

Date of Hearing: April 23, 2019

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Jose Medina, Chair

AB 1460 (Weber) – As Amended March 21, 2019

**SUBJECT:** California State University: graduation requirement: ethnic studies.

**SUMMARY:** Requires the California State University (CSU), to provide courses in ethnic studies at each CSU campus, and requires the CSU to require, as part of the CSU graduation requirements, the completion of one 3-unit course in ethnic studies. Specifically, **this bill**:

- 1) Expresses that the intent of the Legislature is for CSU students to acquire the knowledge and skills that will help them comprehend the diversity and social justice history of the United States and of the society in which they live in order to enable them to contribute to society as responsible and constructive citizens.
- 2) Requires each campus of the CSU, commencing with the 2020-21 academic year, to provide courses in ethnic studies.
- 3) Requires the CSU to collaborate with the CSU Council on Ethnic Studies and the Academic Senate of the California State University (ASCSU) in order to develop core competencies to be achieved by students who complete an ethnic studies course.
- 4) Requires the Council and ASCSU to approve the core competencies, pursuant to (3) above, before the start of the 2020-21 academic year.
- 5) Requires the CSU, commencing with the 2020-21 academic year, to require, as an undergraduate graduation requirement, the completion of one 3-unit course in ethnic studies.
- 6) Prohibits the CSU, when implementing the provisions of this measure, from increasing the required number of units to graduate from the CSU with a baccalaureate degree.
- 7) Specifies that the graduation requirement, pursuant to (5) above, does not apply to a postbaccalaureate student who is enrolled in a baccalaureate degree program at the CSU if the student has satisfied either of the following:
  - a) The student has earned a baccalaureate degree from an institution accredited by a regional accrediting agency; and,
  - b) The student has completed an ethnic studies course at a postsecondary educational institution accredited by a regional accrediting agency.

**EXISTING LAW:** Confers upon the CSU Trustees the powers, duties, and functions with respect to the management, administration, control of the CSU system and provides that the Trustees are responsible for the rule of government of their appointees and employees (Education Code Sections 66606 and 89500, et seq.).

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown

**COMMENTS:** *How did we get here?* During 2016, Governor Brown’s Office, the Department of Finance, and the Legislature expressed concerns about some inconsistencies with the CSU General Education (GE) requirements, and encouraged the CSU to reexamine its policies and practices.

After over a year of consultation and discussion, the CSU Chancellor’s Office issued Executive Order (EO) 1100-Revised. The CSU also saw the reexamination as consistent with CSU’s efforts to remove administrative barriers to student success, one of six pillars, under Graduation Initiative 2025.

The goals of EO 1100-Revised were to:

- 1) Provide greater clarity regarding GE units, outlining the explicit minimum and maximum number of units for general education requirements;
- 2) Ensure equitable treatment of all students so that transfer students and entering freshmen have the same general education requirements; and,
- 3) Facilitate degree completion by explicitly allowing double counting of units that satisfy both GE requirements and major requirements.

Committee Staff understands that while no aspect of EO 1100-Revised prohibited a campus from requiring Ethnic Studies courses or any other courses within the established GE framework or as a campus requirement, this measure appears to be in response to the incorrect assumption that EO 1100-Revised effectively lowered the demand for Ethnic Studies, Comparative Cultural Studies, Gender, Race, Class, and Foreign Languages at many CSU campuses.

To note, the adoption of EO 1100-Revised was to clarify and align GE policies in an effort to increase graduation rates and eliminate achievement gaps.

*Need for this measure.* According to the author, “Current law does not require students take an ethnic studies course. Before EO 1100, some campuses required ethnic studies courses above the 48 GE units. Unless this bill becomes law, ethnic studies courses will be decimated by EO 1100”.

This measure, in part, requires the CSU, to provide courses in ethnic studies at each CSU campus, and requires the CSU to require, as part of the CSU graduation requirements, the completion of one 3-unit course in ethnic studies.

*Ethnic studies courses at the CSU.* Commencing in 1968, CSU campuses responded to student demands and struggles and developed Ethnic studies units in different forms. Some institutions like San Francisco State created a school, which later became a College of Ethnic Studies. Other institutions’ separate and autonomous Ethnic Studies units became departments or programs, while others like Sacramento State and CSU, Fullerton formed a department constituted by different Ethnic Studies programs. These varied distinct and combined Ethnic Studies departments and programs focused on and fostered interdisciplinary scholarship, discourse and projects of national and international scope and import.

Presently, through the system of shared governance whereby faculty and campuses make curricula decisions together, each CSU campus has established a cultural diversity requirement. The requirement may be fulfilled by a separate course, be part of GE requirements, or be embedded throughout GE categories.

Committee Staff understands that many courses within Anthropology, Ethnic Studies, Sociology, or History departments, among others, focus on cultural diversity; therefore, it appears that diversity learning outcomes are integrated throughout GE in the CSU.

*Task forces of the CSU and ASCSU.* The CSU Task Force on the Advancement of Ethnic Studies, convened in January 2014 by the CSU Chancellor, in order to address and respond to concerns about some Ethnic Studies programs being underfunded. The task force brought numerous CSU faculty, staff, and CSU presidents together to discuss various issues and provide recommendations.

In 2017, the Chancellor released a summary of the steps taken by campuses to respond to these recommendations, including the following:

- 1) Ensuring that ethnic studies courses are well represented in GE categories;
- 2) Increasing faculty in Ethnic Studies; and,
- 3) Expanding course offerings in ethnic studies or related study areas.

To note, Committee Staff understands that over the past two Academic hiring cycles, CSU campuses have hired 45 tenure track ethnic studies faculty; which is a significant increase over the previous two cycles when said number was only 27.

The CSU faculty continue to address the concerns about Ethnic Studies programs and courses, through work by the ASCSU. Over the past two years, the ASCSU has convened a GE Task Force, which issued a draft report in February 2019.

One of the recommendations of this report is to include a specific 3-unit requirement within CSU GE for a course on cultural diversity within the United States. Presumably, this course would include courses across the spectrum of Ethnic Studies while providing flexibility to campuses.

*Academic freedom.* While academic freedom may mean different things to different individuals, at the core of academic freedom, is the establishment of faculty members' right to remain true to their pedagogical philosophy and intellectual commitments; it preserves the intellectual integrity of our higher education systems. Additionally, academic freedom means that the political, religious, or philosophical beliefs of politicians, administrators, and members of the public cannot be imposed on faculty or students.

As currently drafted, this measure requires the CSU to require a specific 3-unit course for graduation in ethnic studies.

*The Committee should consider the precedent that would be set with this bill and determine whether it infringes on academic freedom and, conversely, whether the decisions on curricula and graduation requirements should remain in the hands of CSU faculty and administrators.*

*Student success.* To create a more seamless pathway for community college students to transfer to the CSU, in 2010, the Legislature, in conjunction with the community colleges and the CSU, created the Associate Degree for Transfer (AD/T); which, in part, specifies that students are not required to take more than 60 additional semester units to complete their baccalaureate degree at the CSU if they enter the CSU with an AD/T degree.

To note, according to the CSU Chancellor's Office, since the establishment of the AD/T program, over 112,000 transfer pathways between CSU and CCC have been approved. A concern exists that if this measure passes, the articulated pathways could potentially have to be reexamined in order to accommodate the new requirement.

Additionally, in an effort to increase graduation rates for all students, the CSU created the Graduation Initiative (GI) 2025, which relies on streamlining unit requirements, while maintaining academic quality. To ensure GI 2025 would be a success, a great deal of work has been done to ensure that students make timely progress to degree and that nearly all CSU degrees can be completed in 120-units so that full-time students can complete and graduate within four years.

To note, currently 96% of all CSU baccalaureate degrees require no more than 120 units, up from 75% in 2005.

Although this measure specifies that the amount of units to graduate shall not be increased, *the Committee should consider whether an additional course requirement would result in many degree programs having to be restructured, particularly those in high unit majors (such as Business, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math).*

*The Committee may wish to ask the author if, creating additional requirements for degree completion will undo years of work on transfer pathways and potentially undermine recent efforts to streamline GE requirements; and if this will increase time to degree for CSU students?*

*Timeline for implementation?* Should this measure be enacted, requiring the 3-unit course in ethnic studies to be developed; hire qualified faculty to teach the course, and become a requirement for graduation by the 2020-21 academic year may not be a realistic timeframe.

*If this measure moves forward, the author may wish to work with the CSU in order to determine if the timeframe outlined in this measure is realistic, or if the CSU will need additional time in order to best implement all the provisions of this measure.*

*Arguments in support.* According to the California Faculty Association (CFA), sponsors of this measure, "Studies have found that both students of color and White students benefit academically and socially from taking ethnic studies courses". Additionally, CFA contends that, "All CSU campuses currently offer ethnic studies" and that this measure will, "help to improve academic and social outcomes for the vast majority of CSU students".

*Arguments in opposition.* According to the systemwide Academic Senate for the CSU, "Legislative involvement in setting degree requirements could ultimately mean that the government's agenda supersedes faculty expertise as the basis for curricular decisions". Additionally, ASCSU contends that, "If AB 1460 becomes law, it would set a precedent for

future curricular mandates to be imposed by the legislature, potentially jeopardizing not only faculty control over the curriculum but the quality of the university degree itself”.

*Prior legislation.* AB 2408 (Weber) of 2018, which was held by this Committee, per the request of the author, was very similar in nature to this measure.

**REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:****Support**

Black Student Union at Sacramento State University  
California Faculty Association (Sponsor)  
California League of United Latin American Citizens  
Los Angeles County Democratic Party  
National Council for Black Studies  
National Council of Negro Women, Sacramento Valley Section  
Service Employees International Union - California

**Opposition**

Academic Senate of the California State University  
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo  
California State University  
California State University Maritime Academy  
California State University, Channel Islands  
California State University, Chico  
California State University, Fullerton  
California State University, San Bernardino  
California State University, San Marcos

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