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College of Ethnic Studies and SFUSD Collaborate; Student's Succeed

San Francisco students demonstrate the benefits of Ethnic Studies

San Francisco, CA

When the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) voted to create ethnic studies classes for high school students to provide them with a culturally and community responsive classroom experience, they partnered with the College of Ethnic Studies (CoES) at San Francisco State University (SFSU). Preliminary research proves that the collaboration is working.

It is a collaboration that serves as a milestone to the historical student strike at San Francisco State. It was a strike that resulted in the establishment of the CoES there and the growth of Ethnic Studies departments, programs and courses throughout the nation. According to a research study done by the Stanford Graduate School of Education, this partnership is proving to be remarkably successful.

<http://news.stanford.edu/news/2016/january/ethnic-studies-benefits-011216.html>

The study shows that San Francisco high school ethnic studies classes have improved student attendance and increased academic performance. The study compared the academic outcomes of students who took these classes to those who did not.

Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales, Professor of Asian American Studies at the CoES served as the Academic Advisor working with SFUSD teachers, all of whom graduated from SFSU, to create the curriculum. "The goal was designed not just to develop curriculum but to develop the teachers teaching the curriculum as well. The students learn things that are relevant to their lives and they are engaged in the material. But they are also learning to use that material to develop their academic skills whether in reading, writing, critical research or critical analysis. Ethnic Studies also goes beyond the classroom and provides an education that students can use to improve their lives and the lives of the people in the community."

Classes focus on teaching American history through the lenses of race, ethnicity, nationality and cultural identity. They are designed to allow students to comprehend the academic material in the context of their shared experiences, preparing them to succeed while embracing their ethnic identities and solving problems in their communities and society at large.

Aimee Riechel, a teacher at Mission High School has been developing curriculum and teaching 9th grade ethnic studies for nearly seven years. The school offers five ethnic study classes at the

9th grade level and a 12th grade ethnic studies honors class. “Many students who have struggled in English class have enjoyed writing in the ethnic studies courses. Reading skills have improved. They actually enjoy struggling with the work assignments.”

Riechel remembers the impact the class had on one particular student. “He was failing in many of his other classes but consistently earned A’s in ethnic studies class. I was surprised that he wasn’t as successful in other classes.”

These students now do succeed in ethnic studies and in their other classes. The Stanford study found that the attendance for those enrolled in ethnic studies classes increased by 21 percentage points, GPA by 1.4 grade points and credits earned by 23. It also found significant effects on GPA specific to math and science achievement suggesting that exposure to ethnic studies could increase performance in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The data were gathered from three high school classes in the SFUSD participating in ethnic studies from 2010 to 2014.

Riechel feels lucky to be teaching these courses and emphasized the importance of the support from the CoES. “Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales guided us through workshops on how to develop curriculum and also how to develop our teaching philosophies and content knowledge.”

Without a doubt, the partnership between the CoES and the SFUSD is a win-win for everyone involved. Kenneth Monteiro, Dean of the CoES, stated “he was proud of the work of his faculty and that of SFUSD.” He was not surprised because the CoES had over 40 years of experience in producing similar results with SF State students, yet, he still acknowledged that this demonstration project was extremely important to establish the empirical evidence to expand ethnic studies opportunities for all students. “The biggest winners here are the students” and it is evident from their anonymous responses when they were asked what they learned at the end of a semester:

“I learned about my family and my culture since I never thought about it until this class.”

“That is very important that you know what is your culture, and where did your culture come from.”

“I have learned so far that you can’t judge people by their culture, once you see their ways of being, doing and seeing you’ll understand.”

These amazing results come as more districts join SFUSD, e.g. Long Beach, Los Angeles and Oakland School Districts, in adding Ethnic Studies to their curricula.