

From: Jennifer Kelly

Sent: Tuesday, August 11, 2020 12:00 PM

To: Ethnic Studies; Superintendent; [email redacted]; AROC

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Include Arab American and Pacific Islander Studies in CA Ethnic Studies Curriculum

Dear Tony Thurmond, Linda Darling-Hammond, and California Department of Education more broadly,

In addition to the letter on behalf of California Scholars for Academic Freedom that I sent last month, I want to include my own individual note, in the wake of the revisions to the curriculum, about how much this decision matters for me, personally, as a product of California public schools, as an Ethnic Studies professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz, as a scholar who researches and teaches about Palestine, and as someone who will raise my children in California. I grew up in San Diego, California, went to public elementary and middle schools, a private college-preparatory high school, and UC Santa Cruz for college. I received my Master's Degree at NYU and my PhD at UT Austin before returning to UC Santa Cruz as faculty. In all of my education prior to graduate school, I did not learn about Arab American studies or Palestine. It was not until my third year of college that I heard Palestine in a classroom and even then it was only referenced in one assigned article. My research in this area was only able to grow and flourish after college in graduate school. This is unacceptable.

As a current Ethnic Studies professor, I include material on Arab American Studies and Palestine in all my courses on race and gender formations, militarism and tourism, and U.S. empire because Palestine *matters*. Having content on Palestine matters for my students who are Palestinian and for my students who are not because knowing the role the U.S. has played in Israeli state practice *matters*. Similarly, knowing about struggles for freedom from colonialism — across multiple different contexts, including Palestine — *matters*.

The erasure of Arab American Studies and Pacific Islander Studies in the revisions to the curriculum make it so that students will not learn these histories unless they, like me, have the opportunity to go to college and take ethnic studies courses. This is a tragic outcome for California students. California students — my former self, my current students, and my future children — deserve better. They deserve to learn about colonialism and learn about anti-colonial struggles so that they can help craft a better world than the one they inherited.

Furthermore, Ethnic Studies is a field organized and taught by experts trained in Ethnic Studies. We got our PhDs in Ethnic Studies, transnational American Studies that center U.S. empire, and Feminist Studies that center race and gender. We do not teach multicultural studies or diversity studies. The new version of the curriculum excises the histories of struggle and organizing that are central to ethnic studies in favor of defanged vision of liberal multiculturalism. Similarly, Arab American studies scholars and Pacific Islander studies scholars are experts in their fields; their voices need to be centered in *any and all* revisions.

Please refer to our original CS4Af letter below for the myriad reasons California scholars who support academic freedom are in support of the original Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, the labor its writers took to include Palestine in Arab American American Studies and Arab American Studies in Asian American Studies, and the backlash those of us who work on Palestine routinely experience for writing honestly, historically, and carefully about Israeli state violence and Palestinian struggles for freedom.

And please take the following steps in the wake of the most recent revisions, in support of Ethnic Studies faculty across California and the students we teach:

1. Make the right decision here and reconvene the original committee of writers and experts to revise the *original* Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. Ethnic studies scholars and teachers are the experts on Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy. They need to play a central role in deciding how Ethnic Studies gets implemented in California.
2. Pass an Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum that includes Pacific Islander and Arab American Studies courses and lesson plans and make sure that Arab American Studies includes Palestine. The original writers did so much careful work to craft curricula and lesson plans that teach K-12 students Ethnic Studies in ways that necessarily include Arab American Studies and Pacific Islander Studies; please honor their labor and expertise.
3. Maintain and demonstrate a commitment to an Ethnic Studies framework, with the knowledge, language, and pedagogy that belongs to the field. As Ethnic Studies teachers, we labor so carefully over what we teach our students, the histories of struggle and organizing they learn, the theory they read, the ways in which they learn about field formation itself. Ethnic Studies was born out of student organizing; students deserve to know why. You do such a disservice to our work by diluting Ethnic Studies and converting it into a field with a different, often opposite, ethos: multicultural studies, diversity studies, or area studies.
4. The revision of the curriculum, the excising of Arab American Studies and Pacific Islander Studies, and the removal of the original writers — ethnic studies scholars and teachers — is deeply concerning and anathema to the larger decolonial imperatives of Ethnic Studies. Your process in revision needs to have clearcut structures for accountability, transparency, and consensus building *with* those who are experts, who are represented, and who are affected. Ethnic studies teachers, scholars, and organizers and the communities of color the curriculum purports to represent need to play a central role throughout the *entire* model curriculum process, during revision and up to ratification.

We are always living in a moment where Ethnic Studies matters. Students need Ethnic Studies not only to understand the racialized impact of Covid-19, racialized state violence, contemporary global Black uprisings, and indigenous resistance against the colonial present. They also need Ethnic Studies to understand how we got here and how we can imagine a different future. *All students* need Ethnic Studies, including Arab American Studies, including

the study of Palestine, and including Pacific Islander Studies, in their K-12 curriculum to understand solidarity and strengthen our movements for justice.

All best,
Jennifer Kelly

Jennifer L. Kelly, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Feminist Studies Department
Critical Race and Ethnic Studies Program
University of California, Santa Cruz