

## **Teaching Cultural Heritage Preservation: Developing Curriculum Materials for Minority Colleges and Universities**

**Antoinette J. Lee**, National Center for Cultural Resources, National Park Service, 1849 C Street NW (2251), Washington, D.C. 20240-0001; toni\_lee@nps.gov

The “Teaching Cultural Heritage Preservation” project grew out of the need to attract young, diverse individuals to the cultural resources field. This cooperative project involved the National Park Service (NPS) and representatives of minority colleges and universities in the development of a basic course outline for teaching cultural heritage preservation. The project resulted in a printed and on-line course outline and provided a model by which established cultural resources organizations may work with minority organizations to achieve a mutually beneficial goal.

For decades, the professionals who work in the field as historians, archeologists, architects, landscape architects, and curators have not represented the multicultural nature of the country. There are various theories about why this field remained non-diverse, while other professions, such as law, medicine, accounting, and computer science, became diversified through the leadership of the professional schools and leading professionals. The major disciplines that feed professionals into the cultural resources field—history, architecture, archeology, landscape architecture, and others—are also very non-diverse.

### **Cultural Resources Diversity Program**

Rather than accepting the status quo, in 1998, the National Park Service initiated the Cultural Resources Diversity Program (CRDP) in order to address the demographics of the field. The impetus for the CRDP came from Robert Stanton, then director of the National Park Service, who was concerned that NPS and its partners were increasingly addressing cultural resources associated with minority cultures and cooperating with diverse communities on resource management issues. He thought that NPS should take the lead in diversifying the professional ranks of those who worked on these resources and with these communities.

While the major purpose of the CRDP was to increase the number of individuals representing all the nation’s cultural and ethnic groups in professional cultural resources jobs,

the program expanded in scope to include increasing the number of historic and cultural resources associated with the nation’s diverse cultural groups that are identified, documented, preserved, and interpreted. It also took on the goal of increasing the number of diverse organizations and communities that are involved in preserving the nation’s heritage in cooperation with NPS and its partners.

There are several legislative bases for the CRDP. One of these is found in section 101(j)(I) of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA):

The Secretary [of the Interior] shall ... develop and implement a comprehensive preservation education and training program ... [that shall include] technical or financial assistance, or both, to historically black colleges and universities, to tribal colleges, and to colleges with a high enrollment of Native Americans or Native Hawaiians, to establish preservation training and degree programs.

This paragraph was added to the NHPA through the 1990 amendments and provided a legislative justification for the CRDP programs directed at minority colleges and universities. These programs could include cooperative efforts in training, professional development, research, and community outreach.

One of the major programs to develop from the overall CRDP was the Cultural

Resources Diversity Internship Program. Since 1999, between 15 and 20 diverse undergraduate and graduate students per year work at NPS or with one of its partnership organizations on a 10-week internship. The diversity internship program is envisioned as providing career exploration opportunities for diverse undergraduate and graduate students. Because of the careful selection of internship projects, the program offers challenging work experiences that help interns build their résumés in this field. In cooperation with the Student Conservation Association, which is the administrative partner on the diversity internship program, NPS actively recruits students from minority colleges and universities.

### Development of Teaching Cultural Heritage Preservation Course Outline

As successful as the Diversity Internship Program was in providing initial exposure to the field to dozens of undergraduate and graduate students, its reach does not extend beyond a relatively small number of beneficiaries per year. If minority colleges and universities offered at least one course in cultural heritage preservation, then potentially hundreds of students could be reached. Course offerings could provide students with exposure to the field and, if preservation professionals were invited to participate in the course, additional internship opportunities could be organized nearby the schools.

The National Park Service realized that it could not simply duplicate and distribute the teaching materials offered at any one of a number of graduate degree programs in historic preservation because few of them were sponsored by minority colleges and universities. NPS decided to develop new materials based on the active involvement of the constituents who would use the materials.

### Organizing the Curriculum Forum

To develop the course materials, NPS initiated discussions with one of its educational partners—Goucher College in Baltimore, Maryland—regarding assembling a planning group. Goucher College contacted Coppin

State University and Morgan State University, both of which are historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) also located in Baltimore. The planning group also included NPS's Harpers Ferry Center, which was responsible for NPS training in cultural resources. Each of the planning group members recommended individuals from minority colleges and universities and diverse professionals who were interested in the purposes of the project and experienced with minority students.

The Curriculum Forum met for a day-and-a-half in Baltimore in April 2001, and moved its deliberations from Morgan State to Coppin State and finally to Goucher College. Its members included educators and cultural resources professionals representing 11 colleges and universities, the National Park Service, the Cincinnati Museum Complex, and the Smithsonian Institution. The professional disciplines represented included historic preservation, history, architecture, ethnic studies, anthropology, and ethnography.

Based on extensive meeting notes, drafts of the course outline were prepared and distributed to the Curriculum Forum members and others for review and comment. The final course outline was edited, printed, and distributed to hundreds of minority colleges and universities, as well as state historic preservation offices, federal preservation offices, and national organizations. An e-mail message from the U.S. Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (US/ICOMOS) generated requests from other countries, such as Korea, Sweden, Australia, and Italy. The electronic version of the course outline was posted on the website of the NPS Cultural Resources Diversity Program ([www.cr.nps.gov/crdi](http://www.cr.nps.gov/crdi)). The Archaeological Institute of America was impressed with the course outline and posted the electronic copy of on its own website.

### Contents of the Course Outline

The "Teaching Cultural Heritage Preservation" course outline was organized into three units: (1) *Place and Culture*, (2) *Power and Politics*, and (3) *Process and*

*Profession.* For each unit, learning objectives, activities, and resources were developed. The course outline also included a general discussion of the challenge of diversifying the cultural resources field and the goal of the course outline of encouraging colleges and universities to create undergraduate courses in the preservation of minority cultural heritage.

The *Place and Culture* unit addresses what is encompassed within the term “cultural heritage.” (It is interesting to note that the Curriculum Forum members preferred the term “cultural heritage preservation” to “historic preservation” or “cultural resource stewardship.”) The unit encourages students to learn from communities what is important and worthy of preservation. The unit also encourages students to analyze the ways in which historic places and events are interpreted to the public. This unit suggests that communities also may value other expressions of cultural heritage, including intangible culture, such as songs and stories.

The *Power and Politics* unit directs students to examine the role of power and politics in decisions about the recognition, preservation, and interpretation of cultural heritage. Many of these decisions are made by government agencies and elected officials and reflected in the desires of property owners and community members. The end result of this unit is to encourage communities to involve themselves in the shaping of these decisions to ensure the preservation of cultural heritage that is important to them.

The third and final unit, *Process and Profession*, provides a compressed discussion of the official process of identifying, documenting, and preserving the historic places and cultural heritage. It suggests ways in which the process could be more inclusive of diverse points of views. Finally, this unit introduces students to the range of professions that play important roles in the preservation process. Ideally, students will become familiar with preservation organizations and agencies in their communities and learn how various professionals entered the field.

## **Reactions to the Teaching Cultural Heritage Preservation Course Outline**

When the Teaching Cultural Heritage Preservation course outline was distributed, most of the responses came from established historic preservation organizations. A representative of the Division of Historical Resources of the state of Florida wrote, “I strongly believe that your book has provided the preservation field with another step forward in recognizing the intangible heritage of our many peoples.” The Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation of the state of New York reported, “One of the goals of our State Historic Preservation Plan is to ‘educate New Yorkers on the importance of preserving the state’s rich heritage.’— your publication will definitely be a resource in helping us achieve this goal!” These responses, plus many other e-mail messages, underscored the importance of NPS endorsement of a broader “footprint” for the cultural resources field. The respondents also appreciated the connection between the wider scope of the field and educational objectives.

There were few unsolicited responses from professors at minority colleges and universities. When contacted by NPS, professors at these schools were pleased to receive the course outline and were considering ways in which to integrate parts of it into their course offerings. This points out the need for continued dialogue with these professors to ensure that the materials are relevant to their teaching needs.

## **The Next Steps**

The next step in the implementation of the Teaching Cultural Heritage Preservation project is to find ways to assist minority colleges and universities with the development of new courses. An opportunity arose to address this topic during the April 2003 meeting of the Organization of American Historians (OAH) in Memphis, Tennessee. The OAH organized a number of sessions at the conference in order to address the special needs of historically black colleges and universities. One of these sessions was titled “Historically Black

## **Racial and Ethnic Diversity: Acknowledging the Past, Planning for the Future**

Colleges and Universities and Historic Preservation.”

Several professors reported that they had received the Teaching Cultural Heritage Preservation course outline and were reviewing ways in which they could integrate the contents into their courses. Others expressed an interest in using the course outline to build campus support for historic campus buildings, the historical archives of the institution, stronger connections between themselves and

the surrounding communities, and other historical needs of the school. The HBCUs represented at the OAH session agreed to form an informal consortium and discuss an agenda and plan for future action. The National Park Service will continue to work with minority colleges, not just because it is the right thing to do, but because this commitment will contribute to the ability of NPS and its partners to address the cultural heritage needs of the multicultural United States of the 21st century.

