

October 14, 2019

Instructional Quality Commission  
California Department of Education  
1430 N Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

**Re: APIs for Ethnic Studies' Statement on the Disciplinary Boundaries of Ethnic Studies**

Dear Committee Members:

We, as directors and chairs of Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies programs in Northern California, wish to provide input as you consider California's Model Ethnic Curriculum. Specifically, we express our support for the inclusion of Arab American and Pacific Islander Studies as an extension of Asian American Studies.

Asian American Studies (AAS) has been an academic discipline for the past fifty years, addressing the unique voices, histories, humanities, and issues of this broad, racialized group. Emerging from the Black Student Union/Third World Liberation Front strike at SF State University, the founders of Asian American Studies challenged the twin evils of racism at home and militarism abroad. As this discipline has grown, it has come to encompass more groups and topics, and to develop its own theories and methodologies.

AAS is partnering with Pacific Islander and Arab American communities in its scholarship because of our shared regional and social experiences including 1) Orientalization (as coined by Arab American intellectual, Edward Said); 2) discrimination and stereotyping as nonwhites, and 3) colonization of our lands, cultures, and peoples. As a politicized grouping—as seen in the federal designation of Asian American Native American Pacific Islander serving institutions (AANAPISI)—we work in education to empower our respective communities, fight for social justice, and effect societal change. Thus, our courses learning outcomes reflect this mission across campuses.

Another example of the expansion of Asian American Studies is the faculty position for both Asian American Studies and Critical Pacific Islands and Oceania Studies at SF State University. Prof. Ponipate Rokoluketu teaches in both programs, and our courses will be linked.

Since its founding, AAS has aligned itself with its fellow disciplines in Ethnic Studies: American Indian Studies, Africana/Black Studies, and Chicano/ Latinx,<sup>i</sup> groups that have been racialized as nonwhites and part of the common struggle for racial justice and equity. In 1972, AAS scholars played a significant role in the establishment of National Association of Interdisciplinary Studies for Native American, Black, Chicano, Puerto Rican, and Asian Americans (renamed the Association of Ethnic Studies in 2017). In California, AAS has also been constituent program in the broader field of Ethnic Studies.

For instance, in 1992 the CSU Council of Ethnic Studies first convened with an AAS representative as a constituent member to respond to the Los Angeles riots and to improve race relations. At that meeting, this council reaffirmed that Ethnic Studies should focus on the experiences of people of color through

the four original racialized groups. At the campus level, in 2002 the Master's program of Asian American Studies at CSU Long Beach was threatened to be cut. This program worked in solidarity with other programs; it fought to keep the Department of Africana Studies from being downgraded to only a program, and to keep Native American Studies from being folded into the Department of History.

Similarly, by extending AAS to the experiences of our Pacific Islander and Arab American counterparts, we are enriching our discipline while demonstrating much-needed solidarity with communities from our region that are inadequately represented in courses across California.

Thank you again for your hard work, and we would appreciate forwarding our suggestions to the Department of Education and the state legislature.

Prof. Russell Jeung  
Chair, San Francisco State University AAS

Prof. Robyn Rodriguez  
Chair, UC Davis AAS

Prof. Genevieve Leung  
Chair, on behalf of the University of San Francisco Asian Pacific American Studies

Prof. Angie Fa  
Chair, City College of San Francisco AAS  
*Titles and Institutions for Identification Purposes*

Cc: Assemblymember Shirley Weber; Dr. Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales

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<sup>i</sup> The CSU Task Force on the Advancement of Ethnic Studies defines the field as “the study of race and ethnicity anchored in the histories and philosophies, from the perspective of and in the service of the community-based needs, of people of color... It will address the intersectionality of race and ethnicity with gender, sexuality, disability, and other areas from the perspective of ethnic studies; however, will not speak about or for allied disciplines.” *Report of the CSU Task Force on the Advancement of Ethnic Studies*, 2016.