

From: Loubna Qutami

Sent: Tuesday, August 11, 2020 12:01 PM

To: Ethnic Studies

Cc: Superintendent; [emails redacted]

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Arab American Studies in CA Ethnic Studies Curriculum

Dear California Board of Education Instructional Quality Commission,

I hope this message finds you well. My name is Loubna Qutami and I am an Assistant Professor in the Department of Asian American Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. **I am writing today to express my unwavering support for the complete inclusion of Arab American Studies and Palestine in the CA Ethnic Studies Curriculum model. This issue is very important for me as a community-based organizer, educator, and scholar.**

I am an Arab scholar of Ethnic Studies and also the former Executive Director of the Arab Cultural and Community Center (ACCC) in San Francisco. I have recently completed the UC Presidents Postdoctoral Fellowship in the Department of Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. Prior to that, I graduated with a Ph.D. in Ethnic Studies from the University of California, Riverside in 2018, and attained an MA degree from the College of Ethnic Studies: Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas Initiative at San Francisco State University in 2013. While attaining an undergraduate degree at SFSU, I was an active student organizer who received invaluable support and education from Ethnic Studies mentors which reversed the senses of alienation and out of place feelings I experienced during my adolescence as a youth who was growing up in a post 9/11 racial climate. I know that I was fortunate to have a different experience than the many Palestinian and Arab community members who did not have exposure to Ethnic Studies ideas and communities.

My research concentrates on transnational Palestinian youth movements. I utilize interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological approaches in my scholarship and teaching pedagogy which draws from studies of Third World/Black/Indigenous Feminist Scholarship, Critical Refugee Studies, and social movement theory. Both my scholarly and pedagogical frameworks and commitments have been deeply informed by the community, ideas and theories, mentorship, empowerment, and training I received in Ethnic Studies in a variety of California based institutions of higher learning.

If it were not obvious, higher-education based Ethnic Studies programs across the state have realized that the persistent exclusion of Arab-American/Palestine studies and communities from the field of Ethnic Studies is no longer acceptable. The field has turned to account for our communities and while the intention is there, many Ethnic Studies departments are falling victim to extreme repression campaigns that weaponize bureaucracy and financial withholdings to silence dissent. These campaigns have manipulated Palestinian/Arab calls for inclusion, freedom and justice and painted us as (and our allies) as anti-Semites though we have persistently made clear that our belief in justice extends to all communities (including Jewish peoples) and challenges all forms of racism and oppression.

These repression campaigns are not new. In fact, it was exactly the criminalizing narratives of Black/Brown people in the 1960's that gave birth to vibrant nation-wide movements for education reform. The 1968 student strike at SFSU, Berkeley, Columbia and other places, are what gave birth to the field of Ethnic Studies in the first place. At the core of these movements was the belief that people struggling against systemic oppression need a space to articulate their own narratives, learn their own histories, and cultivate justice-centered and self-determined ideals of community, belonging, and freedom.

It is those ideals that created Ethnic Studies as a field that our Palestinian/Arab community is expressing to you today. For too long, our communities have been silenced and invisibilized in an enduring attempt to erase and criminalize Arab/Palestinian identities and histories. This has had grave material, emotional psychological damage for Arab American youth. The inclusion of a curriculum model that allows our communities to self-determine our narratives is vital to eliminate the racist narratives of Arabs/Palestinians pervasive within this country.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Loubna

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