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Exploring Ethnic Studies as a Model in Advancing a Multi-Faceted, Multi-Cultural Academic Curriculum, Without Losing Specific Ethnic Identity Significance

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Exploring Ethnic Studies as a Model in Advancing a Multi-Faceted, Multi-Cultural Academic Curriculum, Without Losing Specific Ethnic Identity Significance

Abstract

Using the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor as a case study this project highlights the 'usefulness' of race and ethnic courses in terms of factual evidence presentation from faculty-student relationships in the classroom and the broader influence in the corresponding ethnic communities. Therefore, while many predominantly white institutions of higher learning may offer a variety of courses that pertain to race and ethnic issues, like the University of Michigan's College of Literature, Science and the Arts (LSA) Race and Ethnicity requirement, many institutions do not necessarily require a discussion concerning the relations among such ethnic groups in a historical, political, current, social or academic environment. The field of Ethnic Studies requires that the concepts of ethnicity, race, and culture include this global multi-faceted perspective. It is this type of perspective from which students may connect a diverse setting, with both historical and present realities concerning the dynamics of that interaction.

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Findings

This necessary component of using a globally-focused Ethnic Studies curriculum as the model for institutions' aims to achieve a socially and academically diverse student body is key in understanding any attempts to unlock the true meaning of many predominantly white institutions' plans for diversity. This curriculum is based on academia's need for an ethnically diverse atmosphere-both physically in terms of admissions and student body presence, and academic curricula. However, this curriculum must be strategically taught in the classroom, and *guided* toward the many multi-faceted entities surrounding the concept of race and ethnicity in today's society. Additionally, the~ focused discm;si6ns must not be a limiting dialogue which highlights singular perspectives, like many already established Ethnic Studies programs and departments whom focus their energies and resources on a particular ethnic identity. Significantly, these courses can not be supplemented by "mock" Ethnic Studies disciplines, which may suggest some of the aspects critical to framing the ethnic studies discipline initially, but not require those components in all course offerings. Should any of these realities exist, the knowledge of the student body about what it means to be part of a "diverse" academic and social setting may be very conservative.

This required curriculum provides the opportunity for many people of color in predominantly white institutions to feel as though their culture's experience is being taught to all students, who correspondingly must learn about white culture everyday in most academic disciplines. This academic exchange creates a dialogue where the

freedom of diverse thoughts and ideas are the norms where a variety of ethnic communities are represented in the mainstream academia in terms of these courses being required for all students, where ignorance of racial and ethnic realities and identities no longer overwhelm the environment. This exchange will serve as the catalyst for future leaders in the society and community to impact the world in which we live.

Presenter

A Native of Toledo, Ohio, Ravi **Kumar Perry** is a Junior Political Science Major at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, where he focuses on national politics and race. A campaign organizer and staffer in national, state, and local election campaigns, he seeks to use his research in future public service, as he strives to become a national elected official. As the primary organizer of the N.A.A.C.P. affiliate chapter on his institution's campus in Summer of 2002, Ravi stays committed to issues of diversity, equal opportunity, affirmative action, and academic ethnic inclusion of all communities. Some of his unpublished works include, *How NAFTA affects African American Farmers* (Summer 2002) and *How the New York Times Portrays Black Presidential Candidates Rev. Jesse Jackson (1984) and Rev. Al Sharpton (2004)* (Summer 2003)