

Recommended Language to Include in Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, Chapter 1

The Language of Ethnic Studies

Ethnic Studies incorporates purposeful academic language and terminology, including intentional respellings, to challenge various forms of oppression and marginalization. For instance, it is widely recognized that the worldviews and perspectives of women, or womxn, and Black, Indigenous, People of Color figures and communities have been largely absent, marginalized, and/or distorted in the traditional discipline of history. This is recognized by Ethnic Studies practitioners, as a dimension of white supremacy and patriarchy that is dominant in the K-12 curriculum. Thus, in Ethnic Studies classes, it may be common to see challenges to this disciplinary marginalization at the linguistic level, with the usage of spellings including herstory, hxstory, hxrstory, ourstory, or other conceptions students may emerge with -- each with intentionality and purpose. Sometimes the purpose may relate to etymology (word origins), other times, such as in the case of the variations of hxstory, the purpose relates more directly to the orthography (visual) and phonemic (sonic) relations of the terms.

These language conventions are embraced in Ethnic Studies, not negated as the ancestral languages of Black, Indigenous, People of Color communities have too often been in the U.S., to the point of cultural genocide for the ancestral legacies of many Native Americans and Africans Americans -- a profound tragedy. Thus, Ethnic Studies reserves the right to cultivate its own disciplinary language and spelling conventions, and this is honored with students, as part of what sociolinguists of color refer to as its language and spelling ideology as a discipline.

These language conventions are not foregrounded in this model curriculum for those just beginning familiarity with Ethnic Studies (as of the Sept 2020 draft), however, educators should note that such conventions continue to grow and are common within Ethnic Studies classes, communities and scholarship. This dimension of the field is also interdisciplinary (or xdisciplinary) with other fields, including certain genres of English Language Arts, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Hip Hop Studies, Philosophy and Linguistics — as the language of Ethnic Studies continues to evolve.