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.