

UTEP OPENS AFRICAN STUDIES PROGRAM

By David Crowder

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UTEP has established a new Center for African-American Studies this year at a time when minority programs are hardly in vogue.

The university has hired Maceo Dailey—a professor with 25 years of teaching experience at five colleges and universities—from Atlanta's Morehouse College as director of the center.

“He will be a role model for everyone he teaches,” said Bonnie Mingo, president of the Student Association. “I am really glad to see (the center) here, not just because I’m black but because it's an addition for UTEP.”

“It’s all about learning. If we learn about each other and about each other’s race, where is there going to be reason for hate?”

Dailey said there is a negative sentiment at some universities today toward minority studies and efforts to recruit more minority faculty members. That feeling is based on political changes in the country, university budget constraints and lawsuits that have successfully challenged affirmative action programs, he said.

“Then, on the other hand, there is a positive response from some institutions that are taking the high road,” Dailey said. “UTEP is on that road and doing some phenomenal things regarding the history of various groups.”

Supporters of the program say it will serve as a focal point for UTEP’s black student population and help prepare students of all ethnic backgrounds who might move away

from El Paso to s where the black population is larger.

Many universities set up black studies program in the late 1960s or early 1970s in response to student demands.

But UTEP, with a small African-American student population that reflects El Paso’s 3 percent 3½ percent, didn’t feel that pressure until recently. UTEP does have special programs in Chicano, border and women studies.



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Dr. Maceo Dailey will head UTEP's new center for African studies.

Last year, a committee of faculty and staff members met with university President Diana Natalicio to ask for a black cultural center and more African-American professors. UTEP created the new black studies program in response to those requests and continues its attempts to recruit more black professors, said Beto Lopez, the university's director of external relations.

UTEP won't offer degrees in black studies, but the program will expose students to more diverse courses in history, English and other disciplines. The center is housed on the fourth floor of the Liberal Arts Building.

In addition to his teaching and research abilities, Dailey brings an "added dimension," Lopez said.

"He'll provide support for African-American students from a cultural standpoint, and really enrich the university and El Paso community with his expertise and interest in bringing in leading scholars and advocates for black culture," Lopez said.

BIOGRAPHY'

The director of UTEP's new Center for African American Studies, Maceo Dailey:

► **Was born In** Norfolk, Va., and raised in Baltimore.

► **Earned his master's degree in history at** Morgan State University in Maryland and his doctorate at Howard University in Washington, D.C.

► **Studied under some of the nation's leading historians, including** Benjamin Quarles, Rayford Logan and David Levering Lewis, the recent Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer of WEB Du Bois.

► **Taught at** Smith College, Brown University, Howard University, Spelman College and Morehouse College.

The benefits of the program are meant to extend beyond the black population.

"We are a multicultural society in El Paso, and this is one thing that will give UTEP students and El Paso as a whole a chance to learn more about African-Americans," said Craig Thompson, UTEP's staff adviser to the 20-member Black Student Coalition and a member of the committee.

In addition to giving graduate history students the chance to delve into black history, the African-American studies program will offer courses to undergraduates who could

find themselves in a very different setting if they leave El Paso.

"You could end up in Atlanta and have to deal with an entirely different population," Thompson said. "Having a course like that will give them the opportunity to better understand that population and that culture."

Blacks make up about 10 percent of the national population.

Sandra Braham, head of UTEP's Upward Bound Program, said the need for more African-American professors and a cultural program was identified in a student survey three years ago. Lopez said UTEP now has fewer than 10 black professors, but has recruited two black social work professors and Dailey in the past couple of years.

"Black students were feeling left out of a lot of activities," said Braham, who credits Natalicio for reacting positively to the committee's request.

"It's another example of the fact that El Paso is a different community and that the university does what it needs to meet the need of the students," Braham said.

Because Dailey is coming from a background at historically black colleges, she said, he brings with him a wealth of resources and connections to black leadership nationwide from which students and the community will benefit.

Stephen Riter, UTEP's vice president of academic affairs and provost, said the university decided to establish the African-American studies center because "in modern America in the 20th century, we need to have someone who can relate to the significant cultural groups in our society, and African-Americans are one of them."

UTEP will be looking to Dailey for the kind of academic courses it has never been able to offer.

“He’s a historian, but he’s really going to play a broader role than just a historian,” Riter said.

This semester, Dailey is teaching a post-graduate course on two of the nation's best known African-Americans: Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois. It’s his only course this semester and like many post-graduate courses has an enrollment of less than a dozen students.

Dailey describes himself as a “humanist . . . committed to the idea of ethnic harmony and progress and advancement for the down-trodden.”

“In some areas, that may take the form of political action,” he said. “But for the most part, it takes the form of progressive, classroom teaching and the exchange of ideas that will stimulate individuals to think critically and engage in problem solving.”

He said these times of national aversion to minority-help programs and to immigrants are reminiscent of another era in U.S. history, the late 1800s.

“Traditionally, African-American historians characterize the late 19th century as the nadir, a time of lackluster leadership, a reactionary Supreme Court and rising tide of racism in America, manifested by lynchings and attacks on African-Americans.

“I think . . . there are some similarities between that era and the era after 1968. But I also believe that we’re really close to a period of take-off once again in American society. I mean the kind of political change and

growth that once again will help to advance the country.

“But what I think is going to be critical this time is the role of educators in ensuring that the questions are addressed and hopefully resolved.”

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