

Irwin Ai-Bong Tang, Organizer
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Dr. Robert Berdahl, President
University of Texas at Austin
Main Building, Suite 400
Austin, Texas

Dear President Berdahl,

We need not remind the President of our University about the importance of a truly multicultural education and multicultural curricula. You have shown your support for multiculturalism, and you are knowledgeable on the subject. Nevertheless, it does not hurt to restate the facts:

- Asian Americans make up the second largest minority group at UT Austin.
- Among U.S. universities, UT Austin has one of the highest populations of Asian Americans.
- Texas has the fourth largest population of Asian Americans in the nation.
- Among the universities in Texas, UT Austin is the most popular among Asian Americans.
- Despite UT's popularity, many Asian Americans are frustrated by the lack of recognition paid to Asian Americans on this campus. This may not seem the case simply because they have not participated in loud protests to say so.
- There exist at UT Austin a Center for African and African American Studies, a Center for Mexican American Studies, a Mexican Center, a Center for Asian Studies, and a great number of experts on Europe and European Americans and immigrants, and even gender studies. But there is no Center for Asian American Studies. In fact, there is not even a professor at UT Austin whose expertise is in the study of Asian Americans.
- In the South and Southwest, there is not a single Center for Asian American Studies despite the large numbers and growing presence of Asian Americans in these regions.
- Many Asian Americans see the establishment of an Asian American Studies Center as a way to balance the lack of support and recognition of Asian Americans at UT Austin.

A "multicultural" education that excludes the study of Asian Americans cannot be truly multicultural. And a "diverse" university that does not recognize and respect its full diversity cannot be truly diverse. To be true to its tradition of multiculturalism and diversity, UT Austin needs to establish a Center for Asian American Studies.

I am the president of the Asian Relations Committee (ARC). The ARC, along with several other Asian American and Asian organizations have united to form the University Coalition for Asian American Studies. Our mission is to establish a full Asian American Studies Center at UT Austin within the next five years. This Asian American Studies Center would operate autonomous of other centers and departments, but would round out the "Ethnic Studies" field that already exists here (but includes only African American and Mexican American Studies). The Center for Asian American Studies would be a full-fledged Center on par with the other Ethnic Studies Centers. A timeline we have developed based both upon our goals and practical considerations follows:

- In Spring 1996, two Asian American Studies courses are available for students. These two courses are listed in the Course Schedule with the other Ethnic Studies courses under the heading of "Asian American Studies."
- By Fall 1996, a Director for the Center for Asian American Studies is hired. The Director both teaches courses and organizes the expansion of the Center.
- By Fall 2000, the Center for Asian American Studies is a full-fledged Center, with faculty, research projects, graduate students, and undergraduates. By this time, the number of Asian Americans in the state of Texas has surpassed one million.

We propose that the President form a task force of relevant students, faculty, and administrators that would study the idea of and write a plan for establishing a Center for Asian American Studies. Our Coalition should be involved in this co-operative effort.

Of course, our movement has been gathering strength within the student community. Our organizing efforts have thus far included the following:

- We have the full support of the STAND party which now occupies virtually all of the seats of the new Students' Association. New Vice-President Brandon Bichler has made the establishment of an Asian American Studies Center a personal top priority. We are cooperating with STAND in order to pass early in their new session a resolution to establish Asian American Studies. We also have support from such STAND representatives as Tito Garcia.
- We have produced a two-part videotape documentary that we are using as an educational tool in our efforts to establish the Center. The documentary which includes "Challenges Facing Asian Americans at the University of Texas" and "Asian Americans on the State of the University of Texas" was produced by one of our most active organizers, Dr. Andrew Chin. Dr. Chin is a lecturer at the LBJ School of Public Affairs and also the producer of a local television show, "Asian

American Austin."

- We are organizing with Asian and Asian American organizations at UT and in Austin. We are adding organizations to our coalition quickly. At this moment, our most dedicated individuals are also active members of Asian Relations Committee, Chinese Bible Study, Lambda Phi Epsilon, South Asian Progressive Action Group, Indian Students Association, Asian American Alliance, and other organizations. We are giving talks at organization meetings and showing our documentary, as well as collecting signatures for a petition.
- We are in communication with faculty that support our cause. We are garnering support from the existing ethnic studies centers.
- We are working with the major news media. We have given them all copies of the documentary video and press releases.
- We hope to begin working with the President and his Administration to establish the Center for Asian American Studies in a manner that befits the high dignity of this University.

We hope that we can meet with you within the next week or two. We are eager to work with you to improve our University. Please contact me, Irwin Tang, at the above address and phone, or Dr. Andrew Chin at (W) 471-8325 or (H) 479-8416.

Sincerely,

Irwin Ai-Bong Tang
Coalition for Asian American Studies

enclosures: Two-Part Video Documentary
Handout on Asian American Studies
Tentative Student Resolution to be Proposed through the SA

xc: Ricardo Romo, Executive Vice-President and Provost
James Vick, Vice-President of Student Affairs
Brandon Bichler, Vice-President, Students' Association

Asian American Studies: Questions and Answers

Q. What is Asian American Studies?

- A. Asian American Studies is an interdisciplinary, scholarly examination of the experiences, perspectives and contributions of ethnic Asians in America. It covers more than 200 years of American history and includes both the proudest and most shameful episodes in the development of the United States.

Q. Isn't Asian Studies the same thing?

- A. Asian Studies is an interdisciplinary field which examines the cultures, histories and languages of Asian countries. The analogy "Asian Studies is to Asian American Studies as Mexican Studies is to Mexican American Studies" is precise. Asian Studies is inappropriate as a substitute for Asian American Studies because Asian Americans are a part of America's culture and history. Asian Studies does not provide a significant amount of insight into the experiences or perspectives of Asian Americans.

Q. Why is Asian American Studies important?

- A. Because of the persistence of many conditions over many generations of the Asian American experience, including the misperception that Asian Americans are not full-fledged Americans, Asian American Studies raises important questions about America's historical mission and cultural destiny which are not addressed elsewhere in the curriculum.

Since fewer than 1 in 250 Texas teachers is Asian American, and even fewer teachers have any exposure to Asian American Studies, the vast majority of students arrive at UT with no academic exposure to the Asian American perspective. They should not leave that way.

Q. Is Asian American Studies a legitimate field of study?

- A. It is as legitimate as any other field in Ethnic Studies, including African-American Studies and Mexican-American Studies, both of which are offered at the University of Texas.

Q. Which other universities offer Asian American Studies?

- A. The list of U. S. universities which offer an Asian American Studies program is steadily growing, as universities have learned to overcome misperceptions and inertia. As of August 1994, the list included:

Bryn Mawr	Cornell	Queen's College CUNY
U. California-Berkeley	Hawaii	San Francisco State
U. California-Davis	Hunter College CUNY	San Jose State
UCLA	U. Massachusetts-Boston	School of the Art Institute
U. California-San Diego	Michigan	USC
U. California-Santa Barbara	Northwestern	Stanford
Chicago	Oberlin	SUNY Stonybrook
Claremont McKenna	U. Pennsylvania	Washington
Colorado	Pomona	Yale
Columbia		

It is very likely that among the universities not on this list, the University of Texas at Austin is the university with the largest Asian American student body. Asian American students at UT now number over 4,200. That number does *not* include nationals of Asian countries.

Q. Why doesn't UT-Austin offer Asian American Studies?

- A.** Although Asian Americans are a rapidly growing presence in the state of Texas—the number of Asian Americans in Texas will soon surpass 1 million—Asian Americans have not succeeded in accessing the state's decision makers through electoral politics and community activism. Most state officials continue to think of Texas in terms of only three ethnic groups: white, Hispanic and African-American. The University fits this pattern of thinking.

A further barrier is the way that the University has entangled all discussions of minority concerns in the issues of student recruitment and retention. Since Asian American students are seen to be numerically well represented in the UT student body, we have been excluded from the university's recruitment and retention targets. A tragic consequence of this exclusion is that any other concerns we may have as a group have been summarily dismissed.

Student recruitment and retention is only one of many concerns minority students and faculty have with university policy. Other concerns are presented in the video program "Challenges Facing Asian Americans at the University of Texas."

Students should challenge the University's tendency to see all minority concerns in terms of student recruitment and retention, because it limits discussion of minority concerns to those which coincide with the University's. The University recruits African American and Hispanic students largely in response to external federal and state pressures. Only by widening the discussion will we be able to test whether the University administration has any intrinsic concern for minority perspectives.

Q. What is being proposed?

- A.** We are proposing only that "the University of Texas should establish an Asian American Studies program which offers teaching and research opportunities at the undergraduate, graduate and faculty levels." We suggest that President Berdahl should establish a task force to examine the feasibility of providing such a program and the various options for implementation.

Resolution

WHEREAS, the University of Texas has recognized that an essential part of its mission is to prepare its students to live and work in a diverse society; and

WHEREAS, as the University's second-largest ethnic minority group among students and largest ethnic minority group among faculty, Asian Americans constitute a significant and increasingly important element of the University's diversity; and

WHEREAS, Asian Americans have contributed and continue to contribute to the University's achievements and prestige; and

WHEREAS, the University has nevertheless repeatedly failed to recognize the relevance of Asian American perspectives in its curricula, services and policies; and

WHEREAS, these omissions have the effect of perpetuating the mainstream culture's harmful misperception that Asian Americans are not real Americans, and a diminished self-image among Asian Americans; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED that the University of Texas should establish an Asian American Studies program which offers teaching and research opportunities at the undergraduate, graduate and faculty levels; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the University of Texas should establish a general policy on diversity which provides for the proactive inclusion of Asian American perspectives in all aspects of University life.