

**CSUF Student Input about an Ethnic Studies Requirement
for the CSU System
October 29, 2019
Results of ASI Sponsored Focus Groups**

Over the course of five focus groups, the Associated Students, Inc. sought to gain the student perspective on AB 1460 by taking into consideration their comments and opinions. The ASI Executive Officers feel that this is a crucial component that must be considered when recommendations are made by the CSUF Academic Senate to the state-wide Academic Senate. Student opinion is important because it leads to proper representation of identities that are ultimately theirs, while seeking to maintain the meaning and intention of AB 1460.

At each session, students were presented with a breakdown of each component based on the presentation given at the Special Academic Senate Meeting held in September. Not all components were incorporated as some related to a timeline, but the general question asked of senators was asked of students.

Students were asked the following questions:

Component 1: Recommendations on Suggested Learning Outcomes

1. What types of learning outcomes should the curriculum seek to include?
2. Should it require specific requirements or more general goals?
3. Should the descriptions be limited to the four historically defined core groups? (Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and (Chicanx) Latinx Americans)? Should it include other groups?

Overwhelmingly, students agreed that the learning outcomes should seek to include:

- Cultural competency, meaning students should leave the course understanding how to correctly and effectively interact with people across cultures.
- **Students overwhelmingly vocalized the need for intersectionality in the course.**
- Lastly, students voiced that while historical context, theory, and cultural competency was important, the application of themes was needed.
 - Examples were given such as: a project in which students apply learning outcomes to real life situations, and/or the ability to participate and engage in community work through a social justice lens and framework.

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Regarding the courses being limited to the four historically core cultural groups; Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Chicanx/Latinx Americans, **students felt that the descriptions should not be limited to the four historically defined core groups, but rather that they should seek to be more inclusive and interdisciplinary by including other fields of study such as:**

- Queer Studies, Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies, Religious Studies, and American Studies.
- Additionally, students expressed the need to include cultural experiences not defined by academic programs, including but not limited to the following groups: Southwest Asia and North African culture/experience, and bi-racial experiences.

Concerning general goals and specific requirements:

- **Students strongly suggested applying several definitions and/or learning goals within the curriculum, including but not limited to:**
 - **Social justice; anti-blackness; colorism; discrimination; racism; privilege; white-male privilege; stereotypes; prejudice; systemic oppression; and feminisms**
- Others suggested in proceeding with the four historically defined cultural groups, and later expanding.

Component 2: Recommendations on the Type of Requirement

Students voiced a plethora of concerns regarding the type of requirement to be implemented.

1. Should the requirement be “stand-alone” or be implemented into GE?
2. Can the requirement have a standard for the entire system, or should individual campuses be allowed to decide what the curriculum looks like at their campus, taking into consideration factors like demographics?

Students voiced a plethora of concerns regarding the type of requirement to be implemented.

However,

Students tended to favor a requirement based on individual campuses because:

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- There may be better opportunities to ensure inclusiveness and flexibility within course objectives
- It may give campuses more agency by allowing the students to create the curriculum of the courses. This allows for demographic flexibility within the course curriculum. Campuses should have a say in determining what that looks like, rather than one set standard,
- Other communities are marginalized and deserve to have identity validated.
- A one-size all mechanism may not be effective in upholding the meaning and purpose of the requirement,
- Campuses may need to focus on a demographic that represents their campus (i.e. California State University, Fullerton, has a significant Chicana/Chicano population),

Students who favored a state-wide standard for ethnic studies had concerns that:

- The culture of the campus and involvement of administrators could influence individual campuses in a negative way if the requirements are campus-specific,
- It would be developed by individuals who do not have individual, direct contact with the campus and cannot understand individual campus cultures,
- It may be difficult to shape the requirement 23 separate and unique ways, AND
- A broader standard with flexibility within it may protect the essence of the bill.

3. Should the ethnic studies requirement be offered as an upper-division requirement and designed to build from lower-division requirements, or should it be mandated as a lower division course?

Students preferred a Level 200 Requirement because:

- Because students will have learned how to navigate college level classes first,
- It will become more accessible to students of all backgrounds,
- The course can review a wider array of topics,
- It has the tendency to create more general knowledge, AND
- May foster an environment that develops a significant understanding of diversity and inclusion early in the college career.

Upper Division Requirements were not favorable because:

- They tend to be specific to individual topic areas, AND
- the focus on general ethnic studies curriculum will be limited.

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Students found that an upper division course may be favorable in the event that they are developed to be an additional component to the course requirement, so that students may apply what they have learned at a deeper level. This would also leave out graduate-degree students, which may also demonstrate a lack of consistency within the Bill's application.

4. Is it possible for the requirement to be fulfilled as parts of a variety of courses instead of within a single course?

Students favored allowing students to choose a class from a pre-selected course area because:

- Students who are studying a particular identity will be asked to step outside this particular area to diversify their scope of knowledge,
- Students will feel invited to be a part of their academic pathway at the University by selecting which course most relates to their interests

Students favored asking all students to take a specific class because:

- Choosing from an option of classes would mean limiting the learning outcomes in ONE course,
- It may become difficult to integrate courses with ethnic studies curriculum outside of the academic discipline,
- It can be molded to relate to relevant topic areas, like Power and Privilege,
- It may be more meaningful than asking students to choose a class that evokes the essence of the requirement,
- It has the opportunity to go over multiple identities and their intersection, as well as cultural components,
- Students may have a better opportunity to gain a wide-ranging perspective of ethnic studies, whereas requiring them to take a narrowly-tailored course may leave out crucial components that the requirement seeks to mandate

Component 3: Recommendations on Implementation

1. Should implementation allow for “campus-specific” additions to the requirement? (In line with a question from the previous slide)
2. Generally speaking, would it be better to focus on the specific curriculum of ethnic studies or to work towards a broader definition of diversity or “cultural competency”?

A broader definition of diversity or cultural competency may be better to ensure that the requirement is an all-encompassing definition of ethnic studies - (should include queer and gender studies). **An overwhelming amount of students agree with this and want to see a**

broader lens/definition of ethnic studies,

- The course should specifically allow for the discussion of different groups and provide an intersectional approach to the understanding of these communities and their experiences over the course of time. Privilege and barriers should be highlighted and taken into consideration with regard to impacts on certain communities,
- Learning outcomes should be centered as a statewide class, with an emphasis on breaking historical stereotypes. However, when comparing each California State University campus, not one, looks like another. The population of CSU Fullerton will look much different from the population at CSU Dominguez Hills, CSU Maritime and SF State. Therefore the campus population should also be taken into consideration in how to shape these courses at each university. These are the “communities” the bill refers to, at least for the duration of the student’s journey,
- Terms to incorporate into the courses: tokenism; equity v. equality; color-blindness v. color-awareness; acceptance; letting you know you belong; colorism; intersectionality; unlearn; systemic; institutionalization; cisgender; otherness; etc.,
- This should be made into a specified course regarding ethnicity - making the course its GE, rather than just including it in the already established Cultural Diversity requirement.
- Classifying it as general education will cause it to lose its purpose. This should stand out as a requirement and not be categorized as a GE class that you have to take,
- An Ethnic Studies overview may not be able to cover everything. Therefore, splitting this into options may better help to elucidate the point of the class, rather than keeping them all together.

Component 4: Integrity of Requirement

1. What best practices should be encouraged for campuses to adopt in their course evaluation and approval processes for meeting the learning outcomes specific to ethnic studies in order to maximize the consistency and integrity of the requirement? (How do we best evaluate these courses to ensure longevity?)
2. How can “disciplinary deference” and commitment to the core principles be protected against courses that may meet the letter of the objectives but not the spirit of the objectives? (What steps can be made to ensure that the courses are meaningful as developed and are truly unique?)
3. How to protect against a requirement becoming ‘less than the sum of its parts’? (How do we ensure the requirement, as a whole, remains meaningful?)

Overwhelmingly, students felt that to properly evaluate the courses, the evaluation process should be a lot more complex than simply collecting data from SOQs by:

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- Forming a committee of students and professors formed to evaluate the course alongside SOQs as there are different conversations to be had regarding the course that would not be effectively discussed through just SOQs.
- Having students discuss what they learned from the course and how they plan to apply that knowledge in their communities.

Some students felt that during the evaluation process, there should be a need to:

- Have both a pre and post class assessments to find how much students have learned throughout the course and how well they understood its material at the end,
- Host town halls with faculty where students could bring up their comments, questions, and concerns about the courses.

Some students felt that in order to ensure that the courses are meaningful and unique, the course should use broader language in order to:

- Talk about multiple communities that face similar struggles,
- Ensure that a diverse set of communities are being discussed and that there aren't any communities excluded from conversations.

However, the majority of students preferred using more specific language to ensure that courses are meaningful and unique in order to:

- Commit to what the course's principles are,
- Not bundle up different communities as doing so would avoid being specific about each community,
- Focus on separate communities and to properly respect them and discuss the specific struggles that they face.

Students found that in order to keep the requirement as a whole meaningful, the course should shift academic culture by:

- Having students complete the course to get something out of it rather than "doing it for a degree,"
- Reconstructing its syllabus to encourage students to do something in a different way and not be punished for it,
- Having students recognize and understand that they might have more privilege than others,
- Courses should encourage students to go out to the community and demonstrate how they apply what they learned from the courses.

General Questions

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1. Do you have any thoughts or concerns about this bill?
2. How do you think this requirement should be shaped for the CSU System?
3. Is there anything missing from the bill that you would like to have implemented?
4. How will this impact you as a student at CSUF?

Students overwhelmingly emphasized the importance of implementing an inclusive and intersectional definition of what ethnic studies is as there is limited reference to an intersectionality component. Other general suggestions and concerns of students included:

- The importance of including queer studies, gender studies, and conversations that encourage inclusivity and intersectionality while discussing issues of toxic masculinity and institutionalized racism
- Encouraging the adoption of the requirement to be considered by all schools, not just the California State University system.
- An emphasis on the fact that this is the first step to allow and encourage communities of color to step outside the otherness that exists in education. These are the basic components students need to know to have a basic degree. It was additionally emphasized that the CSU isn't hitting its requirement for equity if it is not talking about diversity and that more respect should be given to these communities in education.
- A concern of whether these requirements would take away pre-existing requirements from other departments
- Confusion as to why the administration of our university and others across the CSU have been hesitant to take a supportive stance of the bill
- Interest in the existing requirement for the University of California system; more specifically, their learning outcomes and specific implementation
- Concern regarding the impact of this requirement on women and gender studies as well as queer studies; specifically if there would be conversations about how to keep its relevance and the discussion of gender privilege present.
- Concerns regarding the measures the Office of the Chancellor, Systemwide Academic Senate, CSUF Academic Senate, and CSUF would take to make sure that other communities, outside of the four that are listed, are included in these courses. It was repeatedly emphasized without making the content of this requirement more considerate of intersectionality and inclusivity, these communities would risk being further marginalized.
- Concern surrounding how the implementation of this requirement would change requirements for Ethnic Studies majors/minors/those in other majors who currently enroll in these courses as GE's by choice

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- The utilization of a one size fits all approach would be limiting to how we could implement it at CSUF
- Discussion surrounding how community is defined system-wide with each CSU community already being incredibly different; specifically the impact of one three-unit course in making students aware of the diversity within their community when the focus could potentially be specific to one ethnic group.
- **How is one three-unit course going to make students aware of the diversity within their community, especially if it only focuses on one community?**
- The question of whether this act could lead to more requirements being changed within the CSUF Cultural Diversity Requirement; specifically parts 1, 2, and 3 of this requirement and if more requirements would be added
- How many CSU students leave California after graduation? The campus community will look different from a commuter's community, than an out of state student's and further than someone who will be moving out of state. How does this make a lasting impact?
- What is the population at the campus? What does this look like and how will it affect the requirement?

Summary

I, Claire Jenkins ASI Chief Campus Relations Officer, support AB 1460. I believe that in going forward it is imperative that the student perspective be carefully gleaned and considered, because it is the very identity of our students that this bill seeks to put under a microscope.

Perhaps the students of California State University, Fullerton, expressed the need for the implementation and careful consideration of the components of AB 1460 when they stated that it impacts what the CSU system determines that they value, and therefore impacts every student, faculty member, and administrative official.