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## Cal State Northridge faculty members say system is attacking ethnic studies

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For the California State University system, it's a bit of streamlining. For ethnic and gender studies professors at CSU Northridge, it's not only overreach, but threatens the study of marginalized groups. Objectively, all that is clear right now is that the CSU system's attempt to make its campuses' general-education requirements more uniform is up in the air.

As it stands, an executive order from the CSU system chancellor's office would make the general-education requirements at all CSU campuses uniform, limiting them to five categories -- currently referred to in some documents as "areas" and in others as "sections" -- labeled A-E.

Current categories include English language communication and critical thinking; scientific inquiry and quantitative reasoning; arts and humanities; social sciences; and lifelong learning and self-development.

A sticking point, however, arises at Northridge, which stands out among CSU campuses for having Section F: Comparative Cultural Studies. Classes that can fulfill the Section F general-education requirement include courses in Africana studies, American Indian studies, Asian-American studies, Central American studies and gender and women's studies. Leaders from each of the above departments -- as well as the coordinator for American Indian studies, which is a program but not a department -- [signed a petition](#) <sup>(1)</sup> circulating among some faculty members who opposed the change, which comes at the cost of their courses standing out as general-education requirements.

"[Executive Order] 1100 eviscerates CSUN's unique and exemplary Section F Comparative Cultural Studies/Gender, Race, Class and Ethnicity Studies, and Foreign Languages, denying CSUN students an education based on cultural competency and respect for diversity," the petition says.

And the timing couldn't be worse, critics of the chancellor's office say.

"Given our current social and political climate and the demographics of California, we need to continue to resist attacks on historically excluded peoples on the basis of race, ability, gender, sex and sexuality, and to support departments and programs that protect and empower our communities," the petition says.

CSU system officials said the order was issued in an effort to make general-education requirements uniform across all campuses -- a move that is especially helpful for the 67,000 students who transfer into CSU campuses from other four-year and community colleges.

"We had a threefold purpose in devising this executive order," said Christine Mallon, assistant vice chancellor for academic programs and faculty development for the CSU system. "And it is in response to what we've heard from students, and from outside parties including the Legislature -- concerns about how students might understand or misunderstand our requirements, how they could be streamlined to facilitate graduation and how, unintentionally, we may have policies that could add to inequities in student success."

With streamlined requirements, Mallon said, students would be on an even playing field no matter where they were in the CSU system. This would especially prove helpful for transfer students, she said.

"The executive order was to help students," she said. "Diversity and training our students how to live in a multicultural and global society is part of the CSU mission ... all of these things are really important for us to facilitate students' ability to get the courses they need, when they need them, and graduate on time -- while still getting the courses we all agree are part of what is in the breadth of a bachelor's degree."

Northridge is obligated to be in compliance with the executive order by fall 2018. How it will do so, or if it will do so -- although the order being rescinded, despite calls from some faculty, seems like a long shot, at this point -- remains to be seen. A teach-in dedicated to defending the Section F programs was scheduled for tonight, according to the Facebook page for the American Indian Student Association. The event was promoted by the coordinator of the American Indian studies program. Additionally, public statements from various departments have called for the rescinding of the order.

"We collectively resist and reject this violation of Faculty Consultation and Governance. These proposed changes reinforce the already profound divisions that exist in our society," a statement on the website for the Department of Asian American Studies says.

Many who have organized against the order have said they support making general-education requirements more uniform -- except other campuses should follow Northridge's route, not the other way around.

"While GE portability sounds like a good idea, it needs better-thought-out implementation. We propose that CSUN's GE model, which aligns with the findings of the CSU Task Force on the Advancement of Ethnic Studies convened by the chancellor's office, itself become the model across the CSU," a statement from the Department of Gender and Women's Studies says. "In its current form, EO 1100 does the exact opposite and aligns with the current push to end diversity in this country."

How exactly Section F will be accommodated remains to be seen. CSU system and Northridge officials pointed to multiple options, including making Section F courses a separate graduation requirement that isn't a general-education requirement, or splitting the courses among the other existing general-education sections.

Though any changes to the status quo have been rejected by a large number of Section F professors -- whose enrollment numbers might be at risk -- officials at Northridge said that solutions are still being debated.

"[Enrollment numbers] depend on what the solution is," said Elizabeth Adams, associate vice president for student success at Northridge. "The curriculum is the purview of the faculty ... there are some proposed solutions that would maintain -- we think -- the enrollment in these courses."

The urge to maintain enrollment comes both from a point of looking out for the departments, Adams said, and because the university feels the content is important.

The Faculty Senate, or at the very least, the senate committee on curriculum, will debate and craft its opinion to the executive order next week, said Stella Theodoulou, Northridge's vice provost for academic affairs. From there, that opinion will be delivered to the office of the provost, who will report to the system chancellor.

"Both our president and our provost are committed to maintaining the comparative and cross-cultural studies requirement, but at the same time, we are part of a system and we understand we must comply with the executive order," Theodoulou said. "We are trying to work with our faculty and encourage our faculty to find solutions that maintain the commitment, while also conforming to the executive order."

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**Links:**

[1] [https://www.change.org/p/csu-chancellor-timothy-p-white-rescind-the-revised-executive-order-1100/nftexp/ex5/control/20563535?recruiter=20563535&utm\\_source=share\\_petition&utm\\_medium=facebook&utm\\_campaign=autopublish&utm\\_term=psf\\_combo\\_share\\_initial&utm\\_content=ex5%3Acontrol](https://www.change.org/p/csu-chancellor-timothy-p-white-rescind-the-revised-executive-order-1100/nftexp/ex5/control/20563535?recruiter=20563535&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=facebook&utm_campaign=autopublish&utm_term=psf_combo_share_initial&utm_content=ex5%3Acontrol)

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