



# Cerritos College

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## **An open letter to all educators regarding Ethnic Studies at Cal State Los Angeles**

On any given day of the week, one can cruise through Downtown Los Angeles and experience what it feels to be in the multi-ethnic capital of the world. In all its pain, agony, and beautifulness, Los Angeles is ethnic in any way that you can imagine, from food to pop-culture, and the experience of long standing traditions from all over the world. For people of color, their roots are deep, and they are mangled in the steel and concrete infrastructure that was built by the migrant worker. If you dig a little deeper, you know that L.A. is Indian land, and it will always remain Indian land.

If one does their analysis correctly, we can understand that L.A. is growing in ethnic diversity, and despite a “blending” of populations, race relationships remain a vital factor, in how Angelinos interact and live. We are not living in a Post-racial Obama world! Moreover, the bigger questions rest in how we as a species take-on the challenges that surface along the borders of that ethnic interaction that has been occurring in schools and places of work for generations; questions that deal with disease, food, healing, sustainability, wellbeing, and the progress of all people. For student youth of color, a complete understanding of health and wellness, in both a historical and present context, can only come about through the attainment of Ethnic Studies. Ethnic studies is a necessary education for all of us, to fill-in the gaps of our naïve understandings towards one another, so that we can all begin to treat each other rightfully.

It is an adequate addition, to make Ethnic Studies at Cal State L.A. a part of the GE requirement. The culture and history of the inhabitants should prevail in any institution of learning; there is nothing complex about that. Our present moment in history represents a time when we should be strengthening Asian, Black, Chicano, and Indigenous American histories in the classroom; by way of expanded lesson plans, curriculum, and research. Yet Ethnic Studies is not limited to the history of US marginalized groups; the ancestral history and contributions of all world people need to be advocated for. The risks and challenges that we are facing need of the humanities, of the traditional methods of all ancient people, who have in their narrative and ways, cures to the illnesses and conditions that science cannot afford us.

As educators, many of us are in positions of power, and it breaks my heart to hear and know that many of us have given up, turned the other way, or have become frighten. A lot of us have become too comfortable, choosing not to address the tuff questions, and being okay with it. It is not okay. Some of us like my own, and close colleagues fear “job security,” *will this letter come back to haunt me, will my Dean find out (blacklisted maybe), and will I be invited to teach again?* One colleague did advise I not write this letter, to not get involved. Then I think about why I became a teacher, why I left the corporate world, benefits, and a living salary. Because I cared about the wellbeing of our student youth, because I never wanted to be silenced, and because I knew that I would not be alone, along the ranks of other educators that felt the same way. Fear should not turn us away from saying something, we should always be willing to offer something, and I think our students deserve some reaction on the Cal State L.A. matter. We are creatures of emotion, are we not?

There is an abundance of reason to be united and not divided, teachers, and students. We all would be lying to our students, if we were to tell them that education is a safe route to success, to prosperity. It is not! Our students need to organize, they need to know that their tuition is going up again, just as the cost of their books, and parking. The US economy is not growing enough, to accommodate or graduating youth, and their aspirations. While many will achieve prosperity, many of their classmates will be slowly choked to a letdown, in the process of repaying their education.

Our student youth needs to be allowed to organize. To speak out against the institution without fear of losing sight of their dreams, and we too as faculty, must not be frighten by superior authority and retribution. Nor is it the time to be thinking of the complexity of things, we all know the risks and challenges facing our youth and communities. Let us advocate communication, dialogue, transparency, willingness to be right or wrong (never taking it personal), and never fearful on the eve of change.

Respectfully, Santiago Andres Garcia, M.A. **Cerritos Community College District**

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