

From: PaulaNewman
Sent: Thursday, January 21, 2021 11:58 PM
To: Ethnic Studies
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Current Model Curriculum

Let me start by congratulating the people who have been updating the model curriculum on a much improved version reflecting considerable thought and understanding.

This message concerns two subjects.

First, briefly, on the long-term, pervasive problem of anti-semitism and its current formulation as "anti-zionism" by groups purporting to fight racism. It has become the only academically approved form of racism I know of, with Jewish students being harassed, barred or removed from student councils, etc. To deal with this, at least temporarily, the guidelines should be amended to explicitly prohibit discussion of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict in any contexts except where the actual participants in the conflict are the central subject of the course. And any teaching staff conducting such discussions must have detailed knowledge of the *actual* facts surrounding the conflict for the last 120 years or so.

And second, on the need to develop an alternative, detailed course framework or outline covering aspects of the history of most or all US ethnic groups.

Why? Backing up, right now the focus of the model curriculum is consistent with

AB 2016, which suggests that the result of the ethnic studies curriculum should be to

"close the achievement gap, reduce pupil truancy, increase pupil enrollment, reduce dropout rates,

and increase graduation rates". For this reason, many of example course outlines are group-specific, targeted to students in currently underprivileged groups, helping them to dig deeply into the history and culture of their own group, and in that way

increase self-respect and confidence, and interest in further education. And that's fine.

But a broader course with an explicitly historical emphasis would be suitable, as an addition or alternative, in some districts. One simple reason is that it would serve the purpose of giving students a better awareness and understanding of the wide range of ethnic groups in our country, something which is rather lacking.

More importantly, it would also serve the purpose of improving citizenship.

Being a good citizen of the US involves fostering its founding principles, which

recognize the rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness". In our time that means that

we are responsible for ensuring, to the extent possible, that everyone in our country has decent food, clothing, housing, and medical care, and educational opportunities allowing them to explore and develop their interests and talents. And we fall very short of doing so.

So an important civic obligation is to understand how these problems can be addressed. One avenue is a course framework that deals with the history of the US as a nation of immigrants coming to an already occupied land. The course should cover ground similar to the histories by Zinn and Takaki, but focusing on what challenges were faced by the ethnic groups involved, how they addressed them, what were the outcomes and, if the challenges have not yet been adequately met, how that might be done.

It is critical that the framework should be written and edited by recognized, outstanding historians and social scientists.

Sincerely,
Paula S. Newman