

UW Leads African Studies Field

The University of Wisconsin has one of the first — and probably the best — African studies program in the United States.

In the field of languages, Wisconsin was the first university to organize a regular department giving undergraduate and graduate degrees in African languages and literature.

THE CURRICULUM lists 30 different courses, in Swahili, Xhosa, Hausa, and Bantu.

Wisconsin was the first university to offer African literature courses in the original languages, such as Swahili, Hausa, and Nguni.

The first stirrings of interest were in the mid-1950s. Prof. Philip Curtin, who has done noted research in African matters, came here at that time. Here, too, was John Fage, one of England's most famous scholars of African matters.

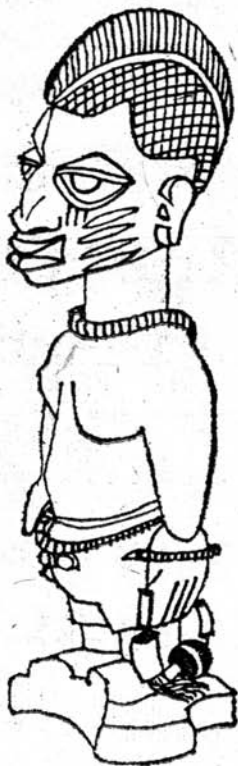
When Ghana won its independence in 1957, interest picked up. The year 1960, when 16 African nations won their independence, spurred the interest more. An African Studies committee was organized in 1961, when the African Studies Program was set up.

CURTIN WAS ITS chairman from 1961 through 1964. The program started small. In 1964, the federal Office of Education

made funds available for African programs, and Wisconsin, with a program already started, was in good position for aid.

Two and three new people were added each year until today there are 25 persons teaching in areas in which African concerns are central.

These include geography, his-



tory, political science, literature, anthropology, economics, sociology, music, and mass communications.

The program is known widely for its work in history, and here the efforts of Curtin and Prof. Jan Vansina have been particularly important.

Vansina, a brilliant Belgian scholar, and Curtin have achieved world renown for their work in the utilization of oral tradition to recreate African history.

THEY HAVE brought the scientific approach to bear on the stories handed down from father to son by word of mouth to establish authenticity. This entails checking of parallel stories, for instance, with neighboring tribes to establish their truth.

Vansina still is a member of the University faculty. Curtin, who won the Schuyler award for his "Image of Africa," is in Paris, where he is working on the African trading city-states in Senegal.

There now are some 120 graduate students in the program, some half of them in history, 20 in political science, six in geography, and a half dozen or so in anthropology.

In years past, there has been little that the African students and the Afro-American students had in common, persons connected with the program say.

But, as a result in all probability of the unrest of the past few years, there has been a greater interest in African courses, by the Afro-Americans, apparently in search of identity.

AND THERE has been a closer relationship between the Africans and the Afro-Americans.

"We have had excellent stu-

dents from Africa, as well as from the Afro-American contingent on the campus," says Prof. M. Crawford Young, associate dean of the Graduate School and former head of the program of African studies.

Several excellent students have come from the Congo, he says, as well as from Rhodesia. One Nigerian student brought a manuscript good enough to publish.

Most of the African students plan to return to Africa, where they can use their education to better their countries. Of the 120 graduate students in the program, 15 to 20 are African.

THE INTEREST of the University in Africa goes beyond the studies program here. The School of Education has a substantial program of teacher training in northern Nigeria. Teachers are being trained there for primary school work.

The College of Agriculture has a program under way in the University of Ife, in Nigeria. The University is giving an administrative assessment to the University of East Africa, and the Extension Division has programs in Kenya and in Ghana.

And Prof. Franic Henderson, limnologist at the University, has been working with the ecology of man-made lakes of Africa.

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