Fought for throughout the latter half of the 1980s, agreed upon by campus faculty in 1989, and launched with its first courses in 1991, the American Cultures (AC) Requirement was a milestone in higher education. According to Ling-chi Wang, emeritus professor of Asian American Studies and one of the requirement’s strongest advocates, the AC program was “one of the most important curriculum-reform projects in the history of this campus…” Beyond bringing new information and perspectives to students, “…American Cultures challenges each discipline to raise questions that they had never raised before, and in the process, they have uncovered unknown aspects of their disciplines.”

The American Cultures Requirement remains unique in the nation in its approach. The courses students must pass to fulfill a one-class graduation requirement cover all instructional fields, as adaptations of existing courses or newly designed ones. All incorporate in the curriculum a comparative analysis of the experiences of US racial and ethnic groups, drawn from at least three of the following: African Americans, Indigenous peoples of the United States, Asian Americans, Chicano/Latino Americans, and European Americans. For many UC Berkeley departments, this framework offers a new approach to course design that responds directly to a problem encountered in numerous disciplines: how better to present the diversity of American experience to the diversity of students now enrolled at the university.
Political uprisings and the demographic transformation of higher education

"While civil rights leaders pressed colleges to admit more black students, the big push came after the assassination of Dr. King on April 4, 1968, followed by uprisings in more than 100 cities and student strikes. I don’t see how you can understand it apart from the upheavals on campus, racial upheavals in the larger society, the general upheavals around the world.”

Professor Jerome Karabel,
50 Years of Affirmative Action: What Went Right and What It Got Wrong,
NYT, 3/30/2019.

In the 1960s, institutions of higher education saw a rapid influx of students of color into what were traditionally white colleges and universities. This influx was due to several important social and political movements, including the Civil Rights Movement, the anti-Vietnam War protests, and the grow of the Black Power Movement. These movements led to increased pressure on institutions of higher education to become more inclusive and to provide opportunities for students of color. The increase in enrollment was primarily due to several landmark legislative acts, including the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. These acts expanded financial aid to college students, created more opportunities for minority students to attend college, and removed barriers to education for students of color. Additionally, the civil rights movement led to a shift in the admissions policies of colleges and universities, with a growing number of institutions adopting affirmative action policies to increase diversity on campus.
The ‘Opening of the American Mind’: Curricular insurgencies

"As the more diverse student body demanded a more diverse education, the nearly all-white faculties at US universities fiercely guarded the notion that a proper education emerged from studying the whitewashed canon of Great Books and viewed anything that might question the objectivity of that premise as an unwarranted political intrusion. The faculty attitude around the country was, 'We let you in here. Come in, sit down, and enjoy the show.'"

Professor Troy Duster, Changing the Culture of the Academy, 2007

In 1964, UC Berkeley students formed the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF), building on the experiences, skills, and tactics of radical literature and collective study. TWLF focused on a list of demands, including the development of a Third World Studies College of African-American, Asian-American, Native American, and Chicano/Latino American studies departments. TWLF was crucial in the eventual creation of the UC Berkeley Department of Ethnic Studies. At the heart of the insurgent movement, coalitions were being formed, extracurricular activities were being developed, and analyses that were foreign to the ethnic structure of the American cultural requirement.

AMERICAN CULTURES PASSES

Faculty votes 227-194 to add racial diversity requirement

By Heather Jones
Staff Writer

UC Berkeley faculty members approved the American cultures requirement yesterday in a decision that was hailed as an important step in fostering understanding among people of different colors.

By a vote of 227 to 194, the Academic Senate narrowly passed a proposal that requires all undergraduates to study the contributions of ethnic groups to American history.

Ethnic studies Professor Ron Takaki said the 33-vote margin was a positive sign.

"It's significant that we had such a large turnout," Takaki said. "More faculty became informed on the issue."

Beginning in 1991, students entering UC Berkeley will be required to pass a course focusing on three out of five ethnic groups — African American, Asian American, Chicano/Latino, European American, and Native American. The course may be taken in a variety of departments, and can overlap with existing breadth require-

ovation when the votes were counted.

Political science Professor William Muir argued against the proposal during the meeting.

"We have a disaster looming ahead of us," Muir said at the meeting. The university does not have the faculty, teaching assistants, or classrooms to accommodate the 6,000 students who will need to fulfill the requirement each year, he said.

Executive Vice Chancellor Roderic Park disagreed, saying that the university plans to allocate sufficient funds to implement the requirement, and by 1994 the campus will add 15 classrooms the size of 145 Dwinelle Hall. Park also said that the Academic Senate should view the American cultures requirement as "more of an educational issue than a resource issue."

Physics Professor Gilbert Shapiro expressed reservations about the proposal, saying, "It is a naive point of view to say that the only way to learn something is to take a course in it."

Shapiro proposed an amendment to the American cultures proposal that would provide alternative ways to
An Ethnic Studies Requirement

What is the Ethnic Studies requirement?

For several years, students and faculty at the UC Berkeley, a university known for its rigorous and liberal education, have been seeking to expand on the Ethnic Studies program. In response to a growing diversity of students, the requirement that introduced the concept of Ethnic Studies, increased in 1991. The requirement now includes courses that focus on the experiences of different ethnic minority groups.

Why do we need an Ethnic Studies requirement?

The addition of Ethnic Studies to the curriculum reflects a growing awareness of the importance of diversity and inclusion. By requiring students to take courses in Ethnic Studies, the university aims to promote a more comprehensive understanding of the world and its cultures.

Questions most commonly asked about the requirement:

1. How do I get classes to replace the requirement?
   - Students can petition to have classes approved to replace the requirement. The university has a process for reviewing these petitions.

2. Does Ethnic Studies replace all courses in my major?
   - Ethnic Studies classes are designed to complement, not replace, courses in other majors in the university.

3. What are the prerequisites for Ethnic Studies courses?
   - There are specific prerequisites for each Ethnic Studies course, which students must fulfill in order to enroll.

What is the present status of the requirement?

The requirement is now officially part of the university curriculum. It is designed to ensure that students gain a more comprehensive understanding of the world and its cultures.

We need a requirement now!

The requirement is necessary to ensure that students have a more comprehensive understanding of the world and its cultures.

What can students do to help win the requirement?

Students can petition to have classes approved to replace the requirement. They can also participate in discussions and workshops to promote awareness of the importance of Ethnic Studies.

Partnered Struggles: Global uprisings against South African apartheid and desegregating the UC Berkeley curriculum

The political momentum created by TWLF, the creation of the Department of Ethnic Studies, and the increasingly diverse student bodies, faculties, and curricula, built the foundations of political education for a new movement.

The evolution of a requirement

Faculty and librarians cooperate in producing new courses

American Cultures: A history of confrontation


1985: Registration protest for UC to desegregate admissions.


1988: Academic Senate form Special Committee on Education and Ethnicity issues, students protest.

1990: American Cultures Center opens.


1993: Ethnic Studies requirement is adopted.
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Asian studies Professor Ron Takaki said the 33-vote margin was a positive sign.

"It's significant that we had such a large turnout," Takaki said. "More faculty became involved in the issue." Beginning in 1991, students entering UC Berkeley will be required to pass a course focusing on three out of five ethnic groups: African American, Asian American, Chicano/Latino, European American, and Native American. The community is torn in a variety of departments, and can overlap with existing breadth requirements.

Supporters have maintained that an American cultures course is necessary when the votes were counted. Political science Professor William Mair argued against the proposal during the meeting.

"We have a disaster looming ahead of us," Mair said at its meeting. The university does not have the faculty, teaching assistants, or classrooms to accommodate the 6,000 students who will need to fulfill the requirement, he said.

Discipline Vice Chairwoman Rodney Park disagreed, saying that the university plans to allocate extra funds to implement the requirement, and by 1994 the campus will add 15 classroom rooms to the site of 855 the multile Hall.

Park also said that the Academic Senate should view the American cultures requirement as "more of an educational issue than a resource issue."

Physics Professor Gilbert Shapiro expressed reservations about the proposal, saying, "If it is a key point of view to say that the way to learn a subject is to take a course in it."

Shapiro proposed an amendment to the American cultures proposal that would provide alternative ways of fulfilling the requirement, such as a term paper. The amendment was voted on and rejected by the senate.

Emiaka Ezeis, a student representative, said he did not know the results of the faculty vote that was held yesterday.

What could be so important? Building the AC Requirement

"This requirement was not about changing what classes students take; it was about changing what the faculty teach, which is much, much harder to do. It was about curricular reform."

Ron Choy, Assistant Director of the AC Center, 1991-2004

Passed by the UC Berkeley Senate in 1991, the AC requirement was the first and only campuswide graduation requirement for all undergraduate students. When the requirement was first created, there was not one course on campus that could meet the requirements. The requirement was built within two years to ensure that incoming students in 1993 had the necessary coursework to meet the requirement, satisfying the most dramatic demographic shift in the university's history.

"The AC requirement requires faculty who aren't specialists in this fraught topic of racial formation to acquire a certain proficiency. Where are they going to acquire that when they're focused on their own specialized research in their specific fields of expertise?" Francisco, UC Berkeley Sociology Faculty, founding faculty member, David Scott.

On a college campus renowned for its research excellence, the AC Summer seminars for UC Berkeley and community college faculty offered through the newly created and administratively supported "Center for the Teaching and Study of American Cultures" were the first cross-campus effort to bring faculty together to talk about teaching.

"The Chancellor gave us a room, a little budget, and a little furniture. Then we had to figure out how to make this thing work (courses that would meet the AC Requirement) happen. In the first summer seminar, we had 20 in our faculty, including faculty, who had (mostly, we think) been in the trenches fighting for AC. And faculty who had never heard of it before. And everyone had only a few weeks to do the planning. We were worried about the costs needed for graduation, making sure that there wasn't a bottleneck before hiring up. The lesson we learned is that the seminars for six weeks during the summer, two hours a day, were arguing about things such as "truth." But it wasn't just about facts - it was about department. Remember that the faculty had required that students pass something that did not exist. There were no AC courses. We had no idea how to do this thing. We met with the provost, the chancellors, and the president - who even knew anything about this. And that was the purpose of the seminar. For faculty who wanted to teach a course to learn the material. From each other." Ron Choy, Assistant Director of the AC Center, 1991-2004.

Within two years, there were enough courses to meet the new AC requirement to ensure that each student would graduate on time. By 1994, when the first students were graduating who needed the AC requirement, there were at least four seats available annually, and UC Berkeley faculty had fundamentally changed the way that they taught.
Who We Are!: Multiculturalism, the war on diversity, and the growth of colorblindness

As multiculturalism became the standard for the states of California and the U.S., the UC system reached its peak of “colorblindness.” In the early 1990s, the Expo and the goals of multiculturalism were seen as the solution to the problems of racism. The debate between “colorblind” and “multicultural” has been going on for decades. The Expo was seen as a way to bring people together and to create a more integrated society.

Public schools became the principal targets of attacks with court cases involving higher-education policies, especially admissions to public universities. These cases challenged the diversity and representation of public policies, including affirmative action. The state of California passed Proposition 209, which prohibited the consideration of ethnicity, race, or national origin in public university admissions.

“AFTS,” the American Federation of Teachers, which represents public school teachers, has been an active supporter of these policies. They argue that diversity is not the same as affirmative action, and that diversity can be achieved through other means, such as enrolling students from different backgrounds in the same classes.

Public schools have been under attack for some time. The challenges to affirmative action and diversity have led to a decline in enrollment and a decrease in the number of minority students. This has led to concerns about the quality of education and the diversity of the student body.

“AFTS has been involved in many of these cases, including the case of the University of California, Los Angeles, where the school was sued for not considering the race of students in the admissions process. The school settled the case, but the issue of diversity continues to be a contentious issue.”

Jeff Chang, Who We Be: The Colorization of America, 2014

“AFTS doesn’t want to completely eliminate, but at least reduce, the need for affirmative action. The university still has to consider the diversity of the student body. It’s not just about numbers, it’s about creating a diverse and inclusive environment.”

AFTS advocates for a more inclusive approach that considers the diversity of the student body in a way that is not just about race or ethnicity. They argue that diversity can be achieved through other means, such as enrolling students from different backgrounds in the same classes.

“AFTS is working to create a more diverse and inclusive environment. They are working with public schools and universities to develop programs that will help to increase diversity and reduce the need for affirmative action.”
Tumbling the Ivory Tower

At UC Berkeley, one radically engaged academic program could finally force the school to own up to its mission as a public university — if the administration agrees to fund it.

By Sarah Burke

Old and New Battlegrounds: On beyond 30

“This expanded student body and faculty have brought the outside world within the walls of the university and have radically altered the curriculum, according to the critics.”


Everything is the same and nothing is the same. Entering its third decade, the AC curriculum is a model of energy and shocking responsiveness to global conversations on statelessness and setback races. Beginning with the uprisings at the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO, to the murder of Breonna Taylor in Louisville, KY, and George Floyd in Minneapolis, MN, the conversations on and off campus preach a battle between instruction and political education, with an urgency that had been lost in the previous decade.

“I am glad to see that our academic community is finally engaging some tradition in university curricula and professional training in the United States, it’s been a long wait." — Tom F. Diignan, Assistant Professor of Sociology at the Center for the Study of Law & Society, UC Berkeley.

Like the early years, creating enough collisions for faculty to exchange ideas in the most intellectually demanding, often emotionally exhausting and politically key spaces, AC programs have been created at the apex of research, teaching, learning, and social justice. In recent years, teaching in Threshold Times, Times Justice, and the Creative Democracy Fellow (CDF) programs, have been formed to create new framings and build more ideas to meet the historical juxtaposition of those complex public issues.

And so it continues... “What could be more important”. Bill Strumers, Inaugural Director, The AC Center, 1996.
Teaching in Troubled Times Series

The Teaching in Troubled Times series began in 2017 as a series of timely dialogues exploring some of the most pressing social and political questions that define our times and our classrooms. The series has featured engaging discussions and delivered "must-read" tools to support our students' complex lives.

american Cultures, Berkeley, Americancultures.berkeley.edu/ttt
The Creative Discovery Fellows (CDF) Program

Launched in 2011, the UC Berkeley Creative Discovery Fellows Program (formerly Adobe Fellows) supports instructors incorporating creative assignments into American Culture courses. The CDF program has been held to respond to a core question of social justice education: “How do we design support for faculty and students in ways that are adaptive, equity-oriented, and future-oriented?”

americancultures.berkeley.edu/cdf
Engineering, Environment, and Society

Since the 1980s, academic researchers studying environmental pollution have repeatedly demonstrated what many communities of color and low-income communities have long asserted: poor people and people of color are systematically and disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards. Why is this the case? What does it mean to be a technical actor—whether an engineer, economist, planner, or scientist—trying to rectify environmental degradation given this context?

In partnerships with multiple community-based organizations, we will engage at the intersection of environmental justice, social justice, and engineering to demonstrate how problems that are commonly defined in technical terms are at their roots deeply socially embedded. Topics covered will include environmental engineering as it relates to air, water, and soil contamination; race, class, and privilege; expertise and knowledge production; ethics, and engaged citizenship.

This course is supported by the College of Engineering, the IES12 program (Engineering Scholars-Engaged Scholar), the American Cultures Engaged Scholarship (ACES) program, and the Blue Center for Developing Economies. For more information visit: http://bluecenter.berkeley.edu/epicminor.

Course: E 157AC or IAS 157AC
Prof. Khalid Kadir
4 units

The American Cultures Engaged Scholarship (ACES) Program

Launched in January 2013, the American Cultures Engaged Scholarship Program developed a partnership between the American Culture Center and the Public Service Center. This program allows Berkeley faculty to frame engaged scholarship within the context of civic learning for students through a combination of teaching and practice, and the creation of knowledge that may impact both the community and the academy.

Given that California currently faces one of its most severe droughts in recent history, it is especially important to learn more about a period and place where conscious engineering of water use allowed a culture to flourish over hundreds of years, the Paite tribe of Owens Valley. The Paite developed a sophisticated system of irrigation canals that made the valley bloom.

For a long time, the history was absent from the popular narrative of the California “Water Wars.” Through an ongoing community partnership in the ACES class, Researching Water in the West (CS 50/150AC), this fascinating history will be presented by a Paiute tribal member, Berkeley faculty, the Bancroft curator and a former AC student, whose lives have been changed by unearthing and exploring this story.

americancultures.berkeley.edu/aces
American Cultures Student Prize

Since 2008, the American Cultures (AC) Student Prize has recognized and celebrated undergraduate achievements within AC courses. The Prize is awarded annually to undergraduates for projects they develop in an AC course that promotes understanding of U.S. race, ethnicity, and culture and exemplifies a standard of excellence in scholarship. Prior award-winning submissions have included essays, poetry, films, reflection statements on live performances, and other work produced for American Cultures courses. Learn More at: https://americancultures.berkeley.edu/sp

AC Excellence in Teaching Award

Since 2005, the American Cultures (AC) Excellence in Teaching Award has recognized individual faculty members’ exemplary teaching in the American Cultures curriculum. Instructors are recognized for their inspiring and sustained commitment to creating a learning space able to address the multiple challenges and opportunities that teaching AC content requires. Learn more at: https://americancultures.berkeley.edu/ata

americancultures.berkeley.edu