

September 11, 2019

California Department of Education
1430 N. Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Honorable California State Superintendent Tony Thurmond and Board of Education President, Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond:

The following views expressed are our own and not Chabot College's.

We are writing in support of the current Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum draft, and to express our concerns around the mischaracterization of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. We hope you'll consider our support and allow for a revision that will not undermine the 50-year scholarship and movement for a relevant curriculum by Black, Chicanx, Latinx, indigenous, Asian American, and Arab American communities.

We are faculty and students from Chabot College's Ethnic Studies department. Ethnic Studies at Chabot College is relatively new, but the college supported the inception of this program after recognizing the importance of offering curriculum which celebrates and recognizes the cultures, histories, and achievements of our students (who are at least 75% students of color: 40% Latinx, 16% Asian, 16% White, 11% African American, 8% Filipino, 9% Other). Our faculty have a combined decades-long professional background in ethnic studies scholarship and teaching. Some of our students have taken ethnic studies in high school, some are enrolled in an ethnic studies class for their first time in community college, and some are ethnic studies majors.

As students of the California public education system, we felt we were miseducated about our own histories, due to a Eurocentric curriculum that continues to disregard indigenous, Black, Chicanx, Latinx, and Asian American communities. For example, celebrating Christopher Columbus as a hero and a "discoverer" of the Americas worked to completely deemphasize the genocide and violent atrocities committed by European colonizers against indigenous peoples. This willful ignorance is what historian Howard Zinn calls "an ideological choice" that serves to justify the violence. Ethnic studies professor and historian, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz writes, "This approach to history allows one to safely put aside present responsibility for continued harm done by that past and the questions of reparations, restitution, and reordering society." We believe that this omission of the true histories and experiences of indigenous peoples and communities of color only fuel racist ideologies which justify the increased hate crimes and state violence targeting such groups.

We've experienced firsthand the powerful impact ethnic studies curriculum can have on countering hate and injustice. By centering on the philosophies, histories, cultures, and most especially the resistance movements of communities of color and indigenous communities, ethnic studies students are trained in critical thinking skills. Students are taught to value their own experiences and voice, in developing their own thought processes, and to learn and practice fighting for what they believe in, including relevant curriculum and representation in our education. The issue is representation, relevance, equity, and historical reality, not political correctness.

But, to truly understand the anecdotal impact Ethnic Studies curriculum has had on students, please read the following student testimonies:

My grandma was the first chairman of Chicano studies at UC Berkeley. I didn't understand the significance of this family history until I took ethnic studies classes. If I could feel this impact, I'm sure so many others would. To learn how groundbreaking the third world strike was, then learning about people in my own family, I'm even more overwhelmed by confidence and empowerment for myself and my family. Ethnic studies

provided me with the tools I needed to continue educating myself and how I can be a contributing member of society.

Taking an ethnic studies class for the first time has been empowering and eye-opening. I was embarrassed that I didn't know this information and I felt I should have known this. But I was never offered this class, I wish I had access in high school. I've felt a sense of community in my ethnic studies class, because I see that other people are empowered as well. It makes me hopeful for the future, when I see people working together in unity, despite superficial differences.

Ethnic Studies is literally my life. It's helped me understand my life. Seeing that my challenges and my mother's challenges were mirrored in the classroom, I began to understand that the hardships I've endured as a woman of color is not mythical (it can feel that way when it's not legitimized, because our society acts like we're past issues of racism, sexism, and so forth). In navigating my own life, Ethnic Studies taught me how to decide for myself. As an ally and a person of color, I've learned how I could create change for myself and my community. I wouldn't survive in our society if it weren't for ethnic studies.

I have found that ethnic studies is by far one of the most rewarding, important and applicable classes that I have ever taken. I find myself applying the concepts and history I've learned from the three ethnic studies classes I've taken to many areas of everyday life. For example, I am now better able to effectively communicate and integrate with community members of different complexions, origins and backgrounds, and I have improved my critical thinking and research skills. I think it's also safe to say that in current times where there is much misunderstanding and tension on matters of race, class, and gender, the best way to address these issues is through a comprehensive education that simply cannot be done without authentic an ethnic studies curriculum.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Contreras, Ethnic Studies major



Alicia Fisher, Ethnic Studies student



Rafi Skandari, Ethnic Studies major



Mireya Valladares, Ethnic Studies student



Jennifer Mogannam, Ph.D. in Ethnic Studies, Chabot College Lecturer



Dani Ahuicapahtzin Cornejo, Instructor of American Indian History and Ph.D. Candidate



Kay Fischer, M.A., Chair, Ethnic Studies department