Establishment of black studies courses at a small, predominately white liberal arts college can be a task differing markedly from the creation of other new programs at such a school.

Sometimes frustrating, sometimes blessed with signs of progress, the effort is being made at Dickinson. There are presently 63 blacks in the student body.

Until the summer of 1969 course content emphasizing black culture, history and achievements was an incidental thing. To some extent it still is. However, two years ago in a memorandum announcing a student-faculty-administration seminar on black studies, the Dean’s office stated: “It is obvious that we all need to be fully aware of both the contributions of minority groups to our own disciplines and especially the nature of black consciousness in contemporary American society.”

The workshop continued through four days. Upon conclusion it was felt Dickinson could best implement black studies, not by creation of a special program or department, but rather by giving “new emphasis” to existing courses and formulating new course structures where necessary “to assist students in understanding the problems of men and nations from perspectives other than their own and their culture’s.”

This informal report, though it cannot be considered an official statement of the College’s position on black studies (there is none), has served as a guide for various departments considering changes or additions in course material.

“To rush into the field either with ill-prepared teachers or with a poorly prepared program would not be educationally sound or helpful to education in black studies,” said College Chaplain Paul Kaylor, a seminar participant, explaining why creation of a separate department was not thought workable.

“The report also took into account the availability of black scholars to a school the size of Dickinson,” he added, thus touching on an issue which may be quite difficult to resolve at the present time.

Criticisms of existing black studies areas has brought up just that point: the need for black educators. At present there is but one, and she is employed part-time, commuting weekly from Baltimore. Her name is Madeline W. Murphy. Quite outspoken, Mrs. Murphy, whose son attends Dickinson, is an active civil rights worker. She teaches “Perspectives in Race,” an offering by the Sociology Department.

“The ultimate goal of black studies, as I see it, is that the curricula in all areas of learning—art, science, sociology, medicine, history, etc., will truthfully reflect the inextricable weaving of black peoples’ contributions to civilization, not as a separate unit but as part of the whole,” Mrs. Murphy says. “If the administration sincerely wants more black students, active recruitment of black professors will be just one part of the solution.”

And therein lies the rub.

“We have had difficulty recruiting black instructors,” comments Richard H. Wanner, Dean of the College. “There are several reasons why. Two years ago we encountered a kind of backlash from black colleges unhappy over the stealing away of their instructors by prestigious schools. In recent years we haven’t
had the applications and other institutions seem to have had greater success in attracting them, more alluring salaries being just one of a number of reasons.

"As far as we’re concerned we would be very happy to have black instructors," Dean Wanner added.

In 1953, when the term “black studies” was yet to be coined, Dickinson was offering a course called The Negro American, covering “The historical and present problem of the American Negro and the cause and effects of prejudice and discrimination,” according to the college catalogue. When the instructor retired 10 years later, it was dropped.

Another long-running course was Culture and Race Relations, “the concept of race variations in culture, race prejudice and processes of social interaction.” It was listed initially in the 1956 catalogue and continued through 1964. There were four other offerings in this study area during the last 20 years, all for relatively brief periods.

Today the curriculum contains nearly as many courses dealing directly with black society as it has in the past two decades. In addition to "Perspectives on Race," which first appeared six years ago, they are: Black Politics in the American Political System, The Negro in America and a seminar on 20th Century Negro Leadership. There are no immediate plans to increase the number of courses in the near future. “Certainly we will continue with present classes,” said Dean Wanner, adding that “our current fiscal situation” would determine future expansion.

Prof. Flint Kellogg, who conducts the seminar mentioned above, is marking his 25th year at Dickinson. His writings include a section in the Encyclopedia of Black America entitled “The NAACP” and Volume I of A History of the National Association for The Advancement of Colored People. Additionally, he has edited two books: The Status of the Negro in New York and The Walls Came Tumbling Down, an autobiography of Mary White Ovington, NAACP founder. Prof. Kellogg has been called “an authority on civil rights and race relations.”

“Negro students have particular problems that their white counterparts don’t experience,” he said recently. “They want a black instructor and adviser who can help them find employment, for example, or enter graduate school. Most of our faculty come from a comfortable background and are unfamiliar with problems of blacks.”

Prof. Kellogg, who has also taught The Negro in America, a lecture course, recalls, “Maybe it’s because we’re white, but we found difficulty with Negro students. The whole business of slavery is embarrassing to them. In the seminar there is, I think, a little tension between white and black students. It’s like teaching Christianity to Jews—you’re going to have emotional problems. I suppose the obvious one is, ‘what does a white man know about this, never having lived it?’ It is also very difficult to make white students realize under what conditions many blacks live. Most of them have never been to a slum, white or black.”

Prof. Kellogg, who has suggested establishment of a chair of Black Studies at Dickinson to be filled by a Negro instructor, sees the desirability of increased discussion among the various departments to avoid duplication in black studies courses while also providing a means for development of a “coherent, overall plan”—needs voiced by many others, students and instructors alike.

Kenneth Woodard is 21, black and a Dickinson senior. From Newark, N. J., a city in some turmoil, he speaks as one familiar with the college’s current black studies efforts, its good points as well as shortcomings.

He too cited the need for black professors while also realizing that “the College has been unable to attract them,” adding, “possibly because of a lack of commitment...”

Black students are asking the College to hire a black studies consultant to help co-ordinate present studies and determine how black and African material can be integrated into
on-going course work, Woodard said. "While Dickinson clearly can not be a black studies college . . . one of the things that upsets us is that it has many resources not being used,"
he continued, citing the "expertise" of a certain professor in "19th century African history" who can't teach it because there is "no course for him." Also, "journals on top of journals dealing with African history, psychology, etc. in the library are just rotting on the shelves at this point."

"We propose a greater integration of black studies in the general curriculum," Woodard said. "For example, a black student taking French, instead of translating the usual assignments, should be able to translate works of black authors.

"The same could be done in the study of German. Many Frenchmen and Germans took African art and culture back with them during exploitation of Africa. Some of the best interpretations of African culture are in those languages."

When questioned on the one most necessary improvement in black studies, Woodard unhesitatingly replied: "The primary problem is . . . lack of depth. We need more black studies courses in order to cover a greater amount of material. Even two semesters of black history aren't adequate. We need more courses and more time to gain sufficient background."

He saw this inability to engage in extensive study as a hindrance to both races. "Unfortunately the white student has not been exposed to enough black history, literature, etc. and thus feels intellectually inadequate in talking with blacks and this puts a damper on full class discussion."

"It's amazing that teachers have been able to cover Negro history in one semester. I think that's to their credit. But at the same time it should be possible to focus on one area and discuss issues more fully."

Dickinson junior Miriam G. Lovett, a white student who has taken two of the school's four black studies offerings, agrees with Woodard's contention that whites lack a sufficient background in black studies. "Classes get very tense sometimes," she says. "White students don't have the background that blacks have acquired often on their own. There's also the basic feeling both have that whites are white and blacks are black" and differences will always exist.

She was asked about "the most constructive" lesson gained from her black studies classes. "It's that I don't know anything of black life," she replied, "and that I've started reading. And not Martin Luther King, etc., but an entirely different group of people such as Marcus Garvey and Elijah Muhammad. The press has misinterpreted me for what many black authors have said. I don't get the same impression from reading them I had before. As Americans we have been taught we give the society something and it gives us something. But when you get the accounts from black kids, you suddenly realize they have a right to their anger against the system. This is a difficult thing for the white student to understand."

The 1969 workshop stated the purpose of its report was "to articulate the judgment of the group concerning the next steps to be taken in institutional policy, program development and curricular change in order to meet the challenge of education in a world no longer defined intellectually and politically by European standards."

Here is how current offerings have followed through on those recommendations:

Sociology: "Perspectives on Race," 64 students, approximately one third black. Mrs. Murphy says she has explored "all symptoms of the disease of racism so that black as well as white students, once having detected the symptoms, will then be able to deal with attempts at a cure." "I feel," she continued, "that the first prerequisite in dealing with a problem of such magnitude is to know the background, the culture, the source of power of black people, in order to understand the strength, and the sheer dogged determination which has undergirded our fight for civil rights. For white students, who have come from sheltered communities where individual institutional racism is de rigueur, this course may broaden their insight and concept of the dangers they too face as victims of the disease . . . then they can perhaps become the change agents and catalysts through which a better society emerges."

Political Science: "Black Politics in the American Political System," 18 students, 9 black, 9 white. Prof. Russell A. Dondro stated the course was "an attempt to study every aspect of black political experiences today. It is an attempt to introduce in students a sense of what can be done to solve their problems, and an understanding among those of us who are not members of a minority race of these attempted solutions."

History: "The Negro in America," 31 students, 5 black, 26 white. Prof. Charles A. Jarvis says an important aspect of his teachings is "to show the moral dilemma of being black in America. "I attempt to tear down a white wall of prejudice," he adds, "and I don't envision my purpose as building up a black wall. I want to expose some of the fears, prejudices and ignorances that have created a rather intolerable social situation today. I try to defeat the myth that society is burdened with: that the African is a savage, therefore inferior and inestvable. The African had a past that he can justifiably be proud of. It is distributed in many areas of art, learning and government. This we attempt to illustrate." Prof. Jarvis also noted that Negro history "is not new history," has been taught at black colleges for many years and that "only recently has it crept into the curriculum of white schools."

History: "Seminar in 20th century Negro Leadership," 14 students, 8 blacks, 6 white. Prof. Kellogg said seminar objectives were "to cover the thought of 20th century Negro leaders, their objectives, what they consider their roles and what others consider them."