

Practitioner's Essay

Building Against the Constraints of the University:

Teaching Ethnic Studies and Asian American Studies at an HSI/AANAPISI and PWI

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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the points of contention that we, the authors, as junior faculty have teaching Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies at a Hispanic Serving Institution/ Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (HSI/AANAPISI) state university and private Predominantly White Institution (PWI). We discuss the lasting influence of our first experiences with Ethnic Studies as graduate students at San Francisco State University, and how these experiences shaped our critical approach and pedagogy in our doctoral programs and jobs. We observe the institutional shortcomings that affect our home departments, noting how the university treats Ethnic Studies, its racialized faculty, students, and people. We invite others to think with us beyond the microcosms of our institutions.

INTRODUCTION

“What would the ideal university look like?” At the close of Lorgia Garcia Peña’s *Community as Rebellion: A Syllabus for Surviving Academia as a Woman of Color* (2022, 98), she asks readers this urgent question. The contemplative personal narrative tells Garcia Peña’s experience as a Latinx and Ethnic Studies scholar at Harvard University who was ultimately denied tenure. Through her experience, we

learn that Ethnic Studies and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) faculty and students are not always welcomed in university spaces. As Harvard and so many other universities that devalue Ethnic Studies have proven to offer inadequate support services for their BIPOC community, Garcia Peña asks us to imagine then what would be an “ideal university.” For us, the “ideal university” was something that we both experienced at the first established College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University (SFSU).¹ We the authors, referred to as “MHM” and “GDC” throughout this work, were first-time graduate students in the Master of Arts in Ethnic Studies program in between the “post-racial” Obama era and the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement. Before entering SFSU, we both attended different private universities where there were no established Ethnic Studies programs and few, if any, Ethnic Studies courses offered.² Yet, like so many other students of color trying to make sense of our own identities, communities, and places in college, we found Ethnic Studies. It not only saved us, but changed us. At SFSU, we learned about theories and terms that we and people in our communities personally experienced. Prior to this exposure to a culturally relevant curriculum, we did not have the language to name our experiences. Through the support and care we received at SFSU, we both continued our education in different PhD programs in American Studies.³ As newly trained PhDs in American Studies, we successfully obtained tenure-track and postdoc teaching positions in which we were tasked to teach Ethnic Studies and Asian American Studies courses.

Even at different universities with contrasting student demographics, we had similar experiences as first-generation women of color faculty teaching Ethnic Studies and Asian American Studies. Collectively, we faced challenges from university administration, misconceptions about Ethnic Studies and Asian American Studies, and the devaluing of our beloved disciplines. Since we experienced Ethnic Studies in both the colorblind era and Black Lives Matter era, we were well aware of the varying attacks on Ethnic Studies through “dog-whistle politics,” and now more so through blatant racism. Yet, a new challenge emerged in this contemporary moment that equated Ethnic Studies with “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion” (DEI), popular buzzwords that have been institutionalized at numerous universities and corporations. DEI serves as another attack on Ethnic Studies through its insidious process of diluting and watering down our decolonial work while bolstering multicultural structures that inhibit our

liberation. Instead of acknowledging decades of struggles that BIPOC have experienced, DEI ignores this history through the problematic attempt for people of color to simply “fit in” to the current colonizing structures.

At both our institutions,⁴ we have experienced these multicultural reductionist attempts that try to subvert Ethnic Studies and what it stands for. We argue that these are not just attacks on our disciplines, but also our bodyminds as first-generation women of color faculty. We ask then, how do our universities that claim a stake in Ethnic Studies, a notably radical field of study, (in)advertently disregard the attempts at assimilating BIPOC faculty into their white supremacist structures? This case study shares our experiences teaching in our first year at two very different universities—a Hispanic Serving Institution/ Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (HSI/ AANAPISI), and Predominantly White Institution (PWI)—in an attempt to make sense of our own place as first-generation women of color faculty.

CAL POLY POMONA (HSI/AANAPISI)

There is a particular need for Ethnic Studies courses at Cal Poly Pomona (CPP) to fulfill the California State University (CSU) General Education requirements. However, there is a limited number of full-time faculty in the Ethnic and Women’s Studies (EWS) department including nine full-time faculty teaching Ethnic Studies (African American Studies—one faculty, Asian American Studies—three faculty, Latinx Studies—two faculty, Native American Studies—one faculty, and Gender Studies—two faculty). I (MHM) was hired in the Ethnic and Women’s Studies (EWS) department at Cal Poly Pomona beginning in the 2022-23 academic year. When interviewing for my position, there were four open positions within my department, and two of the four were filled. The remaining two positions have not yet been filled, and a faculty search is currently underway. On an annual basis, our department must ask the university administration for approval to begin new faculty searches.

CPP is part of the CSU system which includes twenty-three campuses throughout the state. CPP has been designated a “polytechnic university” focusing on STEM courses and experiential learning (The California State University). While there are fifty-four undergraduate programs, forty percent of the student body are STEM majors. Like other CSUs, CPP has a large student population who are predominantly

students of color. At CPP, there are 29,103 students, including undergraduate and graduate students. As of Fall 2021, approximately fifty percent of the student population identified as “Hispanic” (Cal Poly Pomona, 2022), and as such CPP is designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). CPP qualifies to be designated as an AANAPISI (Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution), as the next highest student population (twenty-two percent) identified as “Asian.” In addition, fifty-eight percent of the student population are first-generation college students, and CPP has been designated as a “First-Gen Forward” institution by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) through their Center for First-generation Student Success initiative.

While a high number of students of color enrolled at CPP, the number of students in the Gender, Ethnic, Multicultural Studies (GEMS) major within the EWS department has remained low. As of 2017, there have been 145 majors (Cal Poly Pomona, 2017). The EWS department offers an abundant number of courses in which many are cross-listed with other humanities departments. Highly enrolled courses are often General Education requirements (including Area F: Ethnic Studies, and Area D3: Social Sciences: Principles, Methodologies, Value Systems, and Ethics). EWS courses within these areas tend to be lower-division introductory courses within Ethnic Studies. While there are upper-division courses that may qualify as fulfilling other General Education requirements, upper-division courses tend to be enrolled at lower rates and sometimes canceled altogether. Course cancellations are particularly challenging for faculty who cannot teach upper-division courses that highlight their research specialties and are instead assigned to teach primarily (or all) introductory courses. The department must then cater to the wavering needs and demands of the university. Most troublesome are the lack of authority that the EWS department has in determining who is qualified to teach an Ethnic Studies course and how other departments have sought to claim and cross-list Ethnic Studies courses for their own monetary gain.

GONZAGA UNIVERSITY (PWI)

Gonzaga University (Gonzaga) is a PWI, serving sixty-nine percent of students who identify as white and twenty-three percent who are considered underrepresented minorities (Gonzaga).⁵ Gonzaga is a midsize Jesuit school famous for its highly ranked basketball team. The men’s basketball team earns the school cultural capital along with

real dollars, drawing from afar students who want to be a part of the “Zag Nation.”⁶ I (GDC) know, as I was one; I attended Gonzaga myself, graduating with a bachelor’s degree in Sociology. Hidden behind the veil of mainstream Zag culture are the stories and struggles of students of color on Gonzaga’s campus; the conditions of their lives go unacknowledged in the narratives of handsome athletes and satisfied students that dominate popular Zag culture. The gap between the experiences of students of color and tropes of Gonzaga life alienates students of color even further. Many have therefore come together to call for institutional change.

In 2021, I began my appointment at Gonzaga as one of the two “Underrepresented Minority” Postdoctoral Teaching Fellows. Gonzaga’s faculty profile also reflects a white majority at the school with seventy-eight percent faculty reporting themselves as white, thirteen percent as underrepresented minority, six percent as nonresident alien, and two percent as unknown. Fifty-six percent of the faculty are identified as men while forty-four percent of faculty are identified as women according to the school’s 2021 institutional research data. These postdoctoral fellowships are important because they aim to diversify the historically white professoriate at universities. The goal of the fellowship at Gonzaga is to retain and convert postdocs to tenure-track positions. The university historically has a pattern and legacy of being unable to retain its faculty of color in addition to its track record of withholding tenure-track appointments from faculty who do not fit a specific mold. By Gonzaga’s standards, faculty must be smart and liberal, but not radical enough to challenge the eurocentric and Catholic traditions of the university. Complaining as non-tenured faculty is a surefire way to not get promoted. Garcia Peña (2022, 18) speaks about this experience at Harvard in which she classifies tokenized faculty of color at PWIs as “The One.” She writes, “To be The One means behaving, obeying the rules of whiteness, maintaining the status quo, and above all, being grateful....You must be willing to comply to make white people comfortable.” At Gonzaga, I was “The One,” their “Underrepresented Minority.”

Racialized faculty who move to Spokane, Washington typically have a difficult time transitioning to the inland Northwest. Washington’s border with Northern Idaho shares a long history of white supremacist violence. In Hayden Lake, a suburb just north of Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, white national hate groups gathered at neo-Nazi compounds, resurrecting the region’s history of Aryan Nations gatherings

in Kootenai County, Idaho during the 1970s. I explain the political scene of the inland Northwest to illustrate the historical context and visceral fears that beholden the racialized faculty who teach at Gonzaga. The work expected of these minoritized faculty, and their treatment by colleagues and administration, exacerbates the realities of working within white supremacist institutions and in a region that still gathers neo-Nazi conservatives in large numbers. The quotidian work of teaching Ethnic Studies in predominantly white institutions strains us, overcasting our hopes for revolutionary change because we are far away from the families and communities that sustain and affirm us while being devalued by the institution. As Garcia Peña describes what it means to be “The One,” being “The One” also means that there is endless pressure to support the few racialized students who are also “the only ones.” It means that we must extend ourselves in caring for our students who have no one else besides us. It means that we are also the only ones on campus defending Ethnic Studies because few know what it is. We are fighting for our students, ourselves, and racialized futures. This uneven labor placed on minoritized faculty and students at GU affects the physical, mental, and emotional health of the only ones. We physically hold onto the stress in our bodies, in our tightened shoulders that we are frequently looking over. We are on high alert, not knowing that we are because of how normalized the institutional violence is day-to-day. I see it with my students; they are spent and de-spirited. While physical dangers are present everywhere in the world, these threats are viscerally taxing on our bodies daily in these heightened spaces of danger like Spokane, Washington, and Bloomington, Indiana. This is what it means to be a hyper-visible yet invisible woman of color faculty in a PWI.

Universities extract labor and surplus from their racialized faculty. The “Underrepresented Minority” Postdoctoral Teaching Fellowship program at Gonzaga follows a nationwide trend strapping recent PhD graduates with teaching labor, calling their 2-2, and sometimes 2-3 appointments a “postdoc.” While the fellowship does not task postdocs with advising and service, advising and service happens anyway. The previous-run program at Gonzaga did not convert its former postdocs without pressure from organizing students.⁷ Still, there remains a postdoc who is made long-term contingent labor at the university. The installation of a new Dean of Social Justice, multiple ranks of Chief Diversity Officers, and those with minoritized identities represented in *some* upper-administrative positions feed into the

university's programming of performative allyship and a commitment to diversity. It should be made clear that there is a difference between a commitment to diversity and a commitment to racial justice: the first only requiring the representation of a minority, and the latter requiring, at the base, a redistribution of resources.

During my time at Gonzaga, I witnessed the departure of several faculty of color who shared with me that the salary accompanying the work at the university was not competitive and most certainly unsustainable. Describing the work required of us as unsustainable points to the materiality of our labor not matching what the university has materially supplied for us to do our work long-term. Since my appointment in January 2021, I witnessed the slow removal of material resources for our students, including the ending of the Act Six scholarship program which fully funded students to attend the expensive Gonzaga University. At the same time, tuition increased at the school every year at Gonzaga since I was an undergraduate student. Faculty and staff salaries have remained stagnant, about the same amount since I began my baccalaureate study in 2006. Furthermore, the university is not proactive about its diversity work, and those in administrative positions seem much less present—remaining only in meetings, not attuned to student life or the details of what it means to be faculty of color at Gonzaga. My return to Gonzaga has taught me not much has changed about the university since I was an undergraduate student there.

MAJOR QUESTIONS, CHALLENGES, AND POINTS OF CONTENTION

Comparing Resources at a PWI

Many of the problems related to our experiences at differing institutions are rooted in trying to make spaces for ourselves within these settler colonial institutions. Gonzaga only recently institutionalized Ethnic Studies after succumbing to student demands. The Critical Race and Ethnic Studies Department reached its five-year anniversary in 2023 and continues to operate on a very limited budget. The labor required to build a sustainable program is placed on the department's two faculty who are not taken seriously by their white colleagues and administration. Most recently, I learned that the only assistant professor in the Critical Race and Ethnic Studies (CRES) department decided to end their position mid-year as faculty at the university and requested to transition to a more sustainable staff position given the overload of work, mistreatment, and lack of material resources

available for them to sustain themselves and the department. At the time that I am writing this article, the CRES department there is left with one faculty member—the chair. Nonetheless, these faculty bear the invisible and uneven labor of supporting, mentoring, and advising the university’s historically underrepresented students. The lack of institutional commitment to hiring and retaining faculty of color at Gonzaga University makes it difficult for minoritized faculty to stay and endure white heteronormative institutional life.

The importance and excitement of making Ethnic Studies available in 2018 at a PWI quickly faded with the reality that the program is made unstable by the university’s lack of commitment to materially elevating the growth of the department. Limited budget makes it difficult for any programming to take place, restricting the types of events, speakers, and ceremonies possible. In addition, the number of philosophy and religion courses required for a student to graduate in the College of Arts & Sciences makes it challenging for students to take an Ethnic Studies course. Students sometimes only have room for one elective class during their four years at Gonzaga, and that elective is whatever course fits into the one free space in their schedule. As a result, this affects the department, which then struggles to reach a satisfactory quantity of “butts in seats” that would qualify the department as worthy of material investment from the College.

Interdisciplinary programs and departments at PWIs cannot stay afloat or grow without material investment from their colleges because the racial labor expected from the few faculty and staff is unsustainable. By material investment, we mean tangible items that help us sustain and develop Ethnic Studies programming. We need money for line items to help us build a sustainable program: a budget for events and speakers; a scholarly mentoring program; funding for an Ethnic Studies student association; consistent funds for a pipeline program that supports activities outside of the university (because Ethnic Studies is tied to community); more tenure-track lines with competitive salaries, benefits, and healthy research funds to support our scholarly work in addition to our service work; and so much more if we are to truly commit to a vision for Ethnic Studies. All of these items describe the bare minimum of what we consider to be a material investment. Expansion without the material to grow Ethnic Studies sets up its faculty and students for failure; some universities inevitably suspend Ethnic Studies. PWIs like Gonzaga often claim an institutional commitment to diversity, yet provide limited resources to keep a

program afloat. These interdisciplinary programs are constantly under public attack and also face institutional threats such as budget cuts. Paradoxically, the racial labor required to demand more funding and intellectually build Ethnic Studies programs requires increased work from the faculty, staff, and students already tasked with liberal projects of “diversifying” the professoriate, the curriculum, and the university. The faculty, students, and staff who hold up these programs are tasked and taxed with undoing white supremacy in the academy; the university thus exploits their labor. Ethnic Studies without a budget, properly trained faculty and teachers, and sustainable compensation for staff exploits students who often volunteer their “labor of love.” The neoliberal university agrees that these “diverse” fields should be represented, but not overwhelmingly present so as to challenge the status quo.

Comparing Resources at an HSI/AANAPISI

In comparison, CPP’s “Ethnic Studies” initiatives could be described as “well-meaning” at best. CPP’s attempts to diversify new faculty for its racially and ethnically diverse students have been deficient and harmful to the already established Ethnic and Women’s Studies department because of the lack of oversight in hiring processes. When I (MHM) was hired, eleven of the forty-four new hires were part of the “Ethnic Studies Affinity Cluster.” Another colleague and I were hired directly by the EWS department; curiously, we were not considered part of the “Ethnic Studies Affinity Cluster.” Those faculty were hired within their various home departments, and their vetting as qualified and trained Ethnic Studies teachers is questionable. Unless a search committee chair for a department has contacted an official EWS department faculty, there is no representation of qualified Ethnic Studies faculty on that committee.

While the university artificially recognizes these “Ethnic Studies Affinity Cluster” hires as Ethnic Studies faculty, they do not hold a position in the official Ethnic and Women’s Studies department, they do not attend department meetings or partake in department initiatives or voting, and they do not have a stake in expanding or managing our majors or minors. Instead, new “Ethnic Studies Affinity Cluster” hires are assigned to teach our students the newly approved “Area F” courses which are introductory Ethnic Studies courses. This means that often, the first exposure to Ethnic Studies that our students receive could potentially come from someone not from the EWS department and, most egregiously, from someone who is not trained in Ethnic

Studies histories, theories, or pedagogies. In her op-ed article, “Who Can Really Teach Ethnic Studies?” Ethnic Studies scholar Carmen R. Lugo-Lugo (2023) emphasizes the dangers of untrained faculty teaching Ethnic Studies, as doing so “. . . put[s] historically underrepresented students taking those courses at risk. It is arguably the lives of those students, their group/community histories, their histories of oppression and the inequities they experience that are undermined by such a perspective.”

Unfortunately, I became aware of this lack of training several weeks before starting my new tenure-track position in the Fall 2022 semester at the new faculty orientation. My EWS colleague and I were assigned to sit with some “Ethnic Studies Affinity Cluster” hires, and one of the new hires asked us if we knew of any books that they could teach in their assigned Ethnic Studies course. We offered a short list of books from Ethnic Studies theorists (including bell hooks, Stuart Hall, Sara Ahmed, to name a few), but we were mortified upon hearing that the individual was not familiar with these prolific authors and theorists. Because of this, at a Spring 2023 conference panel where my EWS colleagues and I presented on “Teaching Introductory Courses in Ethnic Studies” at our university’s first “Teaching Ethnic Studies in Higher Education Symposium,” I emphasized that in no other department would an untrained individual be thought of as qualified to teach a course outside their department. For example, we would not expect a language teacher to teach a biology course or vice versa. Yet, it was deemed appropriate by university standards for practically anyone to teach Ethnic Studies.

As Lugo-Lugo (2023) explains, teaching Ethnic Studies is often equated with “teaching race or teaching about race.” Lugo-Lugo further explains:

[Ethnic Studies], by contrast, is about exposing and analyzing historical and contemporary inequities with social justice as a goal, about racial representation and erasure, about colonialism, and about genocide in addition to simply teaching race and about it. Teaching ES is teaching through and with different disciplines while activating different methodological approaches. ES is a discipline in its own right, with its own complicated history and genealogy, its own body of work, epistemologies and lexicons. Conflating teaching race or teaching about race with teaching ES is not only factually erroneous, but it also encourages administrators to think that they don’t need to fund and maintain ES

departments, because, after all, people in other units can teach race and about it.

Additionally, Garcia Peña (2022, 87) writes about another misconception of Ethnic Studies that she experienced as a Harvard professor, “. . . investing in ethnic studies is the same as hiring ‘ethnic faculty.’ Therefore, if we [the university] already have ethnic faculty in other fields, we do not need to invest in ethnic studies.” The accounts of both Lugo-Lugo and Garcia Peña correlate with the standards of numerous universities that devalue Ethnic Studies, as “qualified” Ethnic Studies professionals are those who either: (1) simply mention race in their courses, or (2) are any BIPOC individual from any discipline. At CPP, the lack of oversight essentially resulted in the university’s attempt at establishing an Ethnic Studies Advisory Board (ESAB) in the Academic Senate. However, major changes have yet to be made even as of the writing of this essay, with job ads still posted with “Ethnic Studies Affinity” tags (including Plant Science, Music, Landscape Architecture, and Philosophy, to name a few).

Prior to my interview for this current position, I researched on my university and learned about the “Ethnic Studies Affinity” hires on their career website. I was excited to learn that the university was taking a bold initiative to integrate Ethnic Studies into different departments and into the university campus as a whole. This initiative reminded me so much of the pursuit to establish the first College of Ethnic Studies at SFSU and its positive cultural impacts on the campus environment and student life. I relayed this excitement in my interview. However, when I began my position, I quickly learned how the tag created a deficit for the official EWS department. While there were “Ethnic Studies Affinity Cluster” hires in various departments who taught introductory Ethnic Studies courses (often for their full 3-3 teaching load), no funds were directed to the official EWS department. This meant that outside departments stood to financially gain from the “Ethnic Studies” tag while the EWS department suffered.

At the “Campus Meeting on CPP’s Annual Budget for Fiscal Year 2021–2022,” the “Permanent Support for Ethnic Studies Requirement” was presented and discussed by attendees. A recurring \$812,000 of funding from the California State University system was received by CPP to meet AB 1460’s Ethnic Studies requirements. The funding would be allocated to hiring permanent tenure-track faculty to teach Area F: Ethnic Studies courses and support the hire of the first Ethnic Studies Affinity Cluster in addition to support services for these faculty.

At the time, there was no official wording of an acknowledgment or discussion of the allocation of funds directed to the EWS department where these Ethnic Studies courses would be placed. As a result of this lack of oversight, major consequences that occurred in my first year of teaching in the EWS department have not just been financial but included the lack of support and expansion in developing EWS, recruiting new majors and minors, supporting our current students, and low enrollment in upper-division courses. The EWS department voiced our concerns to university administrators, and minor attempts to correct these issues have been discussed but no permanent fixes have been established.

COMPARING CLASSROOM EXPERIENCES

Gonzaga University

Ethnic Studies is a lifeline for the few students of color at Gonzaga. The students relate to me (GDC) because I am an alum and familiar with the dynamics of the university and student life. The white students who take my classes also value them. Many students let me know that they have never taken a class like this before, that this class changed their life, that they want to minor in Ethnic Studies, and that the university needs to support this program.

Part of my work in the classroom is ensuring that the students are aware of the liberal trap of inclusion. By liberal trap of inclusion, I mean the alluring offer of entry into and access to a white institution. The liberal trap of inclusion keeps historically underserved populations stuck in an endless cycle. It attracts those who desire integration, who want to be a part of that which historically excludes. Its trappings do not change or challenge the system that operates by including only a few and excluding many others. It is within this logic that Ethnic Studies can collapse into multicultural studies, that diversity and representation stand in for racial justice, and that the material present remains unchanged. For me, the liberal trap of inclusion was at play with my desire to be a part of the professoriate at my predominantly white alma mater, yet knowing that I would be minoritized at the university.

It saddled me between knowing the importance of my return to Gonzaga to support undergraduate students, who shared my experience as a first-generation student of color, and knowing that the university would also strap me with labor to support these students. I knew that the postdoctoral position would also celebrate my “minority” and alumni identity. The liberal trap of inclusion also operated at

the hiring level for me when the university converted my postdoctoral position to tenure-track yet did not offer a fair or competitive salary to set me up as an “underrepresented minority” scholar. The highly coveted tenure-track position dangled in my face as I considered whether taking the position would cost me mentally, physically, and financially. I realized that these trappings always cost us. These trappings—the desire to be included, the desire to be represented and to represent for those who are consistently underrepresented—are the ways that the university is able to capitalize on the racial labor of students, faculty, staff, and administrators in the historically white university.

While much of the diversity work on campus is seductive in a predominantly white setting like Gonzaga, I try to teach my students to think critically about their involvements and racial labor within the institution. For example, many of my students are consumed by the annual festivals hosted by the varying cultural clubs. The festivals consume racialized student life as they work hard, laboring through many nights, curating a performance based on a racial or cultural identity. While the university benefits from their performance of race on campus, displaying diversity in its many forms, the students in my classes and these cultural clubs are conflicted about how to allocate their time. They figure that the cultural clubs bear a strong social presence on campus—and, in fact, they do the informal retention work unrecognized by the university—and find it sometimes more important to serve their fellow peers, performing race on campus, than completing work for some of our classes.

While this is not the case for all of my students involved in the cultural clubs, there is a significant number of students who have chosen to dedicate their energy and time to supporting the cultural clubs—which they understand as lifelines for racialized student life in the white university—even at the expense of their academic performance in school. This is a significant example of the liberal trap of inclusion for my students who feel a sense of belonging in these cultural clubs but ultimately perform and participate in the circus of diversity efforts that capitalizes on their racial labor. This cycle maintains the institution as is while the students willingly give their racial labor for the sake of being represented and wanting to create spaces of belonging. Students do exorbitant amounts of work for little to no compensation, and oftentimes their diversity work affects their academic performance—a cost they see as worthy for their greater collective.

Cal Poly Pomona

Conversely, in my (MHM) experience, students at CPP—who are predominantly students of color and first-generation college students—are hyper-focused on their academic performance and majors, to the extent that they begrudgingly enroll in my courses because it is a General Education requirement and because they believe the course will be easy. Universities mischaracterize Ethnic Studies as simply “teaching race or teaching about race,” and so, many students who enter my classroom make this same mistake. Offerings of Ethnic Studies courses at the high school level have only recently been approved by a few school districts and made available in the K-12 curriculum (Elattar, 2020). Understandably, the majority of students who enroll in my introductory Ethnic Studies courses have never taken an Ethnic Studies course. They do not know what Ethnic Studies is. They may even confuse “Ethnic Studies” with the study of “ethics.” Often, they equate ethnicity with race. Or they assume that the highlight of “ethnic” or “Asian American” in the course titles means that my course simply focuses on an appreciation of various ethnic cultures, particularly food and films. Instead, they are surprised to learn my courses examine and analyze power structures that inhibit BIPOC communities, often their own, and how these communities challenge and fight against these structures. I emphasize this point on the very first day of class and throughout the semester.

By the end of each semester, I ask students if they are interested in pursuing an EWS major or minor. While students often enjoy my classes and the course content, they voice that they are not able to switch to an EWS major or minor because it just does not fit within their STEM major. Understandably, as there are many first-generation college students who may struggle financially, a major focus for them is to graduate and obtain a career with their STEM major and secure financial stability for their families. EWS constitutes a gray area where students may enjoy the courses but do not see the monetary value in pursuing the major. Arguably, part of this belief comes from the lack of funding that we receive as a department. While we have an established EWS department, there is a lack of visibility as we scrape to hire new faculty within our department, bring in guest speakers, support year-long student events, and publicize and market to prospective majors and minors. As such, because many CPP students primarily major in the STEM fields, it is likely that the majority of my students will not pursue an EWS major or minor and that their first Ethnic Studies course may be the only one

that they take in their college career. For some students, they may leave their only Ethnic Studies course without the appropriate knowledge that it should bring because their assigned professor is untrained within the discipline. Sadly, they will miss out on a discipline that has uplifted and changed the lives of so many students before them.

While Ethnic Studies may be present on our campuses, our beloved discipline serves different purposes for different universities and different student populations. Unfortunately, these purposes and their outcomes will not always align with our own visions or values. It is difficult to accept the incongruity of a university that lauds for the future of Ethnic Studies but does not necessarily support the Ethnic Studies department. The repercussions of superficial support for what the university qualifies as Ethnic Studies are not only detrimental to the success of our program, but to our students as well. Our program suffers as we struggle to keep all of our courses enrolled and fight for the presence of Ethnic Studies on campuses in opposing political landscapes that may attempt to either dismantle Ethnic Studies or invite Ethnic Studies, but only by means of fulfilling colonizing DEI and multicultural standards. The constant push and pull between these two polarizing landscapes add to the racial labor and impacts our bodyminds, as we are expected to constantly perform based on the university's political leanings. Our departments and our colleagues are in a constant fight or flight mode as we fight for the rights of Ethnic Studies. How are we ever supposed to feel comfortable at our universities and achieve "work-life balance" when we are not able to ever sit still?

CONCLUSION: RESOURCES, SUGGESTIONS, AND PERMISSIONS FOR NEW FACULTY OF COLOR

As scholar-activist Angela Davis (2016, 61) proclaims, "Freedom is a constant struggle," so too is life in academia. There are too few Ethnic Studies tenure-track positions available, and obtaining any teaching position feels like we "won the lottery" by landing our "dream jobs." We are sometimes blindly grateful for the prestigious opportunity to teach and research in the field that we love. However, we must also remember that the university is a business, and as such, we are viewed as commodities and are disposable in this environment. We must fight to humanize ourselves. As we reflect on our own experiences, we share resources and suggestions to new faculty of color that have made us feel whole in our different universities in our first year as first-generation women of color faculty. In addition, we acknowledge

that oppressed peoples, like ourselves, are often hardest on themselves, forgetting their own needs, and because of this, we offer permission for new faculty of color room to breathe and room for grace.

1. We must trust ourselves. We are not imposters; we are trained experts in our fields. As early as undergraduate students, and throughout our college careers, we questioned our ability and merit at our numerous alma maters. We should no longer question our own abilities. Even when it is hard, we must remember that institutionalized racism, patriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism have made us view ourselves as inferior. We should believe in ourselves as much as we believe in our students' abilities.
2. We learned early on that the foundation of Ethnic Studies was resistance, and that resistance must come from a collective. We urge new faculty like ourselves to find community within and outside their various institutions. When inevitably faced with adversity at the university, we leaned on our colleagues for support and nourishment. We cannot and must not fight alone. Beyond the infinite racial and gendered labor that is required of us through countless hours of acts of service while maintaining a hefty research agenda, and while meeting impeccable teaching standards in an undervalued field, we must also make time for rest, recovery, and nourishment. We must make time for the people we care about. We must make time for people who we have shared values with who will fight with us. We must make time for life outside of work so that it does not consume us. Ethnic Studies teaches the humanization of dehumanized peoples, and it is only fitting that we fulfill this vision through our own individual and collective acts of agency. Together, we call out and challenge multiculturalist, reductionist, and racist attacks that are unavoidable at the university.
3. We must not water down Ethnic Studies and must stay grounded in a critical pedagogy that brought us to Ethnic Studies in the first place. We fell in love with Ethnic Studies because of its passion and rebellion. We must remind ourselves that there will always be a fight. This is what we signed up for, this is what we believed in, and this is what we will continue to teach. While some students and university administrations may misconstrue Ethnic Studies as simply an appreciation of ethnic cultures, and some pundits may demonize it, we continue to educate about the foundation of Ethnic Studies while remaining flexible about its evolution.

Ethnic Studies examines the historical and contemporary marginalization and exploitation of BIPOC communities. However, we are not victims. We do not measure our varying lived experiences through an “Oppression Olympics.” We recognize the complexities of our lived experiences. While we expose these oppressions, we also recognize our own varied privileges. For example, specifically in Asian American Studies courses, we highlight the diversity of Asian American communities and their experiences. As Southeast Asian American (SEA) women teaching Asian American Studies, we experience a lack of visibility of our community’s issues within the larger Asian American frameworks that have historically emphasized East Asian experiences. Because of this, we recognize the privileges and disadvantages that we face as SEA women contingent on the space we enter. We carry this acknowledgement in our courses where we address anti-Blackness and Asian settler colonialism within our own Asian American communities. If we only speak on anti-Asian hate and disregard violence against Black and Indigenous peoples, we commit an injustice against the marginalized communities we serve to fight for. We must also not accept the urge to keep Ethnic Studies in its 1960s traditionalist frameworks, which often diminished or erased the activism of women of color and queer peoples. Ethnic Studies is intersectional, and should be recognized as such.

Pedagogically, others before us have taught us that our places in these spaces were never just given to us; they were always demanded by the organizers who set up a path and model for us to build upon. It is with the legacy of the 1960s student demands that we live out the spirit of the Third World Liberation Front, fighting for our lives and our futures. A quote from one young student fighting for Ethnic Studies rings in our ears. Luz Simon Jasso made clear that “Ethnic Studies is how we place ourselves into the future” in her declaration to a room full of students and teachers (Cunanan, 2021, 179). This statement echoes in our lives and represents our continued struggle in the fights for Ethnic Studies. We commit to always demanding and ensuring our place in the future.

We recognize that policies and initiatives like AB 1460, Gonzaga University’s “Underrepresented Minority” Postdoctoral Teaching Fellows, and Cal Poly Pomona’s “Ethnic Studies Affinity Cluster” hires aim to support Ethnic Studies initiatives. We welcome these initiatives as we and so many others before us have fought for this future to arrive. However, we urge others to not turn a blind eye to the

challenges that are (re)produced through the white supremacist and capitalist conditions that many universities tend to uphold. As Lugo-Lugo and Garcia Peña address, simply mentioning race in a course or being part of a minoritized race does not qualify as Ethnic Studies. In addition, offering a sliver of monetary support for our programs does not constitute a “fair share.” These attempts dilute the foundation and mission of Ethnic Studies and should be more suitably recognized as DEI. To avoid or revise such issues, and for these initiatives and policies to become Ethnic Studies, they must consider voices and leadership from qualified Ethnic Studies scholars and practitioners. This must be an ongoing process to ensure that Ethnic Studies thrives. In order for us to do our jobs well, our programs and departments should come with the material resources and line-item budgets necessary for us to build a sustainable, life-giving department. Recognizing the importance of our work must go beyond ensuring that such critical interdisciplinary programs exist. Our departments and programs should not just survive; instead, they should be invested in and set up to thrive. This is how universities can demonstrate an institutional commitment to “diversity” and “anti-racism.” We are hopeful that our respective universities can become the “ideal universit[ies]” that we experienced as graduate students, and what we envisioned Ethnic Studies to be as new faculty in the field.

NOTES

1. Here, we argue that the “ideal university” is something that we experienced at the time. The alignment of our cohort, our classes, the political contexts within which we took Ethnic Studies classes contributed to a dynamism and fervor that was special for only that time that we were students at San Francisco State University. In our Ph.D. programs, we did not have the same experiences that we had while in our M.A. program.
2. MHM attended the University of La Verne as an undergraduate student. GDC attended Gonzaga University as an undergraduate student.
3. MHM attended University of Hawai’i at Mānoa and GDC attended Indiana University. American Studies, for us, was the closest field to Ethnic Studies. There are few Ethnic Studies PhD programs and no Asian American Studies PhD programs in the United States.
4. MHM teaches at Cal Poly Pomona. GDC taught at Gonzaga University.
5. Five percent of students reported their background as unknown and three percent reported themselves to be nonresident aliens according to the school’s 2021 institutional research data.

6. Gonzaga's marketing department created the term "Zag Nation" to identify Gonzaga alumni and community members around the world imagined to proudly be affiliated with Gonzaga University.
7. Only one faculty was converted due to pressure from organizing students.

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