

New degree could start in fall 2000

Kimberly Gentile

Daily Texan Staff



Sakamoto

After five years of work, liberal arts faculty will begin reviewing a proposal for a new UT bachelor's degree in Asian-American Studies Monday.

If approved by the dean of the College of Liberal Arts, the Office of the President and the UT System, the new degree would go into effect in fall 2000.

Art Sakamoto, the interim director for the Asian-American Studies Program, said Asian-American Studies is an important part of Ethnic Studies, but it isn't currently offered as a degree like African and African-American studies or Mexican-American Studies.

Sakamoto's degree proposal lists five courses, and some can be repeated when the topics change. Currently, the University offers six Asian-American Studies classes in other departments. Most of the Asian-American Studies courses now are listed as sociology courses and the enrollments average about 15 students each.

Students have been pushing for an Asian-American Studies program since 1994, yet many were unhappy when Sakamoto proposed the Asian-American Studies Bachelor of Arts degree without student consultation.

Marian Thambynayagam, a theater and dance senior and member of the Asian-American Relations Group, a student activist organization, said AAS advisory committee members didn't discuss the proposal before Sakamoto submitted it to the College of Liberal Arts earlier this month. She said it was only briefly mentioned in a previous committee meeting.

"I want to see the goal of having an AAS degree fulfilled, but I feel this was a hasty decision," she said.

Sakamoto said having a degree in place would solidify the University's commitment to hiring five new faculty members for Asian-American Studies by fall 2002.

"Degree proposals are accepted only every two years, and the degree would have been delayed until fall 2002 if it wasn't proposed now," Sakamoto said.

Larry Carver, associate dean for the College of Liberal Arts, said he doesn't anticipate opposition against the proposal.

If it passes through the College of Liberal Arts dean's office, the proposal will be sent to Provost Sheldon Ekland-Olson's office later this month, and then to UT administrators, the UT System Board of Regents and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board after that.

Carver said the University is reviewing the course catalog this year for fall 2000, and he is certain AAS will be part of the 2000 catalog.

If the major is approved, Sakamoto said the University will be the 12th institution in the nation to offer an Asian-American Studies degree.