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Ethnic studies major in the works

Faculty from the College of Liberal Arts believe the major will increase awareness and eliminate racial misconceptions

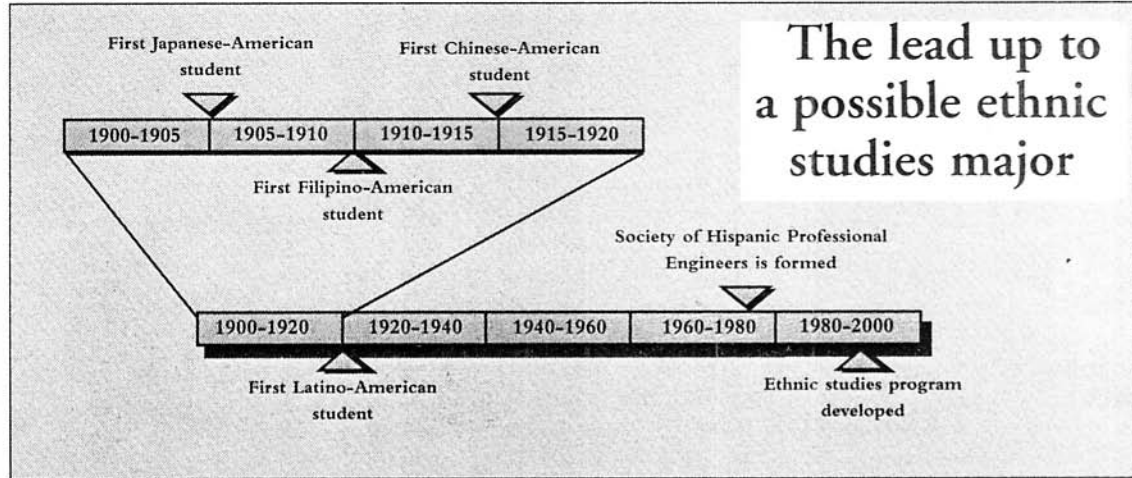
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MUSTANG DAILY

Cal Poly may have a new ethnic studies major as early as next year.

Curriculum requirements are already in the works, after a 16-to-one vote by the College of Liberal Arts department chairs in favor of the program.

Ethnic Studies Department Chair Robert Ku said he came to Cal Poly this year with the idea of the new major.

"Ku has made it clear that he has come on this campus with the idea of making ethnic studies a full-fledged program," Journalism Department Head George Ramos said. "The proposal, as he has outlined it, has received incredible sup-



port among his colleagues in the College of Liberal Arts."

Ku is also enthusiastic about attracting students from different ethnic backgrounds.

"Remember the movie 'Field of Dreams'?" Ku said. "Build it and they will come. Build a strong ethnic studies major, and people will not only come to Cal Poly, Cal Poly

will welcome them with open arms."

College kids are "hungering for diverse experiences," Ku said. This major will, "give better understanding to diverse perspectives of all people."

According to the 2002-03 Cal Poly fact book, more than 60 percent of Poly students are white.

Only 6.6 percent of the student body is Latino, as opposed to more than 30 percent living in California. Less than 12 percent are Asian, and Blacks make up only 0.9 percent of the student population (roughly 160 students out of 18,000).

Industrial technology sophomore Curtis Thomas, a Japanese-African-

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American thinks that starting the new program is not going to boost ethnic enrollment.

"Creating a program is not going to help diversity," he said. "They are going in the right direction, and you can't avoid people that will be ignorant to the whole matter of diversity, especially here."

Ramos agreed that creating diversity at Cal Poly will not happen overnight, but he said that the program will encourage ethnic enrollment over time.

"The fact that there is support for it, shows me that this is fertile ground," Ramos said. "It can grow here. If we all stay in our boxes, we won't learn much about anybody else's box."

Ku stresses the major is "not necessarily for all ethnic minorities," and that there are many white students interested in the topic of racial diversity.

Non-minority students are also expressing interest in the new curriculum. Ku said a "large number of students want the major to exist."

"I'm taking an ethnic studies class

right now, and its really helping me to become less ethnocentric and more sensitive," English sophomore Hallie Leff said.

Business freshman Negisa Taymourian said it's "important for everyone to take an ethnic studies class" in college for better appreciation and understanding from a minority standpoint.

The curriculum will consist of numerous classes including indigenous, African, Latino and Asian studies, as well as comparative methodology and community projects. There will also be focus on gender, racial, science and current technological issues surrounding ethnicity.

A degree in ethnic studies could aid acceptance to graduate school as well students pursuing a career in law, business, communication or politics.

In order for the new major to go into effect, the Academic Senate and the interim dean must approve Ku's proposal. This will likely happen before the 2005-06 school year.

Former Dean of the College of Liberal Arts Harry Hellenbrand made multiple attempts to increase diversity and minority enrollment long before the idea of an ethnic studies program was introduced.

Hellenbrand chaired the University Diversity Enhancement Council, which started the annual President's Diversity Award in 1997—giving \$1,000 to recognize campus departments that have "exhibited commitment to the value of diversity."

An egg attack the Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals United booth prompted Hellenbrand to have school-sponsored multicultural events and diversity training for all on-campus employees.

"Anything that makes Cal Poly a more diverse place, I'm in favor of," said Ramos. "Especially this major. It's the right thing to do in order to expose all of the students, not just the majors, what's going on out there in our multicultural world."

Ku said he believes that the creation of an ethnic studies major is beneficial in eliminating common racial misconceptions.

When asked if the program would help to phase out stereotypes, Ku was optimistic.

"Eliminating stereotypes is just part of a larger issue," he said. "This major will help students better understand the complex histories and current realities of America's diverse population." "Cal Poly is ready for change," he said.