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# An Ethnic Studies Model of Community Mobilization Collaborative Partnership with a High-Risk Public High School

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**Abstract:** In December 2001, the Department of Ethnic Studies at California State University, Sacramento initiated a community partnership project with Hiram Johnson High School and Sacramento's Healthy Start to promote ethnic understanding, improve academic performance, and reduce youth violence. This paper presents the community mobilization efforts by this partnership in developing and implementing a community service project to address emerging community-identified social and educational issues. The paper also examines the role of an Ethnic Studies Model in community mobilization and shares its key components.

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## Introduction

California encompasses one of the most diverse ethnic and linguistic communities in the United States<sup>1</sup>: it is 46.7% white, 32.4% Latino, 10.8% Asian American, and 6.7% African American.<sup>2</sup> The San Francisco Chronicle concluded that the "minority population" is now "squarely in the majority" in California.<sup>3</sup> The significance of this ethnic diversity, however, is rarely integrated successfully into the K-12 school curriculum. Furthermore, "diversity" curricula are generally inadequate because of their brevity and lack of in-depth analysis.

An Ethnic Studies community service project, whose aims were to promote ethnic understanding, improve academic performance, and reduce youth violence, began in December 2001, when a university-community partnership was formed. The Department of Ethnic Studies at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS) teamed up with Sacramento's Hiram Johnson High School, and Healthy Start (a resource agency advocating student support and success within the Sacramento City Unified School District) to develop and implement an Ethnic Studies curriculum at Hiram Johnson. Faculty from both CSUS and Hiram Johnson and CSUS students worked collaboratively on this initial project. The following semester the project expanded to provide tutoring and mentorship for Hiram Johnson students.

Built in 1958, Hiram Johnson High School served a primarily middle-class community and had a solid academic curriculum in its early years. During the 1970s, the demographic composition of local neighborhoods and, consequently, the high school, changed.<sup>4</sup> Today, the school population is 32.1% Asian American and Pacific Islander (29.6% and 2.5%, respectively), 27.2% white (largely of Russian descent), 22.4% Latino, and 16.3% African American.

Students at Hiram Johnson showed low Academic Performance Index scores in 2001, when only 18%–24% of students (in grades 9, 10, and 11) scored at Proficient or Advanced levels in English Language Arts; 25%–29% scored above the 50th percentile in Reading and 42%–46% in Mathematics. A 9th grade teacher stated that some of the students in class were only at a 5th grade reading level. In that same year, 597 of the school's student population of 3310 were suspended and 6 students were expelled. Not surprisingly, the school has a low graduation rate of 45%.

The Ethnic Studies Model of community mobilization efforts were in response to the academic and violence issues that emerged as a result of demographic shifts occurring at Hiram Johnson and its surrounding neighborhoods. In particular, as the school and its community became increasingly diverse, a growing number of teachers and community businesses left for other cities. In general, the Ethnic Studies Model attempts to utilize existing community and university resources to tackle emerging community issues such as academic achievement and youth violence. It does so by bringing a cultural perspective and representation to both the community service participants and the activities in which they engage. For example, faculty and students from the Depart-

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ment of Ethnic Studies (the Department), in partnership with staff at Hiram Johnson, developed an Ethnic Studies curriculum (see Appendix) to teach Hiram Johnson students about the history and experiences of African Americans, Asian Americans, Chicanos, and Native Americans and how these experiences can be interpreted within the context of race and ethnic relations. The intermediate goal was to promote ethnic understanding and tolerance and the end goals were to increase academic achievement and reduce youth violence.

### **Asian/Pacific Islander Youth Violence Prevention Center**

The community mobilization efforts were facilitated in part by the Department's partnership with the Asian/Pacific Islander Youth Violence Prevention Center at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. In October 2000, the University's School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry was awarded a grant from the CDC. The grant established the Asian/Pacific Islander Youth Violence Prevention Center (API Center), housed in the Department of Psychiatry and partnered with the National Council for Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) in Oakland, California. The API Center's primary mission is to study youth violence prevention in the API community. The Ethnic Studies Model project overlapped with the API Center's overall goal of studying and reducing youth violence in the API community, and the Center's objective to train and mentor junior researchers (e.g., undergraduate and graduate students).

The API Center supported its Director (G.Y.M.) by paying for support staff in Sacramento, and from 2002–2004 conducted a summer internship program that included Chaminade University of Honolulu, Leeward Community College, University of Hawai'i at Manoa, and California State University, Sacramento. Ten student interns from the Department conducted focus groups and interviews, co-authored reports, attended grant-writing workshops, and planned and implemented community presentations about the Center's research findings. In 2003 and 2004, several API Center staff attended and observed some Sacramento projects described in this paper, such as the Hiram Johnson community celebration.

The API Center's initial financial and staff support made it possible to develop a community service project that addressed emerging social issues. This paper describes the background, preparation, and implementation of the project, and concludes with a discussion of the key components of an Ethnic Studies Model of community mobilization.

### **Background and Preparation Setting a New Departmental Vision**

In 2001, in the spirit that led to the earliest development of Ethnic Studies programs in the late 1960s, the Department developed three general goals for a community service project: (1) To bridge university resources and community needs; (2) To serve a disadvantaged group by establishing an Ethnic Studies course at the high school level; and (3) To address emerging community issues such as youth violence.

### **Interviews and Assessment**

Department faculty involved in this project interviewed key people in service-learning and community collaboration projects on campus and in California to determine which school principals and community members to contact. After conducting interviews with suggested participants and gauging needs, resources, and support at the school and community levels, Department faculty formally proposed a community partnership with Hiram Johnson High School and Sacramento's Healthy Start agency. A subsequent needs assessment (described below), which involved CSUS students and faculty, and high school and community volunteers, was used to identify specific needs and assets of Hiram Johnson.

### **Creating Faculty Support and Involving Students**

Key faculty members and administrators brought the proposed community partnership to their respective institutions for formal approval. A meeting between the two programs was then held, allowing administrators and faculty from both campuses to meet, establish social bonds, and share ideas about the direction and scope of the partnership. Concerns were voiced by the principal and faculty at Hiram Johnson about behavioral and violence issues, and supported by data from the needs assessment. This led to agreement to develop an Ethnic Studies class for high school students, taught, in part, by university students from the Department.

The Department made a strong commitment to involve students in the planning, implementation, and management of the community collaboration. The full involvement of university students was critical to building a supportive and positive working relationship among students and faculty.

### **Ethnic Studies Curriculum**

In understanding the benefits of an Ethnic Studies curriculum, it is important to pay attention to the content of the curriculum as well as the role and responsibility of the teacher implementing and dispensing the curriculum. A curriculum that reflects diversity and efforts to understand can translate into greater

success for students and provide more resources for teachers, all of which can, in turn, address academic and violence issues among minority students.

To encourage students' goals and dreams, the curriculum must be relevant to their current lives as well as their futures, and be inclusive of the experiences of all students, not just a few.<sup>5,6</sup> A sound curriculum positions and repositions the teacher relative to students, to improve recognition of strengths and identify areas requiring improvement, exposing areas where support can help the teacher serve the academic needs of all students in the classroom. This responsive dialogue creates optimal learning conditions.<sup>7</sup> Recent studies have found that the academic performance of minority students greatly improves when teachers follow a curriculum that is culturally relevant to the lives of students.<sup>5,8-11</sup> The curriculum, therefore, must be contextualized to the unique academic needs of classroom members, including the teacher.

Recent studies have also shown that the academic performance of minority students is strongly related to teachers' expectations, knowledge of their students, and how they engage students in meaningful and genuine ways.<sup>5,8-11</sup> Teachers unaccustomed to working in diverse contexts mistakenly believe that classroom discipline translates into academic success.<sup>12</sup> Instead of being color-blind to racial and ethnic differences, teachers must be encouraged to recognize and work with those differences as strengths.<sup>7,13,14</sup> Teachers' mistaken beliefs about low socioeconomic status minority students<sup>15</sup> can affect the way the curriculum is implemented in the classroom.<sup>12</sup> More often than not, misconceptions about these students are formed from limited teacher contact with diverse communities outside of school.<sup>16</sup>

Without strong support, teachers can unintentionally develop the view that classroom management is teaching. Often, too many teachers have limited training to expand the parameters of what Haberman<sup>17</sup> refers to as the "pedagogy of poverty," when teaching becomes routine (e.g., giving information, monitoring seat work, reviewing assignments, giving tests) under the false belief that these elements alone facilitate classroom learning and teaching. The academic crisis facing multicultural classrooms demands that teachers be aware of their own underlying assumptions and how these affect their students.<sup>18</sup> Some scholars<sup>5,7</sup> believe that traditional styles of teaching emphasize values consistent with white culture while marginalizing and excluding non-white values and beliefs.

Culturally relevant teaching "respects and uses the reality, history, and perspectives of students as an integral part of educational practice" (p. 173).<sup>5</sup> Classroom teaching and learning are enriched when differences in the teacher's and students' cultural and linguistic background are acknowledged and integrated. Such efforts include examining a teacher's social, racial, and

economic background; those of the students and their families; and the history those racial groups have with each other in their neighborhoods, within the schools, and within their city.<sup>5-7,11</sup> Without supported awareness by administrators, other faculty, staff, parents, and students, teachers within diverse contexts—especially white teachers—treat minority students differently from white students.<sup>10</sup> This treatment is not a question of intended practices but rather unquestioned assumptions about what teachers may personally believe about diversity.<sup>18,19</sup>

## **Implementation of Community Service Project University–High School Efforts**

**Building institutional support.** An important part of the mobilization model involved building support at CSUS; this was provided by College and University administration. Additional strength came when the California State University Chancellor's Office selected the Department as an "engaged" department, one of nine CSU-wide departments so designated in 2001. As an engaged department, the Department set out to (1) infuse community-based work in teaching and scholarship, (2) make community-based experiences a standard for academic majors, and (3) develop a model of civic engagement and progressive change at the department level. The Department also assisted other campus departments that shared these goals.

**Class size.** The Department was surprised to learn that nearly 125 students wished to attend the Ethnic Studies course, not the anticipated 25 students. After several discussions, both parties agreed to a class size of 100 students.

**Curriculum development.** Faculty and university students worked cooperatively to develop the curriculum for high school students. A credentialed teacher at Hiram Johnson with a degree in Ethnic Studies and Communications (J.F.) was assigned to the Ethnic Studies class and given responsibility for developing and working on the curriculum with CSUS students. Students collected ethnic studies reading materials on such issues as power, identity, poverty, discrimination, and violence; created lessons plans and class handouts; and assisted in teaching the Ethnic Studies course. Some university students, who served as research interns at the API Center, conducted research on youth violence in Hawaii. Their findings were used in curriculum development at Hiram Johnson. CSUS faculty served as guest lecturers and appropriately revised their lectures and homework assignments for the high school level.

**Regular university–high school meetings.** Regular weekly meetings with CSUS teaching interns and Hiram Johnson teachers alternated between CSUS and Hiram Johnson, and served two functions. First, these "work-



ing” meetings created a close relationship among Department faculty, student teaching interns, and Hiram Johnson faculty. Department faculty were available as scholarly resources to student teaching interns and to Hiram Johnson faculty, while Hiram Johnson faculty provided valuable “community” resources to university faculty and student teaching interns. Second, faculty members from both institutions were invited to attend selected faculty meetings at CSUS and Hiram Johnson, where they reported on the progress of the Ethnic Studies class. University students were also invited to attend some meetings, where they gave brief presentations. This allowed students the opportunity to observe firsthand the importance of the collaborative partnership to both institutions.

**Role of student teaching interns.** An intrinsic component of this collaborative project was the participation of university students, many of whom came from a CSUS Ethnic Studies research methodology class. Student volunteer teaching interns at Hiram Johnson proved invaluable to the success of the project. In addition to curriculum development, students attended the weekly Ethnic Studies high school classes and assisted in teaching and implementing the course. They also functioned as tutors and mentors in the classroom, working one-on-one with high school students.

**Documentation of community collaboration project.** At nearly every step of the project, extensive documentation was done in the form of photographs and video recording. Among other uses, the photographs and videos formed part of multimedia presentations that enhanced communication about the project at national and international conferences and meetings.

## Reaching Out to the Broader Community

**Media coverage and creating good public relations.** Positive publicity preceded the actual implementation of the project. Two articles appeared in the weekly CSUS *Campus Bulletin*, and television crews (from the local NBC and FOX affiliates) covered the launch of the Ethnic Studies course at Hiram Johnson. The *Campus Bulletin* articles and the television news reports became part of all subsequent University and conference presentations about the project.

**Community outreach.** Many Department faculty and students have strong ties to their respective ethnic communities, and these community ties became an important resource in implementing the project. For instance, many university service-learners participating in this project had graduated from Hiram Johnson. Furthermore, when interpreters were needed for speakers of Hmong, Cambodian, or Spanish, the Department used its internal human resources to provide interpreters, rather than going through the

difficult and costly process of hiring outside interpreters.

**Expansion of the project.** After the first semester of the Ethnic Studies class at Hiram Johnson, the principal identified an important student service need. To improve academic performance, the principal proposed a tutoring and mentoring program for students. Hence, in Spring 2002, university students began volunteering as tutors in Math, Science, English, and Ethnic Studies classes at Hiram Johnson.

**Training workshops.** To adequately prepare university students to tutor and mentor high school students, the Department offered a two-part training workshop. Part one was an introduction and overview of the project; part two involved participation of Hiram Johnson teachers and the assignment of students to appropriate classes. A reflection session was also included to bring closure to students’ tutoring commitment. These workshops provided opportunities to assess the impact of the project on CSUS students.

**Expanding the partnership.** When the project began, its main goal was teaching ethnic understanding and tolerance through an Ethnic Studies course at Hiram Johnson to reduce youth violence. To aid in this goal, and begin the youth violence intervention and prevention earlier, the principal of Will C. Wood Middle School proposed expanding the Ethnic Studies project to his school. In addition, the following year a new principal proposed a “conference” at CSUS for Will C. Wood parents, many of whom were recent immigrants without a high school or college education. For instance, many Southeast Asian immigrant parents, from refugee camps or the mountains of Laos and Cambodia, had never set foot on a university campus. The conference and fieldtrip to CSUS gave parents an introduction to an institution of higher learning, encouraged them to visit the campus and meet faculty members, and created opportunities to attend workshops on college admissions and financial aid.

**Community celebrations.** The Department and Hiram Johnson organized a “Community Celebration” at the latter campus, to which students and parents were invited at the end of the school year. Hiram Johnson does not have an active parent–teacher organization, and parents’ only contact with school administration had been negative (i.e., when informed that their children were in trouble academically or behaviorally). Not surprisingly, parents had developed a cautious relationship with school officials. In contrast, this celebration provided an opportunity for parents to have a positive personal interaction with the school and thus break the cycle of bad news. It also allowed parents to honor the good work of their children through a community celebration.

## **An Ethnic Studies Model of Community Mobilization**

Many of the resources described above may not be replicated by other organizations, but an analysis of the program's history offers broader guidelines that may be useful in any organization's goal of community mobilization. Here are key components of the Ethnic Studies Model for intervention and community mobilization.

### **Clear Mission and Goal**

The new Department Chair articulated his vision, which included "service to the community." As a means to this end, he proposed a partnership with a community organization. This goal was met through the Department's collaborative relationship with Hiram Johnson High School and later with Will C. Wood Middle School.

### **Acceptance of and Participation from Organizations**

After the Department agreed to a partnership, it was important to secure a commitment from participating organizations, which would be crucial in developing and sustaining morale and building a team. In future meetings with community partners, the presence of most of the Department faculty fostered a strong sense of solidarity and support for the partnership.

### **Morale and Team Building**

For morale and team-building purposes, it was important to reward the efforts of faculty involved in community mobilization. Because compiling a body of work leading toward tenure is a major concern for faculty, participating members were encouraged to present about the collaborative partnership at major national and international conferences. Participating faculty were released from class time to conduct research and provided funding to attend conferences.

### **Needs and Assets Assessment**

An assessment plan for this project was designed to assess needs and assets of the Hiram Johnson High School community. Early in the partnership, a four-hour "walk-the-block" community survey was conducted by CSUS students (many of whom are multilingual), Healthy Start staff, and volunteers from VISTA, AmeriCorps, and the National Civilian Community Corps. Supervised by Department faculty and Healthy Start staff, 57 volunteers worked in groups of two or three to conduct surveys, and took advantage of community events occurring that day (e.g., a community health fair, a neighborhood association pancake breakfast, and a Southeast Asian community resident forum). They completed 352 surveys in one day.

## **Community Outreach**

No community mobilization project can succeed without the community. Faculty and students from the Department worked hard to reach out and gain the support of Hiram Johnson teachers, students, and their parents. The annual community celebration at Hiram Johnson, described above, provided a positive setting for such outreach. A one-day parent conference at CSUS provided a similar outreach to Will C. Wood Middle School, welcoming and empowering parents by providing knowledge about college admission and financial aid.

### **Media Outreach**

To gain support within the larger college and university community, the media was invited and informed about the project. This resulted in one magazine publication, two university news bulletins, and three mainstream television segments (on local NBC and FOX news). The media segments were also incorporated into conferences and meeting presentations.

### **Training Sessions**

Tutor training sessions for university students helped them understand the cultural background of Hiram Johnson and its students and provided the skills they would need. Thus, when they started tutoring, university students were motivated and confident about working with high school students, and transitioned smoothly into the classroom.

### **Evaluation**

To assess the effectiveness of the program, pre- and post-surveys were conducted. Surveys were distributed to participating high school teachers, CSUS student volunteers, parents who participated in the one-day parent conference and school fieldtrip, and high school and middle school students who took the Ethnic Studies class and/or received tutoring from CSUS students.

### **Sustainability**

A program of this magnitude cannot succeed without considerable funding. When the program started, minimal college and university funding was available. Eventually, the project received a major federal grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service, and two corporate grants from Allstate Insurance. These were invaluable in the continuation and sustainability of the program.

### **Conclusion**

Historically, many Ethnic Studies programs were developed as a result of student and community

involvement and participation.<sup>20</sup> Today, as these programs have been institutionalized at major universities, the central role of students and ethnic communities has been diminished, and mobilizing ethnic communities to solve social problems is not a priority. Scholars have pointed out the historical divergence of faculty, students, and community.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, some scholars have taken an even stronger view and argued that “in terms of the will to pursue community-oriented, community-based research in the academic setting, Asian American Studies faculty have ‘dropped the ball’.”<sup>22</sup>

The Ethnic Studies model of intervention and community mobilization has tipped the balance back toward student participation, serving the needs of ethnic communities and mobilizing them to address pressing social issues. This model brings Ethnic Studies back to its roots of student and community involvement.

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## Appendix

### Sample of an Ethnic Studies Course Syllabus

#### Introduction to Ethnic Studies: Multiculturalism in America Mr. Fabionar, Hiram Johnson High School

##### Course Description

This course is an examination of both the past and present. This year, we will focus on the cultural diversity that exists in today's society by studying past social movements, significant events, and historical moments. Our intention is to develop an understanding of how human diversity has shaped and continues to shape the way the world works today. Students are encouraged to investigate the histories of their own background, as this class will serve as a forum for celebrating the lives of all peoples.

Since this is a class about diversity, it is important to consider different perspectives on the past and present. For this reason, this class has several teachers who are experts in ethnic studies and will be assisting you in learning about the history our multicultural society. In addition to Mr. Fabionar, these teachers include students and professors from CSU, Sacramento's Ethnic Studies Department as well as local community members.

##### Course Objectives

- To develop critical reading, writing, and thinking skills.
- To learn history in a way that is relevant to every student.
- To develop skills for documenting history.
- To promote understanding between and among cultural groups.
- To work effectively and cohesively in group settings.

##### Required Materials

The following materials need to be brought to class every day:

- A three-ringed binder (to be stored in the classroom)
- A folder (to transport homework to and from class)

5 binder separators  
Pencils or pens  
Lined paper

**Class Work**

Each day, a learning objective will be posted at the front of the classroom. This objective will state *what* you will be learning, *how* you will learn it, and how you will *prove* that you have learned it. Additionally, a schedule of topics and assignments will be listed on the board every week. All class work should be stored in a three-ringed binder to be kept in class at all times.

We will be working in groups or in pairs regularly throughout the school year. Sometimes students will have the choice of those they will work with, while other times group membership will be assigned.

**Homework**

When homework is assigned, it is due—**complete and neat**—the next day our class meets in order to merit full credit. For partial credit, students may turn in homework when they turn in their portfolios at the end of each unit.

**Portfolios**

For each unit we study, students will construct portfolios that will consist of in-class work, readings, quizzes, materials generated by group work activities, and homework. In order for students to get full credit for their portfolio, they will need to complete a self-assessment of how well they have accomplished specific unit objectives. Portfolios will count significantly towards a student’s final grade, and therefore must be turned in on time and complete. For every day late, it will be penalized an entire grade (i.e. for a portfolio turned in 1 day late, a “B+” becomes a “C+.”)

**Advisory**

Students may be asked to attend an individual advisory session after school. During this meeting, students will be given the personal attention necessary for improving their academic performance in our class. Possible reasons for advisory include non-disruptive behavior such as incomplete homework, low test scores, inconsistent attendance, or a lack of involvement or motivation during class time. Although Advisory is not a punishment, attendance is required. Students will be notified to attend an advisory session at least two days in advance. If a student does not show up, a student-parent-teacher conference will be held in its place.

**Attendance**

Regular attendance is crucial for success in this class because class work counts heavily toward each student’s final grade. I am very protective of classroom time and expect students to arrive on time and ready to get going on that day’s lesson. If you are habitually tardy, parents will be notified and the student will be kept after school.

**Make-Up Work**

If a student misses class due to illness or for other excused reasons, they are responsible for making up the material **by the Monday after they return to school**. Make up work will not be accepted without a re-admit from the attendance office.

**Grading**

Everybody will have the opportunity to receive a good grade in this class. Final grades will be calculated in the following manner:

Portfolios	20%
Homework	25%
Projects and Exams	25%
Class Work	30% (attendance, effort, participation)

Grades will be posted periodically and confidentially in the classroom. Students are encouraged to check their progress regularly and to report any discrepancies (i.e. missing or incorrectly recorded scores) immediately so that I may keep as accurate records as possible.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**Ethnic Studies and Multiculturalism in America**

Unit 1	Course Introduction History of Ethnic Studies	2 weeks
Project Part 1	Introduction to Oral History Project	50 min
Unit 2	Identity [TCC]	1 week
Project Part 2	Oral History Workshop	110 min
Unit 3	Power & Resistance	1 week
Project Part 3	Student Deadline 1: Bio	50 minutes
Unit 4	Culture	1 week
Unit 5	Institutions	1 week
Project Part 4	Student Deadline 2:	50 minutes
Unit 6	Identity	1 week
Unit 7	Ethnic Specific History: Native Americans and Native Hawaiians	2 weeks
Project Part 5	Student Deadline 3: Becoming/Being an American	50 minutes
Unit 8	Ethnic Specific History: European Americans	1 week
Unit 9	Ethnic Specific History: African Americans	2 weeks
Unit 10	Ethnic Specific History: Chicanos/Latinos	2 weeks
Unit 11	Ethnic Specific History: SE Europeans/Jewish Americans	1 week
Unit 12	Ethnic Specific History: Asian Americans	2 weeks
Unit 13	Ethnic Specific History: Muslims	1 week
Unit 14	What Defines a Nation?	1 week
Unit 15	Immigration and Assimilation	2 weeks
Unit 16	Race and Labor	1 week
Unit 17	Language Diversity in the U.S.	2 weeks
Unit 18	Race and Education	2 weeks
		25 weeks