

From: Gil Graff
Sent: Tuesday, August 13, 2019 7:20 AM
To: Ethnic Studies
Subject: Comment on Model Ethnic Studies Curriculum

Dear Commissioners:

I am writing to express concern about the May 2019 Draft of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. Page one of Chapter One points to the opportunity, through implementation of such a curriculum, to “equip all students with the skills and knowledge to think critically about the world around them and to tell their own stories...,” noting that ethnic studies “aids in the eradication of bigotry, hate, and racism.” This statement of purpose is lofty; the model curriculum falls far short of the mark.

I shall limit myself to three principal critiques. First, is the very narrow definition of ethnic studies. As a graduate student at UCLA in the 1970s, ethnic studies – of a variety of ethnicities – was, it seemed to me, part of a rising tide of celebration of ethnic diversity in the United States. When I earned a PhD from the Department of History with a concentration in Jewish history, I recognized that the proliferation of Jewish studies offerings at UC campuses as at universities across the country was part of an ethnic studies wave, paralleled by the study of other ethnicities. In reading the draft curriculum, I was shocked to discover that, apparently, the experience of Jews in America is not part and parcel of a “core” ethnic studies curriculum. Particularly at a time of increasing anti-Jewish bigotry (expressed in recorded incidents of behavior manifesting the same), one might have supposed that an ethnic studies curriculum designed to aid in “the eradication of bigotry and hate” might have included this ethnic group.

Second, when it comes to relating to Israel and Palestinians, the goal of nurturing critical thinking skills gives way to a clear bias on the part of the drafters of this “model curriculum.” From BDS, to the Nakba, to Shadia Mansour, there is one-directional empathy with no intimation of an alternative perspective. This week, Jews commemorated the exile of many Jews from Judea (as it was then called) to Babylonia, more than 2600 years ago. There has been continuous Jewish presence in what came to be British Mandatory Palestine for more than three thousand years. Without discounting the Palestinian narrative, critical thinking calls for a more expansive, nuanced view than that put forward in the Draft.

Third, the curriculum as drafted presents [insufficient](#) guidance to a teacher tasked with its implementation. Beyond a PhD, I earned a teaching credential in social studies, a Master’s degree in education (CSUN) and a Juris Doctor (UCLA School of Law), and I would be very hard-pressed to implement this curriculum in a manner that would do justice to the complexity and depth of the many, many issues raised. It is hard to imagine that deployment of the curriculum as drafted would lead to realization of the aspirations noted in page one of its introductory chapter.

I urge careful review and reconsideration of the Draft Curriculum with an eye to:

- (1) Broadening the span of ethnicities represented;
- (2) Re-visiting the materials and issues relating to Israel and the Palestinians to enable those who use the curriculum to help students understand the complexity of competing narratives, rather than focusing, exclusively, on promoting one people’s narrative;
- (3) Crafting a guide that can help teachers navigate the depth and [breadth](#) of an exceedingly complex project.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Gil Graff