



DEPARTMENT OF ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES
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August 11, 2020

Dear colleagues:

I am a professor of Asian American Studies at UC Davis and have been teaching ethnic studies for twenty years. I strongly support the inclusion of Arab/West Asian American studies in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum for K-12 education in California. This much-needed curriculum is long overdue, and at a time when the call for racial justice is being heard across the nation, it is time to ensure that what we teach our children is based on the principles of antiracism and anticolonialism that the movement for ethnic studies fought to include in education.

I also teach and do research in Arab American studies and have always understood Asian American studies to include West Asia i.e. Arabs, Iranians, Turks, Assyrians, Armenians, Kurds and others from the western region of the Asian continent. As an Indian American, I am well aware that South Asian and Southeast Asian Americans struggled to be included in Asian American studies yet West Asian American studies and Arab American studies generally have unfortunately long been marginalized and are still not sufficiently integrated into the curriculum. Due to the slippery and sometimes arbitrary categorizations in US race politics and ethnic studies, Arab Americans have often been erased and their struggles against racism, repression, militarism, and imperialism have not been sufficiently recognized, let alone taught and shared. Yet there is by now a strong and growing body of work in [Arab/West Asian American studies](#) that demonstrates how the experiences and histories of Arab Americans speak to the antiracist and anticolonial tenets of ethnic studies in important and also transformative ways.

In the last fifteen years or so, there have been more institutional efforts to highlight Arab American studies in Ethnic Studies spaces and scholarship. For example, in 2006, I edited a special issue of the *Journal of Asian American Studies* focused on the intersections of Arab American and Asian American studies, including a coauthored essay in which I argued for the integration of Arab American studies as West Asian American studies--a field that is built on the legacy of the brilliant anti-imperialist Palestinian scholar, Edward Said, whose work is central to Ethnic Studies and Postcolonial Studies. The national liberation struggle in Palestine--one of the last colonized nations on earth--is crucial to Arab American and West Asian histories and to the anti-imperial and anti-war struggles from which Asian American studies emerged. In fact, the demand of the Third World Liberation Front and the student strikers at San Francisco State and UC Berkeley in 1968-69 were for [Third World studies](#), not ethnic studies per se, as they centered anticolonial struggles for self-determination and Third World (i.e. anti-imperialist) solidarities linking Black and Brown peoples across the globe. The ["question of Palestine"](#) has long animated these anticolonial solidarities and continues to do so in the era of Black Lives Matter and current struggles against policing and racial violence.

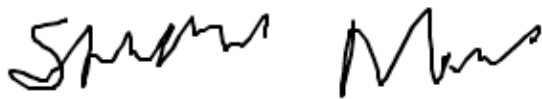
The Association of Asian American Studies (AAAS), in fact, was the first professional academic association outside of the Arab world to [endorse the academic boycott of Israel](#) in 2013 in solidarity with Palestinian scholars and students living under lockdown and in support of human rights and academic freedom for Palestinians. This historic action builds on the foundational history of Asian American Studies and the responsibility felt by scholars in the field to act on anticolonial and antimilitarism in the present day. The AAAS has also issued a [public statement](#) in strong support of including Arab American studies in

the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. Also, in 2013, I founded a section for West Asian American studies in the Association of Asian American to create intellectual space for scholarship in this critical yet till then marginalized field and to support scholars in this area whose work is often censored and attacked. Thus it is clear that as Asian American studies has grown, Arab/West Asian American studies is an increasingly important area--one that also has its own [institutionalized spaces](#) led by Arab American scholars. There is a powerful confluence of anti-Arab and Islamophobic forces that has worked to target Arab American studies scholars and to [erase Arab American studies](#), but despite this, the field continues to grow and a new generation of scholars is being hired in departments of Asian American studies, in addition to Ethnic Studies, American studies, and other fields.

Arab and West Asian American communities are part of California's diverse population and have a long and important, if generally unknown, history in the state--from the farms and UFW strikes of the Central Valley to the small grocery stores in deep East Oakland, not to mention their participation in the fight for ethnic studies itself. Any Ethnic Studies curriculum would be incomplete if it did not include this area and denied all students in California, including Arab American youth, the opportunity to learn about these communities, histories *and* herstories that tell us so much about the workings of power, the resilience of those who resist, and the emancipatory potential of Ethnic Studies knowledge for liberation.

I urge you to hear the calls of the impacted communities and reconvene the original committee of writers and experts to revise the original Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC), maintain the spirit of Ethnic Studies in the draft, and directly engage the communities and scholars concerned about their own histories.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sunaina Maira". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sunaina" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Maira".

Sunaina Maira

Professor of Asian American Studies, UC Davis
Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society Fellow (2019-20)