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Asian-American center proposal to be finalized

"Probably the greatest benefit an Asian-American studies program would bring to the University is new academic exploration." -- Jeff Tsai, Ad Hoc Committee on Asian-American Studies

LEAH RAUCH Daily Texan Staff

A UT committee will meet Friday to finalize a proposal for an Asian-American studies center, and members said Wednesday that UT President Robert Berdahl will receive the recommendation this month.

The center will be one of several proposals in a report from the Ad Hoc Committee on Asian-American studies, said Jeff Tsai, a committee member.

The report also will include separate proposals to add an Asian-American studies degree program, increase the number of Asian-American studies courses offered at the University and begin recruitment of faculty members that could teach these classes, Tsai said.

What the committee will actually be doing is submitting many different proposals that examine the different ways we could go about achieving an increase in Asian-American studies courses that are offered to students," Tsai said.

Committee members recognize that the immediate establishment of a center and degree program may not be financially feasible for the University, Tsai added. He said the various proposals are designed to encourage a compromise with Berdahl.

Edward Rhoads, a committee member and an associate professor of history, said he has no idea what kind of response the proposals will receive from Berdahl.

But he said he hopes Berdahl will approve the establishment of a diverse field of Asian-American studies courses.

Rhoads, who teaches a course on the history of Chinese and Asian-Americans, said there is strong student interest in these courses.

"I think there is student interest, [and] not just among Asian-American students, in the experiences and contributions of Asian-Americans," Rhoads said. "And if there is student interest, the University should try to satisfy that interest."

There are UT professors who could teach some Asian-American courses, but the University will need to recruit faculty members to develop a broader Asian-American studies program, Rhoads said.

Tsai said he is confident Berdahl will work with the committee to work toward its goals. He said the request for an Asian-American studies program is not a political issue and would contribute to the academic strength of the University.

"Probably the greatest benefit an Asian-American studies program would bring to the University is new academic exploration," Tsai said. "Academic exploration is something the University strives for and something students expect when they come here."

Tsai added that a center also would be an appropriate addition to academic programs due to the growing Asian-American population at the University and in the state.

But Chris Lippincott, president of the UT Liberal Arts Council, said the establishment of a center would require the use of funds that could better be used to recruit faculty.

"I like the idea of hiring professors who are willing to teach courses that discuss Asian-American issues," Lippincott said. "But if a center is established, it will involve a major outlay of resources and this money could be better spent on recruiting additional faculty members."

Of the approximately 48,000 UT student population, Asian-Americans totaled 4,397 for the 1994-95 school year, according to the Office of Institutional Studies.

Tsai said Friday's meeting will be open to anyone interested in the proposal, and it should be the last committee meeting before the proposal is given to Berdahl.

The committee was formed in response to a Student Government resolution last spring supporting the establishment of an Asian-American Studies

department and degree program.

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