



DEPARTMENT OF ETHNIC STUDIES
ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES
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NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES
COMPARATIVE ETHNIC STUDIES

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January 18, 2021

Tony Thurmond
State Superintendent, CA Department of Education
1430 N Street
Sacramento, California 95814

Re: UC Berkeley Ethnic Studies Library OPPOSITION to Current Revisions of CA ESMC

Dear Superintendent Thurmond,

On behalf of the UC Berkeley Ethnic Studies Library, we are writing in opposition to the current version of the CA Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC), which we believe does not live up to the values, principles and pedagogy of Ethnic Studies. Essential Ethnic Studies terminology, including the definition of race, has been eliminated, incorrectly defined, or moved to the footnotes. The decolonial, anti-racist, and liberatory focus of Ethnic Studies has been buried in an avalanche of vague and contradictory language. And Arab American Studies has been moved from its rightful place in Asian American Studies to an “interethnic bridge-building appendix.”¹ We share the anger of our Arab siblings that their history and community has been relegated to an appendix.

Directly emerging from student struggle and activism and serving as one of the only libraries in the country focused exclusively on the field of Ethnic Studies, our work is uniquely positioned in that we both document and preserve Ethnic Studies knowledge and content and also actively engage the field as it expands and evolves. Although Arab American Studies was not one of the original disciplines that emerged from the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) student strikes of 1969, it has served as an important component of the discipline, especially since the US War on Terror began in 2001. As the Association for Asian American Studies wrote in their [Statement on the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum](#), “It is because of the centrality of U.S. war and militarism as well as anti-imperialism as central tenets of analysis in Asian American studies that Arab American studies, in the post-9/11 era, has emerged both within and in dialogue with Asian American studies.” Our Asian American Studies and Comparative Ethnic Studies collections collect and support scholarship in Arab American Studies. Recently in 2019, our library was proud to curate a display *Celebrating 10 Years of the International Islamophobia Conference at UC Berkeley* containing an exhibit with posters and a book display highlighting the growth of Arab American Studies and Islamophobia Studies and the international struggles of Arab communities for social justice.

¹ See the Association for Asian American Studies Statement on the California ESMC Curriculum, <https://aaastudies.org/aaas-statement-on-the-california-ethnic-studies-model-curriculum/> and the Statement from the Arab American Studies Association <http://arabamericanstudies.org/an-open-letter-from-ethnic-studies-scholars-in-support-of-arab-american-studies-curriculum-in-california-high-schools/>

In addition to the removal of key content and terminology, we are also concerned that the Ethnic Studies educators who wrote the original ESMC have been sidelined, while politicians and lobbyists have wielded the most influence in what revisions get made. The sidelining of the original committee echoes an all-too-familiar experience amongst people of color of having our expertise denied. As we know from our work with TWLF veterans and from the rich archival collections we have, entire original premise of Ethnic Studies was to collect, preserve and educate with perspectives by and for communities of color that they saw as lacking or marginalized in educational settings.

We are echoing and uplifting the demands of the Save Arab American Studies Coalition, and taking the lead from Ethnic Studies educators:

- Re-empower experts in the field of Ethnic Studies to decide on revisions to the ESMC that align with the principles, values, and pedagogy of Ethnic Studies.
- Put Arab American Studies—including Palestine—back where it belongs, within the Asian American Studies section of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.
- Approve an ESMC that is anti-racist, decolonial and liberatory—that centers the voices and experiences of communities of color and their struggles for liberation.

We call on the CA Department of Education to take immediate action to protect the integrity of Ethnic Studies. We want a curriculum that meets the needs of our youth and carries on the spirit of the original 1968 Third World Liberation Front and Black Student Union strikes that led to Ethnic Studies as a discipline. It is not too late to stand with us on the right side of history and support an ESMC that will educate, protect, and inspire all our children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

UC Berkeley Ethnic Studies Library Staff