

You wanted to know what the Woodson community would say if asked, “With my degree in AAS/AS, what am I qualified to do?” Your faculty and fellows put a great deal of thought into this question. Their replies are found below.

MAURICE O. WALLACE, WOODSON FACULTY

The students' question about the utility of an AAS or African Studies major/minor is not unique to AAS or African Studies. It is a question on the minds of all of the humanities, frankly. "What does an English, History, Art, Anthropology, Women's Studies, Sociology major/minor qualify one to do" is the anxious question of many. My answer is: virtually anything. Admittedly, if one expects her major or minor to translate directly and immediately into a professional career, then the most obvious options for an AAS or African Studies major include education, activism, politics, and religion with their direct need for persons intimately knowledgeable about the social, political, and cultural meaning of black life and expression. The AAS and African Studies major/minor is also excellent preparation, of course, for advanced study in a variety of humanities fields and in law and medicine. I would invite students and their families to think about the utility of an AAS or African Studies major/minor in more imaginative, less reductive ways, however. The AAS or African Studies curriculum is far-reaching—a near world of neglected accomplishments, ideas and views of human survival and, often, flourishing. It, thus, prepares our students for life and work in places and in positions beyond traditional expectations. Research, broadcast journalism, public office, museum and cultural center leadership, entrepreneurship, Peace Corps, White House staffing, even independent film-making, then, are among several other post-graduate pursuits I've known my past AAS/African Studies students to follow, many to distinction.

KIRT VON DAACKE, WOODSON FACULTY AFFILIATE

My few words would be: first, you can do anything with a degree in AAS. Your employability after college is not really connected to your major. Instead, you'll be a graduate of the University of Virginia, itself a powerful calling card. What's most important is really where you went to school and how well you did—school and GPA are the key indices potential employers will first encounter and use to assess you. The second important factor is skill development—can you critically read? Do research? Perform analysis? Communicate clearly in writing and in person? Do you have a broad base of knowledge about the world (are you a global citizen in some way)? And last, are you teachable/trainable/flexible? The AAS major at an elite liberal arts & sciences curriculum school is the perfect place to develop those skills—it is an inherently interdisciplinary and globally-focused discipline that has trained you to read critically, to research, to analyze, and to communicate effectively. Your opportunity to demonstrate those skills comes through your professional resume, your interest/cover letter for a position, and how you present yourself in-person during an interview. Those are the moments when you will demonstrate just how powerful your skills are.

CLAUDRENA HAROLD, WOODSON FACULTY

Our alum and NFL player, Laroy Reynolds, tells me that whenever folks ask him what can he do with Black Studies he proudly responds: "Change the world."

Thanks in part to the broad intellectual training offered through AAS, our graduates have excelled in a variety of fields, from education to business. We have students working as teachers/educators, policy analysts, lawyers, public health professionals, and writers (for example, Joshua Adams, a 2012 graduate who is getting his masters at USC writes for Ebony.com). If students want to continue their intellectual pursuits at the graduate level, they should know that our alums have done pretty well on that front. This fall semester alone, our graduates have started doctorate/MA programs at Georgetown, Ohio State, UPenn, Vanderbilt, UNC-Chapel Hill, NC A&T, Howard, Wake Forest, and Syracuse, among others. For those who want to stay with AAS, they should know we have students at Berkeley, Yale, and Michigan State. Not all but many of these students have benefited immensely from IRT, which has looked out for many of our majors. Completing a DMP in AAS or another related discipline should also be on the radar of those who want to do graduate school.

Our placement in terms of graduate school has been a blessing and a curse. I think students know this is an excellent route to the doctorate, at the same time folks wonder what you can do if you DON'T want to go to graduate school. In terms of moving straight into the job force, we've done pretty well on that front.

Like their counterparts in the social sciences and humanities, students with AAS degrees have been able to pursue the traditional post-UVA career routes like consulting and marketing and working in the field of education. This does require that they are thinking about life after UVA before their last year and that they devote a little more time to securing an internship.

Fortunately, many of our alums have been able to help. Students should know that several alums have specifically targeted AAS majors in their recruitment endeavors for their respective companies (Accenture, Cravath Swaine, and Moore, and Goldman Sachs). This semester, for example, one of our alums who double majored in AAS and Commerce did some recruiting for Accenture, a management consulting firm, and specifically reached out to Black studies folks. She spent an entire day at the University. Another alum recruiting for her law firm carved out time away from the law school and met informally with our students.

I have issues with some of these companies, but students should know that these outreach initiatives are happening and that majoring in the liberal arts doesn't foreclose certain opportunities in the business world. With AAS—as with any major—it's how you "work" the internship game and fortunately through our growing network of alums we are trying to improve our students' ability to get internships.

I should also note that some faculty have been able to hire folks through the USOAR program as research assistants. So for the past two years, I've had about 3 research assistants hired through grants. These are opportunities that our students should be pursuing since companies are looking for folks with research experience.

This USOAR program is also good for students in AAS who double major in the sciences.

(cont.) Words of Advice

Keep that GPA up so that you have options

Look at what AAS alums are doing...

Think about internships and ask faculty for assistance

Get to the know the center for undergraduate excellence

look at research opportunities through USOAR

understand that aas gives you an expertise that is quite valuable in our increasingly diverse world

keep that GPA up so that you have options

NJELLE W. HAMILTON, WOODSON FACULTY

When thinking about what your major/ college education qualifies you to do, don't think about jobs or singular pathways, but about what we used to call a vocation — a calling or life path that corresponds to the issues, questions, practices, and values that you hold dear. Then think about career paths that will fulfill that vocation, and then how the unique combination of coursework, extracurricular activities, and hobbies that you pursue in college contribute to constructing that identity and pathway.

So, as to what you can do with a degree/ minor in AAS:

— Ask yourself what sensibilities have you been developing by learning about systematic injustices and inequalities that have plagued African Diaspora peoples, and in what fields you might place yourself to begin to work towards eradicating them.

— Ask yourself what careers and professions you can infuse with your training in the historical and contemporary issues that impact African Diaspora peoples.

— Ask yourself what fields could benefit from a revalorizing of African Diaspora languages, histories, and cultures, and from having experts with those skills, competencies, and sensibilities.

So then that includes:

- medicine
- medical anthropology
- social policy
- development
- education
- education policy
- politics
- international relations
- linguistics and translation
- health policy
- religion
- archaeology
- creative writing and the arts

In other words, every job, and every career. The question is: what **do you** want to do with an AAS major or minor?

ELLEN CONTINI-MORAVA, WOODSON FACULTY AFFILIATE

What do you gain with a major in AAS?

Expertise in cultural diversity is a great asset both in the U.S. workplace and in the context of globalization. [You gain] experience analyzing issues from several disciplinary perspectives, hence familiarity with multiple types of research methodology and ways to frame and answer complex questions.

SABRINA PENDERGRASS, WOODSON FACULTY

Nations are dealing with the challenges of Ebola in West Africa. An American city is undergoing weeks of protests because of ongoing police shootings of its unarmed African American men. 'The color line,' as W.E.B. Du Bois called it, continues to define our legal, educational, medical, and political systems and the neighborhoods and broader world in which we live. The "emotional wealth" of black folks as Du Bois phrased it--through literature, music, theater, dance, film, the visual arts--has transformed cultures and crosses the globe. Any career path a student might take would be enhanced by the knowledge and skills they would obtain through an AAS major or minor.

LISA SHUTT, WOODSON FACULTY

Your curriculum in AAS and AS does not simply prepare you for the particular career(s) that you will later pursue. We are taught to imagine that each college major lines up neatly with a small number of possible career choices. Not true! This major *does* provide you with very marketable skills: excellent writing skills, public presentation skills, the ability to constructively work both independently and within teams, critical thinking and the ability to quickly digest and reproduce complex ideas, the ability to work with people from diverse backgrounds, the skill to craft arguments and persuade others, a focus on using a variety of methods and considering a variety of perspectives, and the ability to conduct research and analyze different kinds of data, among many others. These are all marketable skills. However, some of the most helpful pieces you put together from this area of study are not simply about career preparation, but about creating yourself as an individual living in the world with presence and purpose. African American and African Studies helps you assemble a general orientation to the world that is critical, constructive, active and political. It is an orientation to the world that helps you see through some of the haze that hangs over this nation and the global community beyond – and that ultimately will help you to cut through it and find your own ways to effect change.

LINDSEY JONES, WOODSON TEACHING ASSISTANT & CURRY Ph.D. Candidate

An AAS major/minor will prepare you both to investigate the historical roots of contemporary social challenges and to look at the past as a source of ideas to address these challenges. Whether you build a career as an entrepreneur, activist, teacher, or in any other field, the habit of learning historical context will allow you to innovate in meaningful and inspired ways.

KWAME EDWIN OTU, WOODSON FELLOW

I think students should be passionate about the courses they enroll in. They must feel the need to invest time, energy, and joy in them, too. The absence of either one or all of these makes their aspirations meaningless. For to be able to gauge one's competence and preparedness for the job market they must learn to appreciate the multiple benefits they stand to offer from these Majors. So I outline below:

1. AAS and African Studies are useful disciplinary and practical tools that can allow students to work in both corporate worlds and in the fields of science and technology. The increasing pressure on corporations to recognize the significance of corporate social responsibility, for example, strategically positions AAS/AS students, i.e. makes them employable. Increasingly, employers are seeking potential employees with the intellectual wherewithal, as well as the necessary familiarity with the populations that their decisions and projects affect. Hence, students must be made aware that the knowledge they acquire from enrolling in these courses, or having them as their majors, affords them those skills needed in these corporate worlds.
2. In a world where diversity has become an epitome of transnationalism, AAS/AS students unlike students in other fields in the Social Sciences, have the benefit of interdisciplinarity. For AAS/AS allows students to do an admixture of courses that allows them to apply different disciplinary theories and methods to what they study. Therefore, the transdisciplinary dimension of AAS/AS puts students in the position to handle sociological, anthropological, political, religious, economic, to give but a partial list, tasks. Knowledge acquired from these domains adds to their competitiveness. So, they may be graduating with a Major in AAS/AS, however their specialization in the latter gives them an added impetus to get a job.
3. And for those considering academic jobs, there has been, in recent years, an upsurge in programs in these fields i.e. AAS/AS. These programs often mix applied and theoretical and approaches. Thus, students who wish to enroll in graduate programs, not only have the option of becoming academics, but also have the potential of becoming consultants and experts on social, political, and economic issues should they consider doing so. There's also the option of law and social work. Students have increasingly used AAS/AS as a gateway towards pursuing law.

AVA PURKISS, WOODSON FELLOW

I have jumped around from discipline to discipline in ways that may seem incoherent, but have worked well in terms of making me a better scholar. I majored in psychology as an undergraduate student. In the middle of earning my degree, I took part in a study abroad program that invigorated my interest in African American and African Diaspora Studies. I chose not to change my major but I supplemented my coursework with as many classes in African American history and literature as I could. After graduating I went on to pursue an MA in African and African Diaspora Studies. During that time, I found that African American history is what I wanted to study, so after completing my M.A. I entered a Ph.D. program in American history. I am now a pre-doctoral fellow at the Woodson Institute, so in a sense I have come full circle. (continued on next page)

I tell this story about my trajectory to show that sometimes the route toward your eventual profession or career is not always predictable, rational, or typical. Even if I could, I would not change the way things transpired. My psychology background makes me a more empirical researcher, and my experience with African Diaspora Studies makes a more rigorous historian, so I am grateful for my background in these fields. At each step I refined what I liked and made changes at the next step, and this has worked well for me. Therefore, my advice is to cultivate a curiosity for things you might like, and when you find what it is you enjoy, adjust your plan accordingly. And if it does not work out, it is OK to change your mind!

I wish you all the best in your academic and professional careers!

LAURA E. HELTON, WOODSON FELLOW

Two things I'd share about "what to do with that degree":

1) Becoming a good writer will serve you perhaps more than anything else you can do to prepare for future careers. Even if you don't think of yourself as a "writer," or someone who likes writing, it is a craft that you end up using almost no matter what kind of work you do in the future. You'll inevitably be writing scouting reports, research reports, grant proposals, business proposals, campaign strategy reports, emails, marketing materials, and so on and so on. Potential employers can spot good writers from their cover letters and emails, and they will value that skill almost as much as any other particular kind of training or experience. I have been surprised multiple times by how a finely-crafted cover letter won me a hearing for a potential job even if it seemed like a long shot. This was true of jobs in government, the non-profit sector, fundraising, and higher education. Another thing I was surprised by after college was how often in the job search process I was asked for a "writing sample." Not just for grad school applications, but for regular jobs. So I would advise making sure that by the time you graduate you have some piece of writing--a research paper, a position paper, a piece of journalism, a review essay, etc.--that you feel good about and which represents your voice, so that you'll have something ready if a potential employer asks for a sample of your writing skills. Don't be afraid to ask one of your professors to help you revise/edit a piece to make it ready to serve as a writing sample. Most professors will be delighted to work with a student who is taking the initiative and taking seriously the art of writing.

2) Volunteer and internship work: An important way to connect your academic work to your political and social concerns, to learn about how organizations work and where you might fit into them, and to give you experience within a particular field. As an undergrad, I volunteered with two different AIDS service organizations and also interned at an arts non-profit. Working in the HIV/AIDS field gave me a lot of knowledge about public health, sexuality, LGBT organizations, and health care activism. I cared about the work and had the chance to learn a lot about an issue that I was passionate about, but it also made me qualified for jobs at a wide range of organizations and directly led to interviews and a job in the years right after graduation. I didn't know going into the arts internship what kind of work I would be doing there, but I ended up helping put together grant proposals, which turned out to be incredibly valuable and marketable later.

So, the upshot: in your college career, focus on learning about subjects and issues you care about, rather than worrying about how a particular field of study is going to get you a job or not. Plans for your career can change and most people end up in jobs through a certain degree of serendipity and contacts made outside of school. And once you land in the job you want, you'll need all the skills from college--writing, thinking, and expressing your ideas clearly and persuasively--to help you do well.