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To the California Department of Education:

On November 6, 2020, the California State Superintendent of Education, Tony Thurmond, announced that Arab American Studies would no longer be a separate area of study under Asian American Studies as part of a new Ethnic Studies curriculum that is being developed for the grades 7-12; rather, it would be transformed into an appendix of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.<sup>1</sup> The California Department of Education also announced over 400 line-edits that ultimately dilute Pacific Islanders' inclusion,<sup>2</sup> indicating the Department's disinterest in centering both Arab American and Pacific Islander communities in its new curriculum. As the ASUCD Ethnic and Cultural Affairs Commission and the ASUCD Academic Affairs Commission, we firmly stand in solidarity with Arab American and Pacific Islander communities against this type of undermining by the California Department of Education, and we urge the Department to follow through the demands listed by the Save Arab American Studies and the Support Pacific Islander Studies campaigns.

In 1968 and 1969, members of the Black Student Union (BSU) and Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) at San Francisco State University conducted the longest student strike in U.S. history to establish a College of Ethnic Studies, the first of its kind.<sup>3</sup> The goal of such a program was "to open up educational institutions to the histories, cultures, and communities of indigenous and racially oppressed peoples."<sup>4</sup> Ethnic Studies is thus a crucial curriculum to be upheld in educational institutions, as it is a source of empowerment for youth of color, a builder of solidarity between diverse communities, and a step toward combating the racism that runs rampant throughout our society and institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://savearabamericanstudies.org/where-we-are/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://pistudies.weebly.com/about.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.kqed.org/news/11830384/how-the-longest-student-strike-in-u-s-history-created-ethnic-studies>

<sup>4</sup> <https://savearabamericanstudies.org/learn-more/>

In wake of the racial tensions around the country that saw historically marginalized communities become the target of racism and hatred, last year the California Department of Education announced its plan to draft and finalize a state-wide Ethnic Studies curriculum for 7-12 graders. Though the intentions and scope of this type of effort are admirable and much needed, Superintendent Thurmond's refusal to include Arab American Studies as an integral part of Asian American Studies and his insistence towards implementing numerous changes on how Pacific-Islander Studies will be incorporated into the curriculum have both shown that, like most state-led initiatives dedicated to uplift and center marginalized communities in education, this one too continues to disenfranchise targeted ethnic groups.

The removal of Arab American Studies from Asian American Studies, and its subsequent movement into the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum's appendix, serves as a form of exclusion, removing the importance and historical contributions made by Arab Americans.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the complete removal of academic material and reference to Palestine and Palestinian Americans from the Arab American studies curriculum is an act of erasure that undermines the rich history of Palestine and further perpetuates narratives of colonization.

Alongside, the current model for Pacific-Islander Studies in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum proves insufficient, failing to recognize the full spectrum of Pacific Islander cultures.<sup>6</sup> With demands of these ethnic groups to be represented in the curriculum, along with the California Department of Education's decision of numerous line-edits, the voices and history of Pacific Islanders are effectively being silenced.

The exclusion of Palestinian history and the failure to recognize the full spectrum of Pacific Islander cultures come as a result of right-wing pressure to silence and undermine targeted ethnic groups, which further highlights how valuable Arab American Studies and Pacific Islander studies are in the fight against white supremacist and colonial forces both at home and abroad.

The demands of the Save Arab American Studies campaign are as follows:<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <https://edsources.org/2020/more-changes-proposed-for-californias-ethnic-studies-curriculum-to-strengthen-balance/643306>

<sup>6</sup> <https://pistudies.weebly.com/about.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://savearabamericanstudies.org/iqc-meeting-update/>

- Include the Arab American lesson plan submitted to the California Department of Education by members of the original Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) advisory committee
- Re-insert Arab American Studies in its rightful place—within Asian American Studies
- Align all lesson plans to the guiding principles of Ethnic Studies, which are anti-racist, decolonial, and liberatory
- Reject debunked definitions of anti-Semitism that equate criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism

The demands of the Support Pacific Islander Studies campaign are, verbatim, as follows:<sup>8</sup>

- Reconvene the original advisory committee in the ESMC process moving forward
- Include a Pacific Islander Studies lesson plan that covers the complexity and diversity of the Pacific alongside critiques of power and systems of oppression seen in the work of Epeli Hau'ofa, Lisa Kahaleole Hall, and Kerri Ann Borja's UN Testimony on the Question of Guam
- Communicate with the Pacific Islander community, ensuring that the final PI curriculum is vetted and approved by Pacific Studies educators
- Work with Arab American educators and community on the development of Arab American Studies curriculum, with content inclusive of Palestine

We urge UC Davis students and communities to join and take action in supporting Arab Americans and Pacific Islanders in ensuring the California Ethnic Studies curriculum is able to provide the educational inclusion of these communities. The coalitions are calling for public comments to be sent to the Instructional Quality Commission of the California Department of Education, Tony Thurmond, and California Board of Education Chair Linda Darling-Hammond **by November 13, 2020**. More information on what can be done can be found at [savearabamericanstudies.org](http://savearabamericanstudies.org) and [pistudies.weebly.com](http://pistudies.weebly.com).

Always in Solidarity,

Ethnic & Cultural Affairs Commission  
Academic Affairs Commission

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<sup>8</sup> <https://pistudies.weebly.com/about.html>