



**WISCONSIN**  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

**TO:** Rebecca Blank, Chancellor

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**DATE:** April 25, 2016

**SUBJECT: Campus Climate Proposal**

### **Introduction**

We are in the midst of a crisis at UW-Madison. A series of racist incidents on campus, as well as the arrest of an African American student by UW police during an Afro-American Studies class, have highlighted a campus climate that too often continues to marginalize or exclude students, staff, and faculty of color. As faculty and staff in Afro-American Studies, American Indian Studies, Asian American Studies, and Chican@ and Latin@ Studies, we stand in solidarity with students who have persistently and courageously demanded change on this campus. We know that these problems are not new, but are only the most recent manifestation of long-standing racial inequities at UW-Madison. We recognize that the current calls for change are part of a history of activism by students, staff, and faculty around racial justice on this campus that stretches back over decades. We believe that a strengthened commitment to ethnic and indigenous studies at UW-Madison can improve campus climate and spark helpful conversation about race and racial disparities on campus, while producing local and national leaders who can direct us through a future that will be increasingly diverse.

Our proposals are grounded in two goals that have been articulated by students of color on campus: **improving cultural competency** and **improving recruitment and retention of students and faculty of color**. We believe that the shared goal of greater cultural competency on campus is best served through educating students more deeply in the histories and contexts that shape race relations today, while also providing a space within which all can learn and grow. As an intellectual discourse that emerges from, and focuses on, the experiences of people of color in the U.S., ethnic and indigenous studies has never been more relevant and vital than now in bringing discussions of race, ethnicity, and indigeneity directly into the classroom, allowing students of

color to see their own experiences reflected in the curriculum while providing the historical and intellectual context necessary for all students to understand the ongoing role of race and racism in U.S. society.

We also believe that building strong, nationally recognized ethnic and indigenous studies programs at UW-Madison can help attract and retain students and faculty of color. Building these programs will lead directly to the hiring of more faculty of color, and can strengthen intellectual communities and nurture long-term vision among faculty of color that will keep them here. Strong ethnic and indigenous studies programs can also serve as a recruiting tool for students of color and offer an intellectual and academic home to those already on campus.

Given the urgency of the current crisis, and the decades-long history of activism on these issues, we request a response to our proposal within two weeks.

## **Background**

Race, ethnicity, and nationhood are core structural and constituent elements of life in the United States. They pervade power relations in society, infuse popular culture, and manifest themselves in education. Recent decades have seen a proliferation of scholarship on race, ethnicity, and indigeneity, as well as interest in these subjects among educated publics. The United States has become more racially and ethnically diverse in the past fifty years. The academy, in reflecting and absorbing this new reality, can further the intellectual understanding of these factors, including their place in public policy formation and analysis, and public outreach.

During the 1960s, civil rights, Black Power, and Free Speech movement activists radically reformed higher education by demanding new programs and courses that would bring the history and cultures of previously marginalized racial and ethnic groups into the classrooms of colleges and universities throughout the United States. Since then, ethnic and indigenous studies in its various iterations--African American Studies, Chican@ and Latin@ Studies, Asian American Studies, and American Indian Studies--has produced scholars, critics, teachers, artists, and community activists who continue the work of ensuring that future generations grow up with the knowledge and understanding that U.S. society is multicultural.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison derives its commitment to intellectual work and academic excellence from its inherent social responsibility as a land grant institution. Its official narratives affirm the values of egalitarianism, open-mindedness, and a free spirit of inquiry. In recent years, however, budget cuts and other forms of attrition have weakened support for these principles.

They are reflected in a decline in student, faculty, and staff diversity; a racial achievement gap; and a disturbing increase in incidents of intolerance on campus, both inside and outside the classroom.

We believe that the University's core standards can be revitalized and its diversity mission strengthened through structures that better support collaborative work, interdisciplinary research, and teaching by and about U. S. people of color. Campus leaders must recognize that such structures will require a practical reward system in the form of grants, hires, budgets for multi-disciplinary projects, and affirmative acknowledgments.

A recent Stanford study provided some of the first empirical evidence that ethnic studies courses at the high-school level can significantly improve the academic performance of at-risk students.<sup>1</sup> We believe that strengthening ethnic and indigenous studies at UW can be a major boon for the recruitment and retention of students of color and for a campus climate that sorely needs an infusion of intellectual curiosity, human empathy, and an understanding of how power operates in a multicultural society. Our proposal also follows Recommendation 1.3 of the campus diversity framework, *Forward Together*, by helping to "Support faculty who further the fields of ethnic studies through education or research" and expanding ethnic and indigenous studies on campus to ensure that "undergraduate students enroll in an ethnic studies course within the first 60 academic credits at UW-Madison."

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Dee and Emily Penner, "The Causal Effects of Cultural Relevance: Evidence from an Ethnic Studies Curriculum." NBER Working Paper No. 21865, January 2016. See also <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2016/january/ethnic-studies-benefits-011216.html>

## Proposals

### **1. New tenure-track hiring in all four ethnic and indigenous studies units.**

Building strong, nationally recognized ethnic and indigenous studies programs that are capable of attracting and retaining students and faculty of color, and that have the capacity to engage in transformative teaching and outreach that can affect campus climate, will require substantial investment. Faculty strength across the four ethnic and indigenous studies units has fallen to historically low levels. Chican@ and Latin@ Studies currently has zero faculty with appointments in the program, while American Indian Studies has 2.5 faculty (FTE) and Asian American Studies has 2.75 faculty (FTE).

We therefore request new tenure-track hiring beginning in Fall 2016 in all four units:

Afro-American Studies: 3 faculty positions  
(2 tenured, 1 tenure-track)  
American Indian Studies: 3 faculty positions  
(2 tenured, 1 tenure-track)  
Asian American Studies: 3 faculty positions  
(2 tenured, 1 tenure-track)  
Chican@ and Latin@ Studies: 4 faculty positions  
(2 tenured, 2 tenure-track)

### **2. A dedicated development officer for ethnic and indigenous studies.**

The possibilities for fundraising for the ethnic and indigenous studies units have been limited by the very small staff and budgets of our units. We therefore request that a full-time development officer be assigned to work on fundraising and alumni outreach for the ethnic and indigenous studies units. We also urge the Alumni Association to continue its efforts to reach out to alumni of color by hiring a new staff member for minority outreach.

### **3. One additional staff member for each unit.**

Students often look to our programs not only for teaching, but for advising and support that goes beyond the classroom. However, our very limited staffing resources (two of our four units have only a single staff member) make even simple academic advising a challenge, to say nothing of more substantial student support and community outreach.

We therefore request one additional staff member for each of our four units so that we may more effectively provide advising and student support, particularly to the students of color who are our programs' primary constituency.

#### **4. Teaching assistant support and training for courses offered by the ethnic and indigenous studies programs.**

A major roadblock to the expansion of enrollment in the ethnic and indigenous studies units at UW-Madison is the lack of TA support in these units. Three of our four units have no graduate students and also lack TA budgets that would allow us to teach larger classes. As a result, we tend to lose enrollment to departments that are capable of running large ethnic studies courses with many TAs, even though our gateway classes in ethnic studies are filled to capacity and often have dozens, if not hundreds, of students seeking enrollment.

We therefore request new or increased TA funding for all four units:

American Indian Studies: 4 new TAs

Asian American Studies: 4 new TAs

Chican@ and Latin@ Studies: 4 new TAs

Afro-American Studies: 2 new TAs, to be added to the department's current TA budget

These TAs would be used primarily in the introductory/gateway courses in our programs and would allow us to offer these courses to a much broader range of students than are currently able to access them. It would allow for different enrollment configurations of classes (e.g. 2 courses with 144 enrollment each, 1 course with 144, 2 courses at 72, etc.) This structural change will allow us to make a true teaching impact on campus and would further the goal of asking students to fulfill the ethnic studies requirement in their first two years of study. This allotment also increases support for graduate students working in ethnic and indigenous studies across the university.

We also request resources that would support the training of TAs to teach in ethnic and indigenous studies. Because three of our four units do not have graduate students and none have doctoral students, we currently have little role in training graduate students who teach ethnic and indigenous studies across the curriculum, and some instructors in ethnic studies requirement courses have expressed concerns about the lack of specific

training for TAs in this area, which requires a skill set that may differ from those in the TA's home discipline.

**5. Support for course redevelopment of "Introduction to Comparative Ethnic Studies."**

We request course redevelopment support for a redesigned course in comparative ethnic and indigenous studies. We have an existing course, Introduction to Comparative Ethnic Studies, that is currently shared among Asian American Studies, Chican@ and Latin@ Studies, and Comparative Literature and Folklore Studies. However, we are currently reimagining the course due to the retirement of the faculty member in CLFS who taught it, and we are considering redeveloping it into a truly cross-program and interdisciplinary course that would include perspectives from all four of our fields. We request a course release for at least one faculty member from each unit, along with course development funding, to support redeveloping this course into a major new gateway for ethnic and indigenous studies on campus.

**6. A coordinating hub for ethnic and indigenous studies on campus.**

We request funding and administrative support for a coordinating hub for ethnic and indigenous studies on campus. Such a hub will expand the profile and reach of ethnic and indigenous studies on campus through sponsorship of events, hosting of visiting scholars, and outreach to communities of color on campus and beyond. It will help publicize existing teaching and research in ethnic and indigenous studies, while fostering comparative work across fields. It will strengthen links between our units and other on-campus programs such as First Wave, residential interest groups, the Multicultural Student Center, and campus support programs, such as SOAR, PEOPLE, and McNair. We request staffing support to launch the initial phase of this hub beginning in fall 2016, in the form of a director and a project assistant.

Over time, this hub might well evolve into a new institute for race, ethnic, and indigenous studies on campus. Significant questions remain about what the relationship of such an institute would have to the four ethnic and indigenous studies units. We are committed to maintaining the autonomy of our units even as we discuss the possible benefits of cooperation. We expect that our conversations over the coming months will produce a fuller vision of future collaboration among our units and of the new structures that might arise to support that collaboration. We therefore also request support for monthly

planning meetings during 2016-17 that will develop a more detailed vision for the future of our units.