SENATE TO VOTE ON W.E.B. DU BOIS CENTER

Proposed center would capitalize on strengths in faculty, archives to promote scholarship on 20th Century activist and scholar’s legacy in race, class, and social justice

That the UMass Faculty Senate’s vote next week on whether to open a W.E.B. Du Bois Center falls during February 2009 is a coincidence, says Robert Cox, director of Special Collections at the University’s libraries. Although this month is the centennial of the NAACP, which Du Bois co-founded, and is also Black History Month and the month of Du Bois’s birth, the Feb. 12 senate meeting just happens to be when years of effort on campus around Du Bois and his work is slated to come together, according to Cox.

Du Bois was a sociologist, historian and prolific author—a scholar of race and class on an international scale—and founder of a number of human rights organizations, including the Niagara Movement and the Pan-African Congresses, as well as the NAACP.

UMass’s W.E.B. Du Bois Library already houses the Du Bois papers, a digital archive, photographs and other Du Bois materials and co-hosts a colloquium on Du Bois’s work each February with the University’s W.E.B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies.

“The Center will propagate the legacy of one of the great intellectuals and activists of the 20th Century,” Cox says. “Because we are stewards of the Du Bois papers, a lot of us feel the need to ensure that his important analyses of race, class, and social position survive into the 21st Century. We would like to see them continue to be part of the conversation.”

Library administrators, supported by a number of Faculty Senate councils, are proposing the center, which will be part of the library but supported by faculty around campus.
“No other place has the depth of expertise we do in Afro-American studies, social justice and labor relations,” Cox says. “The center will bring scholars to UMass to work with our faculty and each other.”

The scholars’ nine-month terms would allow them to work on individual research and to assist the center with hosting interdisciplinary colloquia, seminars and an annual conference. The center also would publish scholarly and educational materials, share the legacy of and scholarship about Du Bois with larger audiences, and assist the Friends of the Du Bois Homesite in Great Barrington with the land where he lived when he was young.

“Few scholars have thought as deeply and over such an extended period of time as Du Bois,” Cox says. “We think those ideas are still relevant today, so we want to bring people together to continue to think about Du Bois’s analyses. And ideally the center will help us provide a bridge between academic analyses and the public conversations of these issues.”

In other business, the senate will consider supplemental guidelines for graduate certificate proposals, and safety and training protocols for visiting scientists and scholars.

The University’s principal administrative officers will offer updates from their areas and will entertain questions from the audience.

The meeting is at 3:30 in Room 227 Herter Hall and is open to the public.