

**Proposal Highlights**  
**New Major Leading to a B.A. Degree in Comparative Ethnic Studies**  
**Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo**

Ethnic Studies is an inter- and multi-disciplinary study of Indigenous, African, Latino/a, and Asian peoples in the United States. It is an important and valuable area of study that is indispensable to the academic experience of all students. With this understanding, a program in Ethnic Studies was established at Cal Poly in 1992. The expectation was that the program would continue to evolve and flourish and play an increasingly significant role in the life of the university. Thus, in 1994, the Ethnic Studies Program developed into the Ethnic Studies Department. Since its beginning over a dozen years ago, Ethnic Studies has steadily compiled the necessary critical mass of faculty, curricula, and material resources required to establish and sustain an academically rigorous and sound major degree program.

The reasons behind the delay in the establishment of an Ethnic Studies major at Cal Poly were numerous and involved a combination of many factors, but it basically boiled down to two specific concerns: the confusion over the definition of Ethnic Studies and the apprehension over the shortage of academic and financial resources thought necessary in creating and maintaining a new degree program.

The newly designed Ethnic Studies curriculum puts these concerns to rest by clearly defining both its academic and administrative limits and possibilities. It is now obvious that the bulk of the resources needed for a strong Ethnic Studies major existed at Cal Poly all along. Due to its inter- and multi-disciplinary nature, bits and pieces of it were spread out in departments and programs in colleges across the university. All it took was a bit of creative reorganizing and consolidating (and not the sizable infusion of new resources as feared) to see the whole picture come together. Thus, it is quite realistic to envision a major in Comparative Ethnic Studies to be in place by Fall 2006.

The need for the major unquestionably exists and the prospect for its sustainability is quite high. A growing number of faculty and staff, students, and members of the community have begun to voice their support for the major and there has never been a better time than now to seriously consider this possibility.

The presence of a major degree program in Comparative Ethnic Studies will make a valuable contribution to Cal Poly in a number of significant ways, particularly in the much-needed area of curricular and cultural diversity of the campus and the nearby community. All signs indicate that the positive ripple effect created by the major is assured to be wide reaching, conspicuous, and significant.

The proposed major program will encourage a comparative and integrative approach to Ethnic Studies, as opposed to focusing on a particular group, as the majority of Ethnic Studies departments and programs in California and beyond design their curricula to do. Students will also look beyond the U.S. borders and consider Ethnic Studies from a global, transnational, and diasporic perspectives and points of reference.

To maximize the unique and valuable opportunities offered by its location within a polytechnic university, the proposed major program will encourage students to foreground issues central to science and technology whenever and wherever possible in their studies. Thus, Cal Poly can play a leading role, locally and nationally, in the creation of an innovative curriculum that examines the important crossroad where science and technology converge with race, ethnicity, and gender.

Thus far, academic scholarship has only just scratched the surface of the rich, complex, vibrant, and diverse history and culture of California's Central Coast and Valley, especially as it concerns racial and ethnic minority communities. A critical mass of scholars, students, researchers, and community members coordinating their efforts within the institutional structure of a degree major program will no doubt successfully assist in the unearthing of valuable and emerging discoveries hidden beneath the buried past (and present) of Cal Poly's surrounding areas.

A major in Comparative Ethnic Studies will be useful for students interested in pursuing a variety of career and professional fields, especially if their interests include activities within multiracial, multicultural, or transnational communities, organizations, businesses, or agencies. Areas include: law, social work, public health, medicine, government (local, state, and federal), journalism, urban planning, politics, business and finance, diversity training, counseling, creative writing, scholarly teaching and research, international relations, community-based organizations, non-profit organizations, arts and cultural organizations, and graduate studies in all areas of the arts and sciences, in both traditional disciplines and in emerging multidisciplinary fields.