

Rationale for Proposed AES Major

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Overview of Willamette's AES Program

The American Ethnic Studies major is a program that fosters a critical perspective that seeks, as its purpose of inquiry, to explore how societal structures and ideological discourses shape, influence, and constrain human activity. As the program's mission statement indicates, I can discover and explore "how complex social relations of race, ethnicity, culture, and indigeneity, in conjunction with other social systems and structures, can give rise to unjust social relations, limit human endeavor, and normalize privilege and oppression." The primary focus of this program is on People of Color and their lived realities of racism, ethnocentrism and social resistance and change. The courses also often examine the issues of white power and privilege, the normalized structures and culture that preserve social inequalities in the workplace, public policy, education, and so forth.

The coursework and scholarship in this program seeks to confront issues of social change and social injustice by the careful analysis of practices that frequently do not receive sustained critical assessment. American Ethnic Studies courses cover a broad range of historical and contemporary topics, both in the humanities and in the social sciences. In this interdisciplinary program I have learned comparative theories and methods of inquiry that prepare me to engage the responsibilities of citizenship in an increasingly multicultural and multiethnic U.S. society. Over the past two years of taking AES courses, I have been engaged in a total student experience that provided me with a reflective and socially relevant academic experience.

Rationale for Application

Over a year ago, during the spring of my sophomore year, I began this process of creating my own major in American Ethnic Studies. It was at this time, as my engagement and interest in psychology was dwindling, that I realized I was developing a passion for learning about these societal structures that shape, influence, and constrain my life along with others. After being introduced to the perspectives, methods, and values of AES as a minor, I discover I had finally found my "calling". However, when I submitted my application last spring before leaving Willamette for a summer in Chicago and a semester abroad in Spain, I was asked to hold off in my process by the AES faculty while they further developed the program through a series of retreats. Since that time, while I was abroad, the faculty decided upon its goals and structure, designing a "skeleton" major that my proposal now fits within.

My Integrated Major

I have given great thought into the design of this major, while at the same time taking into consideration the goals of my liberal arts education. After investigating the inner workings of several different Ethnic Studies departments and programs across the nation, I hoped to design a major that followed both the University's guidelines and some of these "best practices". The program I have designed is not just a patchwork of random courses pieced together; rather, it is an integrated and deliberate framework. This American Ethnic Studies major is rooted in two core classes: "Introduction to AES" and "Theory and Methods of AES." Together these two

courses lay the foundation for my major allowing me the opportunity to discover and explore theories and concepts fundamental to American Ethnic Studies and any major at Willamette. Anchored in the four thematic areas of this program (History, Power, Culture, and Citizenship), these two courses provide a solid foundation for all other elective AES courses. The third core class, my Senior Thesis, will allow me to pull together these foundational courses and seven reinforcing electives to investigate more comprehensively my own area of research and career discernment. The other seven elective courses that would build upon the core classes and prepare me for my senior experience are also integrated and intentional. Following the structure of many major universities, I planned to reinforce these core classes with electives in select courses from the ethnic-specific concentrations of African American Studies, Chicano/a/Latin@ Studies, Native American Studies, and if offered, Asian American Studies. I have taken "Introduction to Black Studies," I am currently enrolled in "Latin@ Voices" and am tutoring at Chemawa Indian School; I will also take an Asian American course this coming year from the post-doctorate fellow Sudarat Musikawong. At the same time, I took into account enrolling in ethnic-specific courses within a variety of disciplines including Rhetoric and Media Studies, Anthropology, Sociology, and History so as to obtain the true interdisciplinary experience and a true liberal arts education.

In addition to focusing upon ethnic-specific groups and class disciplinary courses, my AES electives are also fulfilling the goals of the AES program. In terms of historical focus the "History of American Immigration" class and "Latino/Latina Voices" class that I am currently enrolled in have allowed me the opportunity to analyze the historical construction of race and ethnicity and gain a better understanding of history's role in shaping the current landscape of the United States. The thematic area of culture again has been present in every American Ethnic Studies course I have taken, specifically in the Chemawa Partnership Program, through my experience with the Chicago Center Internship and Field Studies program, and again in my Latino/Latina Voices class. Through these classes, I have explored the role of symbolic and aesthetic expressions of historically underrepresented ethnic communities particularly in terms of the construction of culture as a tool to maintain, resist, and or transform privilege and oppression. Power, the third thematic area, has been the over arching theme of every AES course I have and will take. Specifically, power is a key topic in my Introduction to AES and Theory and Methods classes, along with Latino/Latina Voices, and Race and Ethnic Relations class. Through these classes I have gained a more complete understanding of the political, economic, and societal dimensions of race and ethnicity and ways in which power is embedded in these relationships. Finally, Citizenship, the fourth thematic area is present in most of the American Ethnic Studies classes I have taken. Emphasis on this theme is present in my History of Immigration class where I am currently doing a service-learning project with Colonial Libertad in addition to an alternate spring break service-learning trip to Miami. For my "Theory and Methods" course, I am doing participatory action research and helping to develop the Chemawa program into one in which students actively participate in their own education. In addition to this course, the Latino/Latina Voices class had allowed me to consider the emergence of voice, resistance, and protest in the context of historical experiences of racial and ethnic marginalization in U.S. society. This component of a voice of resistance and protest has equipped with the tools necessary to raise issues of injustice through communities like the Concerned Students for Social Justice, creating a documentary of Latino/Latina voices of Miami, working to protest racial discrimination while an intern at the Rainbow Push Coalition in Chicago, Illinois, developing

programs for Native youth, participating in social activism such as immigration marches, and investigating inequitable treatment by the United States government toward Cuban and Haitian communities of Miami. The American Ethnic Studies program has allowed me to come alive through academics and activism and permitted me the ability to finally connect my head and my heart, a praxis I have only found to be possible through American Ethnic Studies embodiment.

Value of My AES Major

Although I have learned much from the seven American Ethnic Studies courses that I have already taken, I believe that I have so much more to explore, through at least four AES electives my senior year, as well as my senior experience. As Mark Twain wrote, “A good education leaves much to be desired.” In my courses so far, I have realized how little my own life has prepared me for addressing the themes of AES, and they have left me wanting more. Through this major, I will continue to acquire the tools and perspectives regarding to inequality, racism, and social justice. This education will help me to discern my professional direction and explore how I might best serve society as an agent of social change.

After growing up in an isolated, non-diverse community, an American Ethnic Studies base analysis of race, ethnicity, and culture would help prepare me for the differences of living in a global city, ultimately preparing me for an increasingly diverse society. I plan to continue to broaden my horizons by serving on an international level through work with the Peace Corps. After serving in the Peace Corps, I plan to attend graduate school and become a Nurse Practitioner. With this additional degree I plan to become a traveling nurse working with children poverty-stricken areas of the world. An American Ethnic Studies degree from Willamette University will provide me with a framework to practice culturally competent medicine and health care. Perhaps more importantly, this major will deepen my passion to help transform the world in which we ALL live.