

THE INFLUENCE OF ETHNIC STUDIES ON STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND
ENGAGEMENT
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Abstract

This paper explores the value of ethnic studies courses and courses that emphasize diversity in their curriculum and pedagogical practices. Existing research regarding the worth of these courses are supplemented by narratives that have been acquired through interviewing students who have completed either courses offered by the Mexican American Studies program at Tucson Magnet High School or courses offered by the University of Arizona that fulfill the Diversity Emphasis requirement. Ethnic studies and courses that have a similar focus on people of color as producers of knowledge have been found to be effective tools in engaging with "at-risk" students and increasing attendance rates. The students interviewed attest to the effect these courses had on their educational experience and how they were positively influenced by the topics and concepts presented in their courses.

"As students of color proceed through the school system, research finds that the overwhelming dominance of Euro-American perspectives leads many such students to disengage from academic learning" (Sleeter vii).

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to establish a set of narratives that will either confirm or contradict already existing research in regards to students' experiences with ethnic studies programs. Subjects have been asked to share information regarding what was studied in their courses and their own feelings regarding the material and how it affected their engagement in the course. Though much has been written about pedagogy attuned to racial diversity, this project seeks to focus on the experiences of the students themselves and the influence of the literature they engaged within these classes and the pedagogy that was implemented in order to determine what sets these courses apart from their mainstream counterparts. In addition to examining the research already done on the subject of diversity in education and its effects on students, I also use these interviews to add the perspective of actual students as a lens. I have interviewed students currently enrolled at the University of Arizona as well as alumni of TUSD's Mexican American Studies (MAS) program in order to learn more about their experiences in their courses. This paper works to effectively demonstrate the dire need for representation of people of color in the content and creation of literature taught in academic settings, including how this literature positively impacts students who belong to marginalized racial groups.

This paper will explore the ways in which instruction differs in courses that emphasize diversity and its effects on students' experiences in the classroom. A recent study conducted by Stanford University supports the claim that ethnic studies courses positively influences the

academic experiences of students of color, making them more likely to succeed (Dee & Penner). This study, "The Causal Effects of Cultural Relevance: Evidence from an Ethnic Studies Curriculum," demonstrates how an ethnic studies program was utilized to increase academic performance, as well as attendance, amongst ninth graders in multiple San Francisco high schools. This is not the first study to look at the impact that ethnic studies courses can have on students.

In 2012, Willis D. Hawley did an empirical study of the MAS program in TUSD for his PhD dissertation for the University of Arizona. His focus was on the relationship between taking MAS courses and educational performance as well as whether or not these relationships were consistent for different cohorts of students throughout the years (Hawley). Hawley found that MAS classes had no adverse effects on students. Rather, he found a significant correlation between enrolling in MAS classes and passing AIMS, as well as graduating. Furthermore, "these results suggest that there is a consistent, significant, positive relationship between MAS participation and student academic performance" (Hawley 7). While some of his data was inconclusive in regards to establishing a concrete connection between MAS courses and attending higher education (as data was incomplete), interviewing participants who were enrolled in these courses might provide a personal narrative that may affirm or refute Hawley's findings.

Ethnic studies programs in general have been considered valuable to education. *Regents of the University of California vs. Bakke* (1978) was a landmark case in regards to affirmative action and the use of race in admissions decisions. In regards to diversity in education, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell stated that a diverse student population that reflected the diversity of the United States was essential to the atmosphere of learning and quality of higher education. "Since the *Bakke* decision, the educational benefits of diversity... have provided the

primary justification for affirmative action at selective institutions across the country" (Gurin 331). Diversity within education can take many forms. It can happen in structural ways, such as in the form of a diverse student body. This might allow space for students to interact with diversity, but doesn't necessarily ensure it. In addition to a diverse student body, ethnic studies courses (as well as courses that emphasize the value of the knowledge produced by people of color) and the materials used would better ensure that students are interacting with diversity. This "form of diversity experience includes learning about diverse people (content knowledge) and gaining experience with diverse peers in the classroom, or what we term *classroom diversity*" (Gurin 333). The purpose of this study is to look at the personal side of diversity in education and ethnic studies courses. Participants will be asked about their interactions with diverse materials and how those interactions have affected their educational experience.

In the article, "Diversity and higher education: Theory and impact on educational outcomes", Gurin states that these interactions are crucial to a student's development of their own identity. Encountering diversity within their education is vital "lest young people passively make commitments based on their past experiences, rather than actively think and make decisions informed by new and more complex perspectives and relationships" (Gurin 334). This study will garner anecdotal evidence as to how ethnic studies and diverse courses have shaped student's identities and their relationship to education.

The part that is played by ethnic studies courses and courses that emphasize diversity has been discussed at length in regards to its effects on students of color. Tucson Unified School District requires that these ethnic studies programs remain in place in order to counteract the racial segregation that caused the district to fall under scrutiny at the end of the 1960s. TUSD is currently under a desegregation order as a result of a lawsuit that began in 1974.

In May 1974, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (“NAACP”) sued the Tucson Unified School District No. 1 on behalf of the African American students in the District, charging the District with segregating and otherwise discriminating against its African American students (“Fisher Plaintiffs”). In October 1974, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (“MALDEF”) filed a later-consolidated lawsuit containing similar allegations on behalf of Mexican American students (United States District Court 5).

This case was settled with the creation of the Unitary Status Plan, a desegregation plan that was filed on August 31, 1978. This document defines a "racially concentrated school" as one whose student body is composed of an amount equal to or exceeding 70% of one racial or ethnic group, *or* as one that is "defined as such by the Special Master in consultation with the Parties" (United States District Court 8). The plan specifically outlines how the district was supposed to rectify the imbalance in the ratio of students who made up the student body, such as creating culturally relevant programs like Mexican American Studies.

The Ethnic Studies Department was created in 1997 in order to ensure curriculum reflecting the student population served by TUSD. The department developed classes in MAS African American Studies, Native American Studies, and Pan Asian Studies. The MAS program first became scrutinized after Dolores Huerta gave a speech at Tucson High in 2007 where she stated that, "Republicans hate Latinos". This immediately gained attention and earned a response from Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tom Horne.

House Bill 2281 was written by Tom Horne with the specific intention of shutting down the MAS program in TUSD, "The bill was written to target the Chicano, or Mexican American,

studies program in the Tucson school system, said state Supt. of Public Instruction Tom Horne" (Santa Cruz). His was signed into law by Governor Jan Brewer on May 11, 2010. The bill includes two sections: the first outlines criteria for a course or program to qualify as being in violation of the bill; the second, discusses student disciplinary procedure (which appears to illustrate the backlash that was anticipated in response to the bill). The following criteria were what Horne used to find Tucson Unified School District in violation of HB2281:

1. PROMOTE THE OVERTHROW OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT.
2. PROMOTE RESENTMENT TOWARD A RACE OR CLASS OF PEOPLE.
3. ARE DESIGNED PRIMARILY FOR PUPILS OF A PARTICULAR ETHNIC GROUP.
4. ADVOCATE ETHNIC SOLIDARITY INSTEAD OF THE TREATMENT OF PUPILS AS INDIVIDUALS (HB2281)

This language can be used as a scare tactic to instill fear in those not familiar with the curriculum taught in the MAS classes. Within the nationalist context of the United States, suggesting that the program encourages the overthrow of the government might elicit an aggressive response.

Implying that the program promotes resentment towards a certain race or class of people (presumably white and/or people of a high socioeconomic status), might cause privileged people to become defensive. Why allow students to be taught that *they* are an enemy, or a threat. TUSD was found in violation of HB2281 in January of 2011. John Huppenthal, who served as Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction from 2011 to 2015, ordered an audit of the MAS classes as part of his own campaign in order to support the decision. However, the 2011 audit actually contradicted the claims of Huppenthal and Horne and the results were then ignored. While in

violation of HB221, school officials were under pressure due to 10% of their budget being held hostage by the state government. While supporters were quick to defend the program that had raised AIMS scores and graduation rates, there were others who supported Huppenthal and Horne's campaign to "Stop la Raza," the platform from which he ran in the 2010 state election. This phrase arose in an ad for his campaign that also highlighted his decision to vote against bilingual education while serving in the state senate.

Horne specifically mentions in HB2281 a few provisions that would allow certain programs, courses, and course curriculum to be exempt from the bill. Below is an example:

F. NOTHING IN THIS SECTION SHALL BE CONSTRUED TO RESTRICT OR PROHIBIT THE INSTRUCTION OF THE HOLOCAUST, ANY OTHER INSTANCE OF GENOCIDE, OR THE HISTORICAL OPPRESSION OF A PARTICULAR GROUP OF PEOPLE BASED ON ETHNICITY, RACE, OR CLASS (HB2281)

Supposedly this does not exempt Raza Studies, despite the program's attention to racial oppression in the United States in regards to Mexican Americans. Horne himself states that schools should not teach students that they are oppressed. This can be taken to mean that he believes that racialized oppression in regards to Mexican Americans no longer exists.

In the same city where a K-12 program dedicated to serving students of color and providing an alternative to Eurocentric history and literature came under attack, the University of Arizona requires all undergraduate students to take a Diversity Emphasis course. A diversity emphasis course is any course that incorporates the use of gender, race, class, and/or ethnicity into course material, or as an analytical framework. A course can also qualify as a diversity emphasis course if it focuses on a non-western civilization. The effectiveness of these courses for

students and their experiences are explored in the narratives collected through interviews with University of Arizona students who have completed their diversity emphasis requirement, compared with the anecdotal evidence gathered regarding the MAS courses implemented in TUSD. The questions used to guide the interviews for MAS students and Diversity Emphasis students can be found in Appendix A and B respectively. These questions were designed to promote thoughtful answers that would shed light on how the students came to enroll in the course(s), what topics were covered, and what was particularly memorable for the student.

Mexican American Studies

In 2013, the TUSD Mexican American Studies program was replaced with “Culturally Relevant Curriculum.” The district is required to offer some form of culturally relevant courses due to the desegregation order that is still in place.

Andre Rocha is a sophomore at the University of Arizona earning a Bachelor's degree in Retail and Consumer Sciences with minors in Photography and Fashion. He is twenty one years old and attended Tucson Magnet High School, from 2008 to 2012. He was enrolled in Mexican American studies courses for his sophomore and junior years. His brother, Gabriel Rocha, was also involved in the MAS program, initially taking it in his junior year of high school. Gabriel is twenty three years old and earned credits at both the University of Arizona and Pima Community College. The brothers grew up in Southwest Tucson and attended school in TUSD for their K-12 education. Both Andre and Gabriel identify as Hispanic males. I interviewed Andre at the UA's Women's Resource Center, where he works as a graphic designer. We had discussed the Mexican American Studies courses in the past and he agreed to be a part of the study. He then referred me to his brother, Gabriel, who was unavailable to be interviewed in person. He agreed to answer the predetermined questions by email.

Andre first enrolled in an MAS course his junior year because he was interested in exploring classes that went beyond the mainstream curriculum. He took two classes, taught by Ismael Arce and Curtis Acosta respectively. Acosta helped design the program and became a prominent figure in the protests against HB2281. One of the classes that Andre discussed was the Chicano Studies course that functioned in place of the mainstream history class. When asked to describe what kind of content was covered in the course and what about it was memorable for him, he stated:

We also just learned a lot about like the 1960s eras with the high school walkouts and like inequality within the school systems and we kind of just went up the time line with like the history of our culture and how the Spanish, came first and then we got our independence from them, and then the U.S. kind of like came into play, and then the U.S. Mexican War. . . it was pre-colonial, and then Spanish contact, and then we went into like the U.S.-Mexico dispute, and then we finished off with like the whole Cesar Chavez movement and the Chicano movement of the 1960s. (A. Rocha)

He said that this course offered a new perspective on history that he hadn't encountered before taking this class. He enjoyed that it was taught from a Mexican American lens and that it went beyond the mainstream, European settler narrative. The pre-colonial aspect of the course—learning about indigenous peoples before European contact—is one that he believes is lacking in other history courses.

When asked why he chose to enroll in the MAS classes, Gabriel states, "I joined the Raza studies my junior year in high school. Many of my close friends were interested in the program and being of Hispanic roots, I thought it would be an interesting class" (G. Rocha). Gabriel took

two courses that he referred to as "Chicano Studies" and "Chicano Literature". "Latino Literature was offered as a alternate requirement for Junior English. I also took Chicano Studies, which fulfilled my American History requirement my Junior year as well" (G. Rocha).

Gabriel was heavily influenced by his experiences in his Latino Literature class. He recalled a few of the authors that stood out the most to him, such as Junot Díaz, Ana Castillo, Luis J. Rodriguez, and Sherman Alexie. He learned skills such as rhetorical analysis through analyzing various kinds of texts, from President Obama's speeches to 2Pac's lyrics. He also learned to analyze short stories. He stated that the short stories were significant to him because they "[detailed] the struggle of youth of color." He identified with these stories and they resonated with him because they reflected his own experiences. "The class was deeply personal for me. I was able to relate to many of the readings in one way or another. The persecution and prejudice displayed in the short stories, novels and poems, still very much alive today. Being marginalized, as a Hispanic male, I was able to relate with a lot of stories "(G. Rocha).

Gabriel felt that the material was relevant to contemporary society, as well as to his own life. This provided an additional level of significance to the course and the various pieces of literature that he encountered while in the course. This perceived relevance is crucial to student engagement and was one of the biggest selling points of the program when it was being promoted. It has been shown that when students are more invested in the subject of the course, they will perform better academically. When asked what was covered in the course, Gabriel stated:

In my Latino Lit. Class we covered a wide variety of Chicano/a authors from the 60's and upward. It was however not limited to Chicano/a authors. We studied some African American, Native American and White authors in conjunction. We

also analyzed various types and forms of media, such as poetry, short stories, hip-hop/rap, *campesino*, and all manners of storytelling. While it was very different from previous English classes, it retained a high level of curriculum and expectations (G. Rocha).

While the material wasn't particularly memorable for Andre, as he had trouble recalling specific details about the class from so many years ago, he does distinctly remember the atmosphere of the classroom. The classroom was a space where everyone was welcome and encouraged to participate. He states that "In Lak' Ech" was a idea that was very prominent in the way the students were treated and the class was conducted.

I think what always stuck with me was that "In Lak' Ech," having that respect and that feeling of unity, that was another thing they emphasized too, was being united and being one and respecting each other, so. . . that's one of the things that's stuck with me throughout the years, for sure (A. Rocha).

In Lak' Ech was also something that stuck with Maria Teresa Mejia, a senior at the University of Arizona who took MAS courses her junior year of high school. She was enrolled in the courses her senior year when they became banned. She also took Chicano Literature with Curtis Acosta and describes the course as being inspiring: "It was in this class where I learned In Lak' Ech, and the four tezcacatlipocas. These concepts changed me as a human and helped me gain a relationship with my father" (Mejia). Further explanation of the concepts, In Lak' Ech and the four tezcacatlipocas, can be found in Appendix C.

Andre also speaks very fondly of pedagogical practices used in the classroom, such as a "unity clap," that created a feeling of comradery and empathy with one another. He states that In Lak' Ech was emphasized heavily in the classroom and has continued to influence the way he

interacts with others, in and out of the classroom. This sense of unity extended to all students in the classroom, not just those who were racially or ethnically identified with the core themes of the class. If true, this would directly dispute Horne's argument that the MAS program advocates for racial solidarity and resentment towards other races. Andre states that while most of the class was composed of Latina/o students, students of other races were just as engaged. He believes that they never felt excluded in the classroom.

They wanted to learn, they were there to learn about the culture and learn more about history from a different perspective other than the U.S. perspective. And so, they really made that clear by participating and engaging and like not being so arrogant to other ideas. So they were very open-minded (A. Rocha).

It is interesting to note, though, that Andre refers to one of the subjects of the course as "our culture," when he said "we kind of just went up the time line with like the history of our culture and how the Spanish, you know, came first and then we got our independence from them, and then the U.S. kind of like came into play, and then the U.S. Mexican War" (A. Rocha). This is interesting due to the fact that the course is available to all students, regardless of racial and ethnic background. This may be due to the large number of Latina/o students who made up the class, and their identification with the perspective from which the material was taught. If this had any effect on the other students in the class, Andre did not notice it.

Andre identified with different topics in the course more than others. The discussion of the walkout in Los Angeles high schools in the 1960s interested him greatly due to the fact that he witnessed his first walkout while in eighth grade while at Pistor Middle School. He says he did not participate at the time, but it was a memorable experience.

I didn't participate in it, but I remember being in school and the school basically going crazy because students were walking out and that was when it all started. It calmed down my freshman and sophomore year of high school, but then it came back up junior and senior year as a bigger issue. . . it just reminds me of the whole like 1960s high school walkouts that took place in California (A. Rocha)

He is referring to passing of HB2281 and the banning of the MAS program at Tucson High when he states that the issue returned during his junior and senior years of high school. When he talks about the banning of MAS, he states that it was an eye-opening moment for him in regards to how he viewed education. While he believes that the courses themselves were informative and important to him, the actual banning of the program is what he felt had the biggest effect on him and his relationship to education.

When the MAS program was removed from TUSD and replaced with the Culturally Relevant Courses, Andre saw the educational system in a new light. "That's when I saw how institutionalized like our school systems are, [how] the whole system is" (A. Roche). This experience caused Andre to become more critical of, and skeptical about, the educational system. "I think a lot of it too is... In a way, controlling, they don't want us to know too much. It's kind of just like, it made me like keep an eye on educators, the people who educate me now" (A. Roche). While one might argue that skepticism is a useful tool in regards to keeping the educational system in check, others might be concerned that schools are being managed in a way that causes students to become distrustful. Education is often promoted as an equalizing force when one is born underprivileged, but if a student doesn't feel safe or valued in education, how are they expected to achieve?

Maria Teresa had a similar experience where she felt disillusioned by the educational system. She encountered barriers when attending University High School (UHS), an accelerated high school that is also located in TUSD. She believes those barriers influenced her decision to take MAS courses after transferring to Tucson High School. "A huge part of this was my experience at UHS. At UHS, I was being pushed out of the education system. I had teachers who were refusing to help me" (Mejia). The environment at University High School wasn't conducive for a student of color to succeed, according to Maria Teresa. Her peers engaged in racist rhetoric by repeating negative stereotypes, making it difficult for her to learn. "Kids around me would say how Mexicans could not read or write and I began to internalize what they were saying. MAS was being offered as a course to help me academically and socially succeed in a society that is dehumanizing brown students" (Mejia). This concern regarding marginalization within education echoes Gabriel's feelings. He felt particularly engaged in the literature that reflected his own experiences with racism. These experiences are all too common and aren't taken into consideration enough when programs like MAS are placed under scrutiny.

Maria Teresa's belief that she was internalizing the negative comments that constantly surrounded her demonstrates a real concern that one might have for a student of color, due to the fact that a student of color can develop feelings of isolation in predominantly white spaces. Maria Teresa states that, during her time at University High School, "I began to believe that I was not worth anything. I thought that school was a waste of time since I would never succeed. . . [A teacher] criticized me about the foods I ate, never said my name and was ignor[ing] me" (Mejia). This teacher also singled Maria Teresa out in front of her peers and criticized her writing abilities. "I even had one teacher tell me in front of the entire class that my writing was awful and I wrote the way that I talked" (Mejia). The criticism of Maria Teresa's made her feel

inadequate in her writing abilities, in addition to the embarrassment of being publicly humiliated. The teacher also chose to critique Maria Teresa's speaking abilities at the same time, a practice used frequently against people of color in order to devalue their intellectual worth. Teachers who are ill-equipped to work with students of color can cause lasting harm to the student's perception of themselves. This marginalization in the educational system encourages students to disengage from learning. The MAS program offered a way for these marginalized students to feel valued and for their experiences to be validated and reflected in the materials that they read. Students who do not encounter materials that reflect their lived experiences and identities internalize the idea that their lived experiences and identities aren't valuable.

The MAS program was the only one that was banned after the passing of HB2281, despite the fact that there were other ethnic studies programs in place at Tucson High. Andre felt that the program was targeted because some critics believed that MAS students were being "radicalized as opposed to being educated."

[Tom Horne] was saying that they're just like making protesters and out of that class and everything in like, I don't know...It was never like that though, they never taught us to just protest and protest or whatever, be like those kind of people. All they wanted to do, all they were doing was educating us. And I thought they [MAS teachers] were probably one of the best educators, best classes too and so it was just frustrating (A. Rocha).

When asked about what made MAS teachers "the best educators," Andre answered that it was their passion and that it was infectious: "you could just feed off of their passion and it got to your spirit." He believes that the teachers were what made the classes great, as he made the observation that teaching an interesting topic will only get students so interested, but passion is

what will fully engage students. He said that the passion that the students had internalized is what drove the backlash against the banning of the program. Considering the reactions of the students to HB2281, such as organized protest and actions such as students chaining themselves to the chairs at a TUSD Board meeting, "passionate" seems to be an accurate assessment. Andre stated that, "you can't take that [passion] away," despite the removal of the courses.

Andre states that he didn't enroll in the Culturally Relevant Courses that took the place of MAS because he felt discouraged by the banning. "It was almost like the whole atmosphere was like we got the wind kicked out of us or something like that. It was almost like we were all just shocked at what had happened, we couldn't really believe it" (A. Rocha). He said that because they felt the MAS program had been singled out, it had felt insulting. "...African American studies wasn't banned. Or any of the other cultures, it was just like the Hispanic, Chicano studies that was mainly banned. So it was just frustrating" (A. Rocha). This feeling of being targeted exacerbated the feelings of mistrust and frustration among the students. They felt that the courses were important to them and had strengthened their relationship to their education. Maria Teresa feels that she was always passionate about education, but it was while in the MAS program that she felt confident in her abilities.

It wasn't until the MAS courses where I found my identity from critically examining who I am. I found out that I am actually intellectual warrior, who has endured constant dehumanization in the education system. My way of fighting back was to organize walkouts, sit ins and protests in order to keep the MAS courses. After we lost the classes I continued my work by presenting at conferences, getting a job where I work for the *new* MAS departments. I also was published in a book about my work with MAS. This courses opened doors for me

and I continue to fight for education and to help high risk students get the information and resources they need to succeed (Mejia).

The passion for the MAS courses was never lost, but rather channeled into other efforts to help other students like herself who may feel marginalized in the educational system. She currently works in the Culturally Relevant Curriculum classes at Pueblo High School, where her older sister teaches the CRC History courses.

Gabriel was also moved by the program beyond his high school education. He discussed how the MAS courses are most likely the reason he went onto to pursue higher education.

I would go as far as saying that without, those classes I would not have gone on to college. It definitely prepared me for the rigors of college work and prepared me for the expectations of higher level and critical thinking. The class had me writing at well beyond the college level, when I previously felt English was my weakest subject. (G. Rocha)

Gabriel's belief that he went to college because of these classes attests to their effectiveness as tools for engaging with students and supporting them in their education. College preparedness is one of the priorities of most high schools. Gabriel's feelings of preparedness, and his own current academic pursuits, could be considered evidence of the program's effectiveness at achieving these goals. While pursuing higher education is typically considered an achievement in and of itself, it is important to note the critical thinking skills that Gabriel felt he learned in these courses that prepared him for a future in college. These, themselves, should be considered valuable.

Diversity Emphasis Courses

The University of Arizona requires that all undergraduate students fulfill a diversity emphasis course requirement in order to graduate. Any course, whether a general education course or a course within one's major or minor, can fulfill this requirement as long as it follows the conditions created by the University. Originally referred to as "Gender, Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Cultures" courses, the guidelines for what qualifies as a diversity emphasis course are divided into two categories. The first is the gender, race, class, and ethnicity requirement and the guidelines:

A course proposed to meet the gender, race, class and ethnicity requirement must involve at least two, and should, whenever possible, involve all three, of the following:

1. Explicit representation of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race or social class in course material
2. The systematic use of gender, sexual orientation, social class, race or ethnicity as analytical categories
3. A substantial quantity of materials written or interpreted by members of the targeted group or groups ("Diversity Emphasis Requirement")

The second category is the non-Western culture requirement:

Broadly-defined, non-Western means non-European. Beyond this general guideline, the term points to cultural perspectives, behavior, and influences delimited less by geographical location than by their contrast with those shaped by the dominant thoughts and economies of western Europe and America.

Courses may be designated "non-Western" if they involve at least two, and when possible all four, of the following:

1. Explicit representation of non-Western civilizations (institutions, perspectives, patterns of behavior, and cultural products) in course materials
2. The systematic exploration of non-Western modes of thought and analysis
3. Consideration of the nature of contacts between traditions
4. Materials written, created, or interpreted by non-Westerners ("Diversity Emphasis Requirement")

In order to fulfill the diversity emphasis requirement, a student needs to take a course that falls within the guidelines of either category. While the University offers a list of general education courses that have already been approved as fulfilling these guidelines, a course within a major or minor may fulfill this requirement without explicitly being designed to do so. This allows an amount of leeway in regards to how explicit the "diverse" instruction is.

Jane Doe, who requested that a pseudonym be used in place of her real name for the purpose of this paper, is a nineteen year old undergraduate student at the University of Arizona who is a second semester freshman with an undeclared pre-business major with a minor in creative writing. She identifies as a Mexican-American female who grew up in the border town of Nogales, Arizona. She has described her experience entering the University as a "culture shock," as she grew up in a predominantly Hispanic community. The "culture shock" was a welcome experience and one that she actively sought out, specifically stating that she wanted to see more diversity. The interview was conducted in a local coffee shop, a location chosen by Jane Doe. I had already known Jane Doe from a summer program where I had worked as a

preceptor in her English 101 course, a program she references within her interview. This connection allowed for an honest and critical discussion regarding her diversity emphasis course. A set of predetermined questions structured the interview, though the interview quickly shifted to a discussion-like dialogue due to our previously established rapport.

Jane fulfilled her diversity emphasis requirement with the course MAS 150B Introduction to Social Justice. MAS 150B is part of the Mexican American Studies department and falls into the category of a general education course. She came to take this course because of an interest in Mexican American studies that developed during a summer bridge program, prior to her first semester at the University. The instructor of the summer course utilized Mexican American literature frequently, which compelled Jane to take another course that would have similar content. "In New Start we talked a lot about social justice, I remember the instructor went over a lot of Mexican studies so that kind of made me want to take another course on that, so that's how I chose it. I wanted to learn more about other cultures" (Doe).

According to Jane, the Introduction to Social Justice course had a very strong emphasis on Chicano movements and related material. She said that this wasn't what she was expecting when she originally enrolled in the course.

Well I understand that the instructor was teaching about Chicano rights and stuff because that's how he identifies personally, but at the same time, I felt kind of like he was teaching too much about Mexican stuff since the class wasn't called "Introduction to Chicano Studies." It was called "Intro to Social Justice," so I was expecting an equal time frame to talk about Asian rights and Black rights, but it was mostly all Mexican rights, so that's why I felt weird for the Caucasians, well for anybody who didn't identify with Chicano or like Mexican culture (Doe).

Jane expressed concern that students who did not identify as Chicano/a or Mexican would be alienated from the course materials and subject matters in regards to engagement. When asked about her own feelings regarding the course materials, Jane stated:

Most of the course was on Chicano rights and like the movements and stuff because my professor was Chicano, I mean is Chicano. So I guess I identify with that in the sense that I'm Mexican, but I didn't really think "oh I feel that struggle internally" you know? Because I don't think I'm *that* in touch with my culture to actually feel like... not necessarily a part of it, but I just... I don't know, I mean I felt like I could connect with it, but not on a deep level (Doe).

Jane seemed to feel that students who had relevant life experiences to the topics being discussed in class were more engaged in the course. "I know there was one girl that really did, because we talked a lot about the DREAM students, and a lot about immigration and I know that one of my friends, her family immigrated, so she really connected with it" (Doe).

When asked about how the course was conducted, Jane stated that it was different from other courses that she had encountered. While the majority of the assigned reading material consisted of academic articles, the class was also assigned a chapter or so from Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968). This book explores the power dynamics between educators and their students, proposing a new pedagogy that allows for the understanding that students are holders and producers of knowledge as well. Jane described how the course instructor attempted to integrate Freire's ideologies in the classroom by acknowledging the hierarchical relationship between student and teacher, while working to break down that power dynamic. This is something that does not extend across the board to all diversity emphasis courses. Maria Teresa completed her diversity emphasis requirement with the course, "Race, Ethnicity, and the

American Dream", and said that she enjoyed the material in the course overall, but not the teaching dynamic. "The professor also did not have the students lead the discussions and did not show himself as equal to the students, rather he was superior" (Mejia). A conscious shift in the power dynamic is a commendable effort and is demonstrated through the ways in which Jane's professor conducted the class. Jane states that he did not test the students' knowledge with exams, a first for her in her academic career. Rather, her instructor tested what they had learned over the course of the semester by having them present on a social injustice. This presentation was the primary determiner of the students' grades. She also discussed his teaching style, which included small group discussions and the use of guest speakers. "He brought in a lot of speakers and I thought that was interesting too, because everyone had a different voice and had something different for someone different in the class to connect with. So it wasn't always just him talking and I thought that was really cool too" (Doe). When asked what types of speakers visited her class, she said that he brought in academic speakers from other states, his own graduate students, DREAM students, and Native American academics.

The guest speakers that most stood out to her were the DREAM students. The DREAM Act, which stands for "Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors," "was designed to allow, among the tuition discount provisions, undocumented students to get on the path toward citizenship and gain legal employment by going to college or serving in the U.S. military" (Flores 241). Jane felt that their narratives were memorable due to the personal aspect of having someone speak from their own experiences, rather than reading about someone's experiences in an article.

They all told us their stories about how they got here or about how they're like struggling to pay for college and all of that. Because this was the first year that

they allowed DREAM students to come to the U of A, so they were saying like "yeah we finally got here and I mean it's still a struggle for us to stay, like we don't even know if we'll be back next semester" and all that stuff. It was really sad to hear (Doe).

She found this to be especially valuable as a learning tool because she was learning about something from those who had experienced it themselves. When trying to express why she found this to be so important, she first talked about the credibility of a firsthand account. The example she gives is a reference to a Native American speaker that came to their class.

I think having the difference between having someone from the ethnicity or like the race that you're studying about teaching you is kind of like... it's kind of like the difference between reading some article in a newspaper saying like "oh this happened with Native Americans last Wednesday" or whatever and a blog post by a Native American saying "this is what happened to me." It's kind of like... well you believe it more, you're able to connect with it more because it's a personal experience. (Doe)

Here, Jane explains how her empathy with the speaker was enhanced by the credibility she felt that speaker brought to her firsthand account. That connection and understanding is arguably an important part of the learning process that will allow students to have lasting impressions of the content they study.

When discussing her relationship to education after starting college, Jane chose to compare this course with another that she had taken; a business course had starkly contrasted with her experience in MAS 150B. The class size was significantly larger, and they were frequently tested on the course material.

Because it's kind of like, you go into this lecture hall with like three hundred other people. They're lecturing at you and like if you're sitting in the front, you turn around and everyone's either asleep or on their laptops and then at the end of the day, nobody really knows what they're studying. They're just doing it to memorize and then after they take the test, they just forget everything. I know I don't remember anything from MIS anymore. I mean that's also something else that I guess affected my relationship with education, is that I noticed that in some classes you're going to have to... like they throw so much at you, that all you have is to just memorize. Especially if you're not interested in it (Doe).

Jane contrasted memorizing with genuine learning. When asked if she learned in her Social Justice course, she said that she did. She went on to talk about Ruben Salazar, a Chicano journalist killed during the National Chicano Moratorium March against the Vietnam War by an L.A. County Sheriff's deputy, emphasizing the historical focus of the course. She stated that she had not learned about many of the historical events they had covered prior to taking this class.

Jane was not without critiques of the class though, despite her enjoyment of the course as a whole. Her language is reminiscent of Tom Horne's "Finding by the Superintendent," the document which described TUSD's Mexican American Studies program as being in violation of HB2281. She stated that, "I feel like maybe some students are developing some sort of prejudice against other races" due to the discussions in class (Doe).

Ok, in that class, I noticed that a lot of the... a lot of what they talk about social justice was "the minorities are oppressed" and it's kind of like they're teaching you that you're oppressed. That's like the underlying message of what... or what I got from it, I guess. I came from Nogales, it's like an hour south, like everyone there

is Hispanic, so like I mean I always knew I was in the minority, but when you're there you feel like you're the majority because it's mostly Hispanic people. And then I came here and I suddenly learned like "oh I'm a minority." It's kind of weird. And I feel like at the same time, they're teaching these minorities that they're oppressed, they're teaching the white people in the class that they're the oppressors. It makes me uncomfortable because... I don't know, I feel like sometimes they're metaphorically pointing fingers (Doe).

Jane also mentioned a classmate who immigrated to the United States. "She told me, 'yeah, I try to stay away from white people, they scare me,'" which made Jane feel uncomfortable despite the fact that she and her classmate both identify as Mexican (Doe). Jane noticed that she had also been sitting in a corner of the room that was composed of all Latina students in the class. She said this wasn't a conscious decision, though it may have been for the other students. While Jane felt discomfort with the arrangement, the seating nor the classmate seemed to cause any memorable conflict in the class.

Jane described a dispute in the course when a white student asked a DREAM student who was speaking to the class as a guest lecturer a potentially inflammatory question. The student asked why Mexican would continue to emigrate to the United States when they knew they would be considered "illegal". Jane believed the white student had no ill intent; rather she was genuinely curious and desired to better understand the motivations of immigration. Jane seemed to be thinking aloud as she attempted to work through whether or not it was offensive for the student to have asked the question, if it was not meant to be offensive. Eventually, she seemed to settle on the idea that the responsibility was not on either party to have prevented the incident. She explained that the DREAM student was

putting themselves in a vulnerable position by coming into the classroom and sharing their story, but her classmate also did not have the foundational understanding of the situation to know not to ask that question. Rather, Jane seemed to believe that there should have been an understanding established prior to the DREAM student even entering the classroom.

I guess, I don't know, that makes me think maybe they're teaching material, but at the same time, students aren't actually understanding the reasons why things happen the way they do. They just know the facts from history books. Well, that made it apparent to me that she doesn't know why a Mexican would want to come to the U.S., I guess that's maybe something more they should teach, I don't know, like the conditions living in Mexico (Doe).

Jane described the class as being primarily white with a handful of racial minority students. When asked about the participation of her classmates, she said that there were about five students of varying racial backgrounds who participated consistently. In regards to her white classmates in particular, she said that a boy stood out to her because on the last day of class, all he had to say about it was that it was "boring". She noted that the only time he had participated in the course discussion was when the topic of religions arose, and she suspected that this was due to his religious studies background. "And I noticed some other Caucasian students would tell me that, they're like, 'I have no idea what's going on in this class' because they couldn't really connect with anything" (Doe). She talked about how it made sense that people would participate more actively when talking about subjects that interested them, such as the male classmate and his interest in religions. Maria Teresa noticed something to a similar effect in her class as well. "There were so many students who did not want to be there and did not internalize the issues being presented. The students were not critical thinkers and did not have a motivation for this

course" (Mejia). When it comes to the actual engagement in the course, it seems as though the way in which the class is conducted can only have so much effect on the students. It appears to be fairly dependent on whether or not the student finds the course interesting, which one would assume is fairly difficult to regulate. A potential solution is changing the way in which ethnic studies itself (as a field) is introduced to the class. Conveying the value of ethnic studies to students might change the way they perceive the course and their own interest in it.

The discussion with Jane then turned to the difference between the Introduction to Social Justice course and a mainstream history course. She was still bringing up issues of framing racial minorities in opposition with white people, and potentially alienating white students in the classroom, though she was now weighing the difference of who was being left out in which classes. "Before I learned that, I never even noticed that, that we study from Christopher Columbus and on, and that we don't study about Native Americans. So like, I learned that in Social Justice as well" (Doe). She thoughtfully worked through her observations of class participation in tandem with the subject matter being discussed, and she eventually came to the conclusion that, "subconsciously you would be more engaged when you're learning about somebody who looks more like you" (Doe).

Prompted with the idea that students may feel alienated in this course and other courses similar to it, Jane stated:

I think it is worth it to even be uncomfortable in a class where you're not learning about yourself, because at the same time, history is about people who don't, will not always look like you or have your same roots, but I think it's important to learn about, I think it's worth the discomfort. I think it depends on the person.
(Doe)

Implications

The University of Arizona mandates that students complete at least one Diversity Emphasis course before graduating, but the University never states on their website what they are hoping to accomplish by requiring students to complete these courses. One can assume that the University, like other universities, have attempted to address claims that the mainstream curriculum lacks in representation of a multiplicity of experiences and identities. According to the essay, "Enhancing Campus Climates for Racial/Ethnic Diversity: Educational Policy and Practice" by Jeffrey F. Milem, universities tend to be tentative in regards to reinforcing policies that would supposedly increase the representation of diverse materials in courses. Universities are hesitant to take an assertive position on the subject because they are unsure of where the boundaries reside. "The quandary lies in just how much of a resocializing agent higher education institutions wish to be. Higher education has not decided whether it should merely reflect our society or whether it should try to consciously shape the society" (Milem, et al. 280). The Diversity Emphasis courses, originally referred to as Gender, Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Cultures courses, seem to have been implemented in April of 1997 (the date given on the University website for when the guidelines for these courses were approved). Whether or not having this course requirement is actively adding exposure to both literature by people of color and a multitude of perspectives regarding dominant narratives to students' education is arguably unclear.

The University of Arizona is currently being criticized by students and staff for lacking diverse curriculum, having few resources for minority students, and not addressing critiques of a hostile campus environment for minority students. On March 8, 2016, a list of demands was released by a new organization called "Marginalized Students of the University of Arizona." The

group is composed of students from the Adalberto & Ana Guerrero Center, African American Student Affairs, Asian Pacific Student Affairs, the LGBTQ Resource Center, Native American Student Affairs, and the Women's Resource Center. These students collectively decided that many of their needs overlapped with and so they came together to demand that the University put more effort forth to assist and retain minority students. The list of demands insists that the University devise a ten-year plan in hopes that it "will increase retention and graduation rates for marginalized students, sustain diversity curriculum and training, and promote a more safe and inclusive campus environment" and they outline a list of requirements to be included in this plan (MSUA 2).

The list of demands is nineteen pages in total, but specifically in regards to "Classroom and Curriculum", the LGBTQ Resource center made this demand:

5. Extend the diversity emphasis requirement

- a. Include an introductory course to cultural competency and identities
- b. Tier II diversity courses must be offered as a part of this requirement to build on the basic skills taught in the introductory course
- c. The total number of credits required to fulfill for diversity emphasis must be raised
- d. All diversity courses, including existing courses, must have a reviewed curriculum that offers applicable tools to engaging with people of diverse backgrounds
 - i. This includes: African American identities, Native American Identities, LGBTQIA+ identities, Chicax identities, Asian Pacific American Identities, and Disabled Identities

- ii. Applicable tools refers to knowledge that allows students to positively and effectively engage with a wide variety of diverse people (MSUA 12)

This direct critique of the current manifestation of the Diversity Emphasis requirement seems to speak to the dissatisfaction that students have in regards to the effectiveness. Jane Doe spoke of her Introduction to Social Justice with appreciation, but also with honest feedback about how it could have been more effective at educating students on a wide variety of topics that fall under the umbrella of "diversity". Her predisposition to wanting to learn about other cultures and communities, in combination with her encounter with MAS materials in her English 101 course, indicates her enthusiasm for engaging with diversity. Her thoughts regarding her classmates are influenced by the fact that she has had previous experience working with ideas that challenge the dominant narrative. The demand for Diversity Emphasis courses to be more heavily monitored in regards to their commitment to teaching diverse materials does not seem unwarranted considering how loose the current guidelines for what courses may qualify to fulfill the requirement are. With the recent formation of the Marginalized Students of the University of Arizona, coupled with the passing of HB2281 in 2010, it seems as though the need for diversity in education is more crucial than ever. "Enhancing Campus Climates" discusses the effects that the historical context of an institution has on its racial/ethnic climate, with context including the history of the institution and its surrounding area (Milem, et al. 281). With HB2281 contributing to the context of the University of Arizona, the University is already at a disadvantage when it comes to the inclusion of diversity.

If Gabriel Roche's experiences—including his participation in higher education—are any indication, the MAS program was effectively doing everything right. The acquisition of critical thinking skills, which Gabriel discusses, was integrated into the MAS program itself. In an

interview with *Tucson News Now*, Curtis Acosta stated, "The Mexican-American/Raza studies story shows the importance of critical thinking, shows the importance of building education around reading and writing at a very critical level and empowering youth to look--to analyze the world" (Grijalva). Gabriel attested to the critical thinking skills that he acquired while in the program, stating that the skills he learned in the program prepared him for the more rigorous nature of college-level work. Andre Roche also discussed the teachers themselves rather than the content, stating that their passion is what really encouraged engagement with the students. This passion was evident in both his and Gabriel's interviews, as well as the protests that followed HB2281. On April 26, 2011, a group of TUSD students entered the TUSD Governing Board room and chained themselves to the chairs in order to protest HB2281, as well as the administrative officials who were meeting to deliberate whether or not to uphold the ban in lieu of losing ten percent of their funding. Student protesters chanted "our education is under attack, what do we do? Fight back" while maintaining control over the room (Huicochea). The reactions from students who were enrolled in the program are evidence of their passion for Mexican American Studies and its effectiveness in comparison with the mainstream classes at engaging students on a meaningful level.

All of the participants interviewed for this paper identify themselves as Mexican American. According to the U.S. Census, 41.6% of Tucson's population identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino ("Population, Percentage Change"). Considering that that is almost half of the population, there should be a considerable amount effort put forth to make sure that education, at all levels, is inclusive. If education continues to be exclusionary in regards to materials, resources, faculty, and policies, minority students will have a disproportionately harder time staying and succeeding in higher education than their white peers. "A longitudinal study of

highly talented Latino students found that perceptions of racial tension between groups on campus in the first year had a consistently negative effect on academic and psychological adjustment in subsequent college years" (Milem, et al. 289). What was also discovered in "Enhancing Campus Climate" was that perceptions of campus climates varied greatly across different racial groups. Citing a study conducted in 1986, it was found that 70% of white students surveyed believed that their university was generally supportive of minority students, compared with 28% of Black and Chicano students at the same institution (Loo and Rolinson 65). This could explain the disparity between those who believe that higher education institutions are lacking in diversity versus those who think the demands of minority students for institutions to be more accountable are being unreasonable.

It could be argued that institutions of higher education should be responsible for actively encouraging diversity on their campuses, including a more diverse curriculum. While there is already plenty of existing scholarship on the realities of minority students in predominantly white spaces, it should be obvious why students who are not affected by systematic racism are less sensitive to its presence in their education. The various studies that have been done on the topic should be evidence enough as to why university administration should be implementing and reinforcing policies to counteract these inequalities. "Enhancing Campus Climate" discusses the role that university faculty have in the formation of students' understanding of racial and cultural differences.

While peer groups clearly have the greatest impact in the undergraduate socialization process, recent research on the impact of college on students' racial attitudes, cultural awareness/acceptance, and social/political attitudes suggests

that faculty may have a larger, more important role than traditionally believed (Milem, et al. 290).

Multiple studies have also found links between the incorporation of diversity into education, through the use of ethnic studies, and academic student achievement. In 2012, Willis D. Hawley specifically conducted an analysis of the MAS program within TUSD and student performance. What he found was that, "that there is a consistent, significant, positive relationship between MAS participation and student academic performance" (Hawley 7). Statistically, there was a positive correlation between students participating in the MAS program and graduating in every model he examined. Of these eight models, he found this correlation to be significant in six" (Hawley 7). More recently, in January of 2016, a study was conducted by Stanford on the academic performance of students in several high schools in San Francisco. They selected participants based off of their eighth grade GPA and these students were enrolled in an ethnic studies course for ninth grade. What they found was that "assignment to this course increased ninth-grade student attendance by 21 percentage points, GPA by 1.4 grade points, and credits earned by 23" (Dee and Penner). These results strengthen the testimonies of those interviewed for this paper, providing empirical evidence to their anecdotes. "These surprisingly large effects are consistent with the hypothesis that the course reduced dropout rates and suggest that culturally relevant teaching, when implemented in a supportive, high-fidelity context, can provide effective support to at-risk students" (Dee and Penner). Understanding the importance of ethnic studies and a diverse education in regards to student performance and engagement is critical for institutions of higher education, as they are only perpetuating inequalities by having insufficient resources for minority students and placing little gravity on engaging with diversity.

Conclusion

What TUSD did right, originally, with their MAS program was that the courses were offered as alternatives to the mainstream core subject courses, rather than as elective courses. This demonstrated a perceived value of ethnic studies as being just as legitimate as a mainstream course of study. The proposed demands from the Marginalized Student of the University of Arizona may help to reform the Diversity Emphasis course in the future; by creating a two tier system of courses that would qualify, as well as increasing the amount of credits a student would require to fulfill the requirement.

Appendix A

Interview questions for MAS students:

1. How did you come to be in the Raza Studies program?
2. What class(es) did you take while in the program?
3. What material did you cover?
4. Of the material covered, what was most memorable for you?
5. Was the material significant for you, if at all? Did you identify or connect with any of the readings personally? Why?
6. Did the class have any impact on you and your relationship with education?

Appendix B

Interview questions for Diversity Emphasis students:

1. How did you decide to take this class?
2. What is the class about, what is its focus?
3. What material have you covered so far in the class?
4. Have you had a favorite topic or piece so far?
5. Was the material significant for you, if at all? Did you identify or connect with any of the readings personally? Why?
6. Has this class had any impact on you and your relationship with education?

Appendix C

In Lak' Ech

The concept of In Lak' Ech is similar to what is referred to as "the Golden Rule." It encourages students to be empathetic and is incorporated into the curriculum of the MAS program. Students within the program often began class with this poem:

In Lak Ech
 Tú eres mi otro yo.
 Si te hago daño a ti, me hago daño a mí mismo.
 Si te amo y respeto, me amo y respeto yo
 You are my other me.
 If I do harm to you, I do harm to myself.
 If I love and respect you, I love and respect myself (Rodríguez).

"This ethos forms part of the philosophical foundation for MAS-TUSD. As such, it is difficult to find the "hate" that the program is accused of teaching" (Rodríguez).

The Four Tezcatlipocas (also known as the four compañeros)

"They include: Tezcatlipoca-reflection, Quetzalcoatl-wisdom, Huichtlipochtli-will and Xipetotec-transformation" (Rodríguez). Maria Teresa described this concept as a way for students to self-reflect and think critically, as well as develop a relationship with one's history and ancestors. The final step is transformation, something that she says engaged with "in order to be a new person" (Mejia). "While the concepts are normally associated with the transformation of human beings, at MAS-TUSD, the Four Tezcatlipocas are also associated with a transformative educational process, a process that results in the creation of academically superior and critically compassionate students" (Rodríguez).

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