 2022!

To apply or for questions, please contact Katherine
Ampaw-Matthei, SAO

Email: kampaw@ucdavis.edu