

From: Emily Bernstein
Sent: Friday, August 9, 2019 9:21 PM
To: Ethnic Studies
Cc: Tony Thurmond
Subject: Concerns About ESMC

Dear Instructional Quality Commission of the California Board of Education,

My name is Emily Bernstein, and I am a Special Education Teacher in CA and a PhD student who has spent much of my professional life advocating for people who have been systematically oppressed by our institution. Naturally, I support the practice of teaching Ethnic Studies classes, but I have some concerns about the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum as proposed.

In reading over the document, I find the need for Ethnic Studies courses compelling and necessary, however the way some aspects of these courses are modeled is worrying to me. The ESMC focuses heavily on power structures and forms of oppression including white supremacy, sexism, classism, Islamophobia, transphobia — but excludes anti-Semitism. Anti-Jewish bias receives only a passing mention during a discussion of intersectionality in a proposed course on Pacific Islander studies and the 22-page glossary and bibliography has entries for Islamophobia and racism, but none for anti-Semitism. At the same time, aspects of the Arab American Studies course seem to reinforce division between Arabs and Jews and at times perpetuate stereotypes about Jews. I would argue there are ways to dismantle stereotypes about Arabs without perpetuate stereotypes about other groups.

I have engaged in inter-faith discussion groups bringing together Arab-Americans who identify as Muslim, Jewish-Americans and Christians and in these conversations we have often lamented the divisiveness of rhetoric between our communities. I fear the conception of this course does not consider how to validate one minority group and teach others about it without inadvertently vilifying another.

I sincerely request you make appropriate changes to the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum to address these concerns.

Thank you,

Emily Bernstein