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May 9, 2016

Office of the President
Academic Affairs and the Office of the Provost
San Francisco State University
1600 Holloway Avenue, Administration Building
562 San Francisco, CA 94132

Dear President Wong and Provost Rosser:

We write on behalf of the graduate students and faculty in the Department of Ethnic Studies at the University of California, San Diego to express our grave concern regarding the reduced funding for the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University (SFSU). We stand in solidarity with the students, staff, and faculty of SFSU's College of Ethnic Studies, and we urge you to heed the demands that they have set forth. As a department that traces its institutional and intellectual lineage to the 1968 formation of the nation's first and only College of Ethnic Studies at SFSU, we see the defunding of SFSU's College of Ethnic Studies as a danger to the health and wellbeing of our field. It not only jeopardizes the recruitment and retention of students, staff, and faculty of color on your campus and the educational experience of all students at your university; it also sets a dangerous precedent for other Ethnic Studies programs, departments, and instruction across the country.

As of May 2, 2016 a group of students at San Francisco State University have initiated a hunger strike until you allow for direct funding for the College of Ethnic Studies to “not only sustain itself but also thrive.”¹ These students’ resolve eloquently demonstrates that Ethnic Studies is not a luxury for students of color and the communities SFSU seeks to serve—it is, in the most literal sense of the word, *vital* to their education. We want to reiterate that Ethnic Studies is a primary pathway for students of color and working class students to come to see themselves as knowledge producers and integral members of a campus community.

The College of Ethnic Studies at SFSU has a history of courageous social justice education that provides a model for colleges and universities across the country. Given such a renowned and respected legacy, SFSU truly has the opportunity to continue to lead the kinds of exciting changes happening in higher education. While small in size, it is perhaps the most well known of any of SFSU’s colleges outside of the university. Emerging from a series of actions organized by various student groups, including the Black Studies Union, Third World Liberation Front, as well

¹ <http://www.sfexaminer.com/sfsu-students-wont-eat-ethnic-studies-demands-met/>

as community members from the larger Bay Area, the College of Ethnic Studies addressed the lack of access, misrepresentation and general neglect of indigenous peoples and people of color within the university's curriculum and programs. The demands set forth to preserve and advance the College of Ethnic Studies today reflects a history of struggle by a coalition of student activists of color and community organizers, to establish a department on campus that reflects their communities' intellectual traditions and cultural expressions.

SFSU's College of Ethnic Studies faculty and academic programs have encouraged UC campuses and other CSUs to live up to our responsibility as universities to the promotion of equity and commitment to social justice. Within the past two decades, UC campuses began instituting a diversity requirement—often classes from Ethnic Studies departments—for all students, to better understand the perspectives of others whose histories and social conditions may differ from their own. Furthermore, countless disciplines have now grown to depend on Ethnic Studies, including Gender and Sexuality Studies, American Studies, Cultural Studies, Sociology, Literature, and History. The rest of the campus depends on the labor performed through the College of Ethnic Studies. If the College ceases, the labor of creating equity in education will return to being an uncompensated expectation from faculty of color, rather than a core element of an SFSU education.

Notably, in the past several months, student activists and faculty at institutions including Yale University, University of Missouri, and Emory University have stirred national conversations on matters concerning race, gender, and class on university campuses, pressing for administrators to support and initiate institutional change around issues of diversity and inclusion. One of the many demands that echoed across these campuses was the creation of a university-wide Ethnic Studies curriculum. This progressive work has been concurrent with the tremendous influence of Black Lives Matter networks and in coalition with many other concerned student movements.

These changes underway are exciting—for in many ways, the current historical moment is not unlike the important moment when your College of Ethnic Studies emerged from similar campus and community activism. It is important to note that the current changes have also provoked white supremacist backlashes, threatening the physical and psychological/mental wellness of students of color—a population that comprises the majority at public universities across the state of California. Currently, the withdrawal of funds from the College of Ethnic Studies has proven itself to be a destabilizing force to the wellbeing and intellectual legacy of students that constitute San Francisco State University's history. This suggests that the university and its governing motives are not influenced by student needs and demands, but by a more troubling logic.

We understand the threatened defunding of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco as part of a larger pattern of disinvestment and the state's retreat from long standing commitments to public education as a vital democratic project. The result has been the dramatic privatization of public goods and a devastating explosion of student debt that threatens the futures of students and entire communities. In recent history, cuts to higher education have often been abetted by divisive culture war rhetoric that disregards or actively attacks important fields like Ethnic Studies devoted to thinking about difference and inequality. Graffiti-writing racists and other reactionary enemies of democracy and informed critical thought are only emboldened when administrations defund and devalue Ethnic Studies. We urge SFSU to stand against this race to the bottom and recommit to the values of public education.

Given the history of Ethnic Studies at SFSU, we feel you are in a unique position of leadership. We call on you to heed the demands of students pressing for you to fund and allow for the advancement of the College of Ethnic Studies, in order to ensure the quality education San Francisco State and California's public higher education systems promise the people of California and beyond.

Sincerely,

Graduate Students and Faculty in the Department of Ethnic Studies, UC San Diego