

## **Black Research Symposium (BRS)**

Theme: “The Power of Community: Afro-Diasporic Worldbuilding and a Sustainable Futurity.”

March 23 - 25, 2023

Location: AACC + Witherspoon; Hunt Library

Estimated Attendance: 150-200 (across 3 days)

### **OVERVIEW**

The Black Research Symposium is the first of its kind on NC State’s campus that will feature Black diasporic learning, scholarship, and epistemologies via cutting-edge research, storytelling, creative works, discussion circles, community-based projects, and industry initiatives from the NC State campus and surrounding community. The symposium is a three-day event that will take place on March 23 - 25, 2023. The work of this symposium is to engage in the practice of Sankofa, to promote futuristic thinking, to embody the principle of Ubuntu, to foster Harambee, and to assert rest as a revolution!

Invited are students, scholars, faculty, social justice activists, artists, creators, storytellers, entrepreneurs and community members. We encourage all to attend and submit proposals. Interdisciplinary and multimodal research, community-based projects and cultural work are encouraged in a variety of formats, which include but are not limited to, presentations, digital posters, workshops, panels, teach-ins, community discussions, photo essays, music demos, cyphers, art displays, multimedia presentations, performance, embodied movement, and more.

### **WHY THIS SYMPOSIUM AND WHY NOW?**

NC State University’s 2021-2030 strategic plan (*Wolfpack 2030: Powering the Extraordinary*) recognizes the unique challenges presented by the urgency for racial equity and social justice across global society. In response, NC State has asked the campus community to center equity, inclusion, and access in all that it does. The Black Research Symposium (BRS) as a critical component and partner towards these goals will be a public example of NC State’s efforts. As an innovative framework in which to engage students in scholarship, holistic development, and high-impact practices, BRS has the potential to transform how we “Think and Do.” Not only does the framework and goals for BRS align with NC State’s 2021-2030 strategic plan (*Wolfpack 2030: Powering the Extraordinary*), but it also pushes forward the strategic initiatives of the African American Cultural Center as a hub for Black life, Black thought, and collaboration on campus. The BRS will engage students in scholarship, learning, and dynamic community building framed in culturally responsive and culturally sustaining practices (Alim et al., 2017; Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2021).

### **HOW IS THIS DIFFERENT FROM OTHER SYMPOSIUMS AT NC STATE UNIVERSITY?**

Most research symposiums are built upon a “Western” model of knowledge production (Castleden et al., 2015; Smith, 2021). The rules of engagement in these spaces include unspoken agreements on “who” is qualified to conduct research, and conventional definitions of

how knowledge is produced. As Marimba Ani details in *Yurugu* (Ani, 1994), knowledge in the Western context, centers positivist and materialist frameworks focused on the written word and specific forms of rationalization; thereby, excluding the multiple ways of knowing that are embodied and practiced everyday among diverse communities around the world (Ani, 1994). This symposium will honor ways of knowing by Afro-Diasporic peoples that are both ancestral and historical; intuitive and empirical; spiritual and pragmatic.

Castleden et al. (2015) notes how even in community-based participatory research, colonial relationships and unequal power relations still manage to characterize many research projects initiated in academic spaces (Castleden et al., 2015). Research symposiums which fail to interrogate the long histories of colonial, capitalist, and structurally racist underpinnings of scholarship may inadvertently replicate Eurocentric values and Western hegemonic power dynamics, creating a disconnect between researcher and those who are researched. This disconnect alienates community from research; focusing the benefits of research on the career advancement of the researcher rather than collective solutions for the community under study (Castleden et al., 2015). We also know that communities of color, and Black communities in particular, have a challenging and often oppressive relationship to research, where we have been historically portrayed through a deficit based lens and demonized via a collective pathology (Tuck, 2009; Castleden et al., 2015).

These issues should cause us to question our methods and approach to research. The BRS symposium will not replicate these issues, but present an innovative model to reconsider how we engage in research thereby moving forward the objectives and goals of NC State's strategic plan and the AACC initiatives. This is demonstrated in the next section.

### **ALIGNMENT WITH NC STATE'S STRATEGIC GOALS**

The Black Research Symposium seeks to align with 5 out of 7 NCSU' 2030 strategic goals.

- **Goal 1: Empower students for a lifetime of success and impact.**
  - Success and impact for NCSU students must include culturally relevant and liberatory frameworks that engage and ground students in decolonizing methodologies and social justice frameworks.
  - Representation matters. And there is power in one's network.
    - In 2021, at only 5.36% of faculty, and 15.14% of staff, the current demographics of Black faculty/staff, let alone the total number of BIPOC faculty/staff are not enough to adequately serve and engage the needs of diverse students at NCSU (*Diversity – Institutional Strategy and Analysis*, 2021).
    - Black students in particular often report an experience of being the “only one” in their classes having little to no interaction with Black staff/faculty and Black students (Arroyo et al., 2018, p. 41). Often, these experiences of isolation and loneliness are even more pronounced for Black women (Arroyo et al., 2018). Arroyo (2018) cautions us to remember that “the relative success of Black women in college when juxtaposed with Black men can mask the very real challenges these women face” (Arroyo et al.,

2018, p. 32). In addition to feeling like the “only one” Stone et al. (2018) illustrates the ways in which imposter feelings impact the social, emotional and mental health of Black students at predominantly white institutions (Stone et al., 2018). By creating an intentional space- i.e. the Black Research Symposium- we can bring various constituents together across campus, into a space of collaboration. A “sacred container” to experience high impact practices in a culturally competent and liberatory framework (Pandit & Cooper, 2022).

- Students have an integral seat at the planning and organizing table for the BRS, including graduate and undergraduate students (AACC GA, student programming interns, the Umoja Affiliates framework, and AYA Ambassadors) to foster and inform student centered spaces and collaboration at the symposium. Student leaders will have a significant role in the planning, organizing, and execution of the symposium. As well as gain research and career development experiences that they can build upon with future employers.
- **Goal 2: Ensure preeminence in research, scholarship, innovation and collaboration.**
  - The Black Research Symposium presents a holistic framework to approach problem based, participatory, or community action research and scholarship. By centering on Black diasporic ways of knowing and communicating knowledge the BRS has the capacity, with institutionalized support, to position NC State as a preeminent leader around culturally responsive and relevant research endeavors with the ability to attract faculty, staff, and thereby positively impact the recruitment and retention of students.
  - For Black communities in particular, research shouldn't be an isolated act that is distinct from spiritual communion with ancestral knowledge, extracurricular activities, community activism, creative art making, cultural heritage, or academic exploration. Rather, research should be engaged in a fluid space where there is a continuation of learning, and the inclusion of various community participants. The Black Research Symposium creates a “sacred container” to engage in research and scholarship embedded in Afro-Diasporic cultural forms, grounded in Afro-Diasporic ways of being, and informed by Afro-Diasporic epistemologies. .
  - Within NC State's *2020 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)* the results on High Impact Practices reveal that Black students at NCSU have the highest engagement in the category of “research with faculty” in their first and senior year– 7% and 46% respectively. As compared to 5% and 32% of White students respectively (*NSSE High-Impact Practices, 2020*). This demonstrates an interest in research that should be fully supported via targeted initiatives. These targeted initiatives not only serve as a model for Black students, but other underrepresented student populations as well.
  - This type of targeted strategy is mirrored in the equity framework developed by the Haas Institute under John Powell at the University of Berkeley. In Powell's

framework of *targeted universalism* - “universal goals are established for all groups concerned. The strategies developed to achieve those goals are targeted, based upon how different groups are situated within structures, culture, and across geographies to obtain the universal goal.” (Powell et al., 2019, p. 5). In a similar vein, even though research and scholarship is established as a universal goal for *all* NC State students, we must have targeted strategies to effectively meet the needs of Black identified students on campus. As we stand today, NC State does not currently host any research symposium that centers scholarship on Afro-Diasporic communities, or uplifts the work of Afro-Diasporic scholars on campus.

- **Goal 3: Expand and advance our engagement with and service to North Carolina and beyond.**
  - ***Authorship and Ownership - Cite Black Sources:*** NC State is exploring new models for *university-community* collaborations. Frameworks such as these —by necessity and survival— have a long legacy in Black communities. Many of these innovative *university-community* collaborations have sprouted directly from Black communities. In this way, we build on the legacy of Black liberation movements, and other BIPOC communities who have a long grassroots history of doing “communiversity”- thereby supporting high impact practices via an afro-diasporic liberatory lens with community engagement at its core.
  - As NC State is a land grant and research-one institution, emergent within its fabric is a focus on teaching practical ways of advancing the industrial and political goals of the nation for the cultural benefit of society (Ford, 2017). This includes creating multiple avenues for scholarship to emerge. As such the work of the Black research symposium is to do just that, create multiple avenues to connect the community back to NC State by including and showcasing our community’s intellectual work in the ‘windows’ of the university as well as by giving intellectual work back to the community so that it can be utilized to create better and stronger communities, leaning on NC State’s motto to not only think, but also do.
  
- **Goal 4: Champion a culture of equity, diversity, inclusion, belonging and well-being in all we do.**
  - Traditional models of research based on “western” cultural values do not serve our entire community of diverse students, staff, and faculty at NCSU. We are a diverse campus and we need models that champions, looks for, and listens to the various “tones” and “melodies” of Black diasporic people (Curtis, 2017, p. 98). Equity and inclusion means that one size doesn’t fit all, even within a diverse culture.
  - Goals towards equity and inclusion support enrollment goals for the institution. If we are to increase our enrollment of BIPOC students, we must also provide access to high impact practices within culturally relevant and liberatory frameworks that engage and ground students in decolonizing methodologies and

social justice frameworks. This means paying attention to what Paul Gorski and Marceline DuBois of the *Equity Literacy Institute* call “experience disparities” or “experience differences.” Noting that “access to feelings of belonging,” spaces of affinity, and social inclusion are just as important as access to material resources (Gorski & DuBose, n.d.).

- **Goal 6: Lead in developing innovative partnerships, entrepreneurial thinking and applied problem solving.**
  - This symposium seeks to integrate innovative partnerships; involving industry, community, artists, staff, student faculty, storytellers, activists, and elders - building on partnerships with NCSU libraries, NC State Entrepreneurship programs, Student Leadership and Engagement, and interdisciplinary connections among various academic disciplines on campus.

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE BLACK RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM**

*The symposium will embrace and reflect following guiding principles. Each principle has 1-3 learning outcomes attached to the principle below.*

- **Practice Sankofa-** learning from the past to build a future.
  - Participants will be able to define and build upon the principle of Sankofa. (knowledge/remember)
  - Participants will be able to identify elements of Afro-Diasporic culture, values, worldview, and practices. (knowledge/remember)
  - Participants will be able to discuss how they can incorporate Afro-Diasporic cultural practices, epistemologies, ways of being, into their professional and personal work. (understand)
- **Be Futuristic-** building on theories of afrofuturism (Womack, 2013), african futurism (Okorafor, 2019; Wabuke, 2020) , and astro-Blackness (Anderson & Jones, 2016), these theories imagine a future where Black people do indeed exist, free from white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, extreme capitalism, and the violence of imperial wars. The “work of the imagination” as Robin D. G. Kelley frames it, offers us tools to craft “new visions” in a radical act of worldbuilding (Kelley, 2022).
  - Participants will be introduced to various viewpoints in Afrofuturist theories. (knowledge/remember)
  - Participants will be able to imagine new futures grounded in Afrofuturist theories. (apply)
  - Participants will be able to examine ways, via their everyday practices, that they can create sustainable futures for Black people. (analyze)
- **Embody Ubuntu-** build *with* and *alongside* community; increase capacity; honor our interconnectedness; build solidarity.
  - Participants will engage in a deeper understanding of solidarity and interconnectedness. (understand)

- Participants will be able to identify new principles they want to model in their own community, research or scholarship practices as it builds solidarity and interconnectedness. (apply)
- **Each One Teach One**- everyone has knowledge to share; decenter hierarchical power dynamics, center lived experiences and stories; cultivate intergenerational interactions and learning opportunities.
  - People will be able to experience multiple forms of scholarship and research that centers the experiences of Black folks. (knowledge/remember)
  - Participants will see, view, and engage in various demonstrations on how research/scholarship can be presented outside of a Western paradigm. (analyze)
  - Participants will embody the value that everyone has expertise and knowledge to share; and construct and center intergenerational stories and lived experiences of Black peoples and collective community in research and scholarship. (evaluate)
- **Foster Harambee**- champion mutually supportive and relational ways of engaging with community, be relevant; offer solutions; share resources; ground theory in practice/praxis
  - Participants will be introduced to research and scholarship models and projects that break down the barriers between academic and community. (knowledge/remember)
  - Participants will be able to formulate ideas that they could put into action to support community building, shared resources, equity initiatives, and mutual aid. (evaluate)
  - Participants will generate solutions, recommendations, and planning that directly benefits Black communities. (create)
- **Be Sustainable**- create structures and systems that are equitable and just; be good stewards of our resources; build systems and institutions that can be replicated.
  - Participants will be able to identify equity frameworks rooted in Afro-Diasporic cultural practices and epistemologies. (knowledge/remember)
  - Participants will be able to apply equity frameworks (compare, contrast, pick and choose) to their own projects, research and scholarship. (apply and analyze)
  - Participants will be able to determine how they can be good stewards of resources and cultivate sustainable practices in projects as it relates to people capacity, resources, and wellness. (evaluate)
- **Be Emergent**- value transformation, change, creativity, growth, and innovation; center relational ways of being; overstand that the process is just as important as the finished product (“emergent”) (brown, 2017). (adrienne maree brown)
  - Participants will engage in research and scholarship that is in progress. (knowledge/remember)
  - Sessions will foster continual community building and opportunities for participants to join, add, and contribute to projects post symposium. (evaluate)
  - Participants will prioritize connections and interactions that are relational rather than transactional. (apply)
- **Rest as Revolution**- nurture holistic practices and spirituality; be whole; be authentic.

- Participants will be able to identify, choose, and learn about various wellness practices and tips. (understand)
- Participants will cultivate a wellness habit/practice in their personal and professional work/practices. (apply)
- Participants will feel an overall sense of wellbeing as a result of attending the event. (create)

### **Bloom's Taxonomy (Key)**

- Create
- Evaluate
- Analyze
- Apply
- Understand/ Comprehension
- Knowledge/ Remember

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