Meet Siera – serious student, engaged activist and committed community member. She’s involved in the Black Students’ Union and The Journey (a student-run campus ministry). At the same time, she spends her afternoons running a youth program at the local YMCA. And, during one semester, she volunteered 10 hours a week for a state senator’s campaign. She does all this while balancing the demands of a full-time college student with two majors.

“All of my courses have been interesting, and the professors have been tremendous,” says Siera. But one course in particular – Black Images in the Media – really motivated her, and prompted Siera to conduct an innovative sociological experiment on campus.

“I had seen a video online about people in New York City who hung signs around their necks reading ‘You can touch my hair.’ I have natural African American hair, so one day I let it go big and I hung a similar sign around my neck and stood in Cougar Mall for a few hours.

We all know too little about each others’ cultural backgrounds, so this was my way of addressing that gap. Did it work? Well… I made some connections, so it was definitely a start.”

Siera is serious about studying cross-cultural tensions. “My dream job would be to serve as a diversity consultant in corporate America,” she says. “I actually conducted a big research project that involved looking at U.S. Census data and statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor and complemented that with surveys, focus groups and interviews, which play a vital part in developing a comprehensive understanding of how effective human resource policies are in regard to diversity. The idea sprang from my interest in understanding how, as a black female, I’ll be treated by corporate America once I graduate. This was an amazing chance to research something in detail that genuinely interests me.”

Check out African American Studies, it’s more than culture and history.

Siera Barksdale transferred to the College to study sociology. She’d heard about the research professors were doing and she was looking to find a niche for herself. After coming to campus, she discovered the African American Studies Program, and she’s been immersed in it ever since.

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