

From: Akshaya Natarajan
Sent: Thursday, July 9, 2020 4:33 PM
To: Ethnic Studies
Cc: [emails redacted]; Superintendent
Subject: [EXTERNAL] IQC Public Comment -- Save Arab American Studies

Hello BoE Instructional Quality Commission,

As a citizen of California and a lifelong student of its public schools, my life has been moulded by California's educational standards and curriculum since its inception. I graduated from San Mateo High School in 2014; although I took all of the AP history and government classes offered, I didn't have even a single class period of learning about ethnic studies.

I finally learned what ethnic studies was in my first quarter at UC Santa Barbara, when I took an introductory Asian American history class to fulfill some GE requirements. Walking out of lecture after lecture of pivotal moments in California's history I didn't even have a *clue* about, I mulled over the same question every single student of ethnic studies has probably had -- ***why wasn't I taught this in my history classes?***

I've had a lot of time to think about this question, as I went on to do a major in the first-ever independent Asian American studies department, founded as a direct result of radical student activism for ethnic studies on UC campuses. After graduating, I worked at a nonprofit in San Francisco dedicated to bringing free ethnic studies curriculum to K-12 schools. I'd mail lesson plans to teachers across the country about the mass racial profiling and incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII. We believed that by teaching the bitter history of putting people of color in prison camps, we would learn to also stop repeating it.

I am oriented with ethnic studies on both an academic and professional level; as such, **I'm a supporter of the ESMC and for its Arab American studies curriculum.** I know that there is an urgent demand for Arab American studies, and communities of people ready to teach it. As a graduate of Asian American studies, the academic field where Arab American studies is often housed, I know there is a grave lack of attention and resources dedicated to it. In the post-9/11 era, exacerbated by Trump's Muslim ban, *Arab American students are desperately in need of curriculum that reflects their histories and current realities.*

Know history, know self. Knowledge is power, and we desperately need to empower California's students so they are prepared to face the issues of their generation, issues that we are currently grappling with today.

I urge you to make the commitment to **collaborating with Arab American scholars and community leaders**, and follow through on those commitments. Please ensure that the Arab American studies curriculum stays inclusive of all under-taught histories, **including Palestinian and Palestinian American history**, as these are essential to understanding our current sociopolitical moment.

Thank you, and I hope you make the decision to support California's students of color.

Sincerely,

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Akshaya Natarajan

University of California, Santa Barbara '17