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Transforming Community: Cultivating Political Consciousness

Among Asian American Student Activists at California

Community Colleges

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the

degree Master of Arts in Asian American Studies

by

Kelly Zhi-Shan Zhao

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Transforming Community: Cultivating Political Consciousness Among Asian American Student Activists at California Community Colleges

by

Kelly Zhi-Shan Zhao

Master of Arts in Asian American Studies University of California, Los Angeles, 2022 Professor Jennifer Jeehae Chun, Chair

This project will explore the role of Ethnic Studies (ES) and Ethnic Studies-adjacent disciplines at California community colleges (CCCs) narrated through the experiences of four Asian American former community college student activists. Situating the historical significance of the 1968 Ethnic Studies movement, this study will highlight the under researched site of community college ES programs and their influence in shaping student's politicization. Influenced by the implementation of AB1460 at the California State University system in 2020, this study looks at the experiences of four Asian American students that have been impacted by Ethnic Studies programs at their local community colleges, highlighting distinct forms of pedagogy affecting student activism, retention, and solidarity building processes in relation to their local communities. Conducted through in-depth interviews, this study develops a critical lens for challenging narratives of diversity and multiculturalism initiatives, rejecting neoliberal framings of ES. Overall, the anticipated outcome of this study is to further develop scholarship and interest in community college ES programs in relation to fostering student activism, retention, and political solidarity among students of color.

The thesis of Kelly Zhi-Shan Zhao is approved.

Loubna N. Qutami

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Chapter 1: Introduction

English 122: First-Year College Composition and Reading, Mondays 8 A.M. - 10:50 A.M. Required Materials: A generic writing anthology that can be purchased at the bookstore. A classroom lined with desks cemented to the carpeted floor, with students slowly filling the room at around 6:30 A.M. I know this because I get here at 6 A.M. In the two hours before class starts, I learn that another classmate that comes into class early is here after their overnight shift. We talk and I learn that he goes home to sleep after class since this is technically the end of his day. On the other hand, I carpooled with my two siblings so that my mom could drive to work after dropping us off. Another classmate comes in after dropping off their kid who is almost my age at the high school across the street. Another person sits in the back, but we never really talk. As more people trickle in and the clock moves closer to eight, conversations in the room slowly die down right before the professor arrives.

The first text that I read in community college was Gloria Anzaldúa's *How to Tame a Wild Tongue*, tucked inside a thick English composition anthology that I cannot remember the name of. When I first encountered Anzaldúa's chapter from *Borderlands/La Frontera*, I felt my heart swell up and stir– it was the first time I read her work, yet her words resonated so deeply with me that I dog-eared half the section even though the chapter was only thirteen pages long. To hear Anzaldúa articulate so clearly the frustrations I felt navigating between language, race, class, and gender sparked something inside of me. Although she was writing specifically about the experiences of Chicana women, *How to Tame a Wild Tongue* rekindled my own memories of learning to read and write English contextualized through being a first-generation college student and the child of immigrants. Sitting in the brick-walled, introductory English class, Anzaldúa's writing compelled me to share my experience reading her text in the classroom for the first time and was also one of my initial exposures to ethnic studies (ES) before I even knew of the field. As I began discovering my own voice and politicization process through ES, I applied this knowledge into my own educational journey, changing my major multiple times in community college-- beginning with Theater Studies (because I wanted to research and write plays about the Asian American community), then to English (because I wanted to write stories about Asian Americans), and eventually to Sociology (because my community college did not have Ethnic Studies) before finally transferring to UCLA to major in Asian American Studies and minor in Labor Studies. At this point, I had developed a strong sense of a pan ethnic Asian American identity, rooted in knowing ES through learning about the history of the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) from community college professors and articles on the internet. I encountered How to Tame a Wild Tongue six years later in a graduate seminar on student-centered teaching pedagogies in the UCLA Chicanx and Central American Studies department, as I prepared to become a teaching assistant in the Asian American Studies master's program. I always think it was a chance encounter to read Anzaldúa's work in English 122 where the professor could have assigned any text, but situating my own journey in Ethnic Studies, this is where I want to begin my writing and research. Positioning How to Tame a Wild Tongue as a foundational text in my own initial exposure to ES, this paper begins with my reflections of my time as a student of ES, understanding ethnic studies as part of a politicization process that changed the course of my own education and life.

During the two years that I spent in community college, Diablo Valley College (DVC) was a place where I encountered classmates and peers that made great efforts in their educational journey, whether it was through hour-long commutes to get to campus, balancing

part-time/full-time shifts, or taking care of dependents. At first, I became interested in researching California community colleges (CCCs) after reflecting on my own trajectory within the public education system, where although I learned to read a grade later than my peers, reading and writing later became the most genuine way I was able to engage with learning as I continued throughout my schooling. Entering community college in 2016, I came into DVC wrapping my head around the idea of injustice, given the context of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Through the mentorship of professors Dr. Frank Ortega, Dr. Sanghamitra Niyogi, and Dr. Albert Ponce, I was also introduced to the concept of social justice (SJ) and later Ethnic Studies (ES) later at DVC, where a Social Justice Studies (SJS) major was implemented after student clubs and professors petitioned for a major and degree to be offered by the institution. At the time, I was exposed to community organizing spaces at DVC through the friendships that I made at the PUMA Center, which housed the school's UMOJA Program, Puente Project, and MESA Program. Students would hold meetings, study sessions, and hangouts for people that had long commutes and would rest or study. In addition to being a study space, the center also supported student of color organizations burgeoning at the time, including the Men of Color Association (MOCA) and Women of Color Association (WOCA), which became spaces that cultivated my political education at DVC. At the center, I became familiar with campus politics, including when students began organizing to create a sanctuary status for the campus and refused to cooperate with ICE in identifying undocumented students. This led to professors and students partnering with local community organizations, who we ended up supporting at larger protests and rallies throughout the East Bay region. As a result of the relationships I formed at DVC, I developed a personal stake that informed my politicization process and later my educational journey in ES. Transferring to UCLA in 2018, I realized that my experience in community

college was transformative not only because of what I learned in class, but also was also because of the friendships that informed my own politicization process and chance encounter with ES. Through contextualizing my own experience at DVC, I begin this project by highlighting how a sense of community informed my own educational trajectory, leading into other experiences and stories shared about one's politicization process from other Asian American students that occur at California community college (CCC) campuses.

In this project, I seek to capture how Ethnic Studies is part of a larger politicization process for Asian American students and other students of color, specifically in the ways that it fosters the development of a pan ethnic identity for Asian American student activists. Respectively, what does a politicization process look like for community college students, who have multiple responsibilities beyond being full-time students, pursuing an education at institutions that have specific goals laid out (such as increasing transfer rates or providing vocational training) and limited resources? Drawing from four in-depth interviews with former community college students, I discuss how each interviewee's politicization and pan ethnic identity formation as self-identified Asian American student activists are cultivated through the lived realities they are confronted with while attending community college. Alongside a contextual analysis of each student's experience and initial exposure to ES, two key questions will be discussed: What kind of opportunities do students at community colleges have to take Ethnic Studies courses? And what difference do these encounters with Ethnic Studies make for students' processes to politicization? Analyzing the four interviews, I argue that each of the students I interviewed discuss the importance of Ethnic Studies as part of their processes of politicization. Yet, their encounters with ES in community college often consist of "chance" encounters through courses in related fields such as History and Sociology, or through majors

such as Social Justice Studies (SJS) or Multicultural Studies (MS), which are offered as a 'semantic substitutes.' Drawing from Shaun Harper's (2012) analysis of common semantic substitutes within higher education research, the term "semantic substitutes" will be further explained in the following paragraphs to address institutional naming practices for alternatives to ES. As this project consists of four in-depth interviews, I seek to capture how each student's story highlights the impact of ES at California community colleges for students of color. Within the context of the California State University (CSU) Ethnic Studies requirement (AB 1460) implemented in 2020, this project also seeks to highlight the role of ES-adjacent fields such as Multicultural/Intercultural Studies (MS/ ICS) and Social Justice Studies (SJS) in potentially fulfilling ES requirements for students transferring to CSUs from CCCs. Specifically, while there are 116 accredited community colleges across the state of California, not every CC has an ES department, but may offer courses that could be categorized to fulfill ES requirements, falling under "diversity" or a "multicultural education". Opposing the neoliberal framing of diversity, inclusion, and multiculturalism in higher education, it is important to understand that the beginnings of Ethnic Studies expands beyond its official title, "building on pioneering works such as the writings of Carter G. Woodson (1933) and W. E. B. DuBois (1903), freedom schools of the 1960s, Black independent schools and Afrocentric public schools (e.g., Durdin 2007, Lee 1992, Span 2002), tribal schools (e.g., Begay et al. 1995), and language immersion schools." Understanding the historical significance of ES, this project aims to provide a critical understanding of how Ethnic Studies and ES-adjacent programs influence student activism and political consciousness while recognizing the historical and political timing of this research. Lastly, understanding the history of violent land dispossession in the United States alongside contemporary land acknowledge statements in the context of higher education institutions

including the CCC system, the project also highlights the implications of disciplines that mirror Ethnic Studies, but are detached from the historical struggles and context of the TWLF identified through the use of euphemisms such as semantic substitutes and interest convergence as coined by Dr. Shaun Harper and Derrick Bell, respectively.

Within the context of this project, I use the terms *interest convergence* and *semantic* substitutes to better understand the context of the four interviews conducted. Specifically, while interest convergence and semantic substitutes are not key concepts in the field of Ethnic Studies, I draw the terms 'semantic substitutes' from Higher Education research (Shaun Harper) and 'interest convergence' from the field of Legal Studies (Derrick Bell) to make sense of the interviews and current state of ES at CCCs in this project. Specifically, the terminology of interest convergence draws from Derrick Bell's application of Critical Race Theory to analyze the context of ES in higher education, given that interest convergence has been theorized to understand the Brown v. Board of Education ruling, highlighting that Black people only achieve civil rights victories when the interests of white and Black people converge. Framing the implementation of ES requirements alongside ES-adjacent disciplines, interest convergence in the context of CCCs plays a role as a conceptual euphemism for understanding how ES and diversity requirements become overlapped in creating a neutralized curriculum, uprooted from the political foundations of ES. Additionally, Shaun Harper's discussion of semantic substitutes within higher education research highlights that semantic substitutes in research utilizing terms such as "hostile campus climate" draw attention away from structural issues of race and racism in higher education, using depoliticized language that neutralizes systemic issues in higher education. As the California community college system enrolls over 1 million students across 116 colleges, the role of CCCs serve a broad range of needs as an educational institution.

Drawing from an interdisciplinary approach, this study will reference the terms interest convergence and semantic substitutes as euphemisms in my research, acknowledging the genealogical citations that inform my analysis.

While the key objectives of this project will be to analyze solidarity-building and political consciousness development of the four Asian American student activists involved in Ethnic Studies or ES-adjacent departments while attending community college, this project also anticipates shifting towards examining future possibilities for ES at CCCs as well. Community colleges serve a large student population, which prompts them to be a critical site to study how intercommunity dynamics manifest within the communities each school is situated in. Additionally, ES and ES-adjacent programs can also differ due to factors including geographic location, local economies, accessibility, and socioeconomic barriers that affect the decisions of each CC. Though all 116 community colleges vary in terms of student population and demographics, the four in-depth interviews conducted with David, Amy, Emily, and Eric highlight the possibilities that already exist in identifying the impact of ES at existing CCCs. Drawing from Yen Le Espiritu's conceptualization of Asian American pan ethnicity alongside Laura Pulido's definition of politicization processes, the two concepts of panethnicity and politicization process will be referenced to analyze each interview participant's development of political consciousness during their time at CC. As one student put in their interview, their understanding of inequality and oppression was influenced more so by the context of their lived experience in community college beyond attending class. Reflecting on their exposure to peers while attending CC, this student highlighted that ES cultivated their political consciousness only when they were able to make the connections to their lived experiences outside of school and in their personal lives, such as when they shared their experience working alongside formerly

incarcerated people while attending CC. By drawing connections between each interviewee's initial exposure to ES alongside their experiences outside of school, the interviews aim to provide critical vignettes examining the impact and potential possibilities for implanting ES at CCCS.

As a site, California community colleges (CCCs) have been under-researched in implementing an Ethnic Studies curriculum. With limited scholarship on the effects of student experience in relation to student organizing and community activism, this project hopes to highlight the *community* aspect within community colleges drawing from student interviews while contextualizing the specific context of CCCs. Encompassing a broader socioeconomic and geographic scope of student experiences in higher education, researching ES at community colleges also pushes the fields of Asian American Studies and Higher Education to move beyond conversations about affirmative action, meritocracy, and racialized exceptionalism in Asian American communities. As this thesis analyzes the politicization processes of four Asian American student activists involved in Ethnic Studies or ES-adjacent departments while attending community college, the concluding portion of this project will shift towards looking at existing efforts implementing ES programs at CCCs. Identifying a pilot program at a Southern California community college that is currently implementing an Ethnic Studies-learning community, this project ultimately aims to capture the impact and potential of ES programs at CCCs.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

To situate the context of Ethnic Studies and Social Justice Studies at California community colleges, it is important to understand how the historical foundations of ES are central to the politicization process for many students of color. Contextualizing the 1968 Ethnic Studies movement alongside the development of the California community college system, I begin with an overview of key terms and definitions that inform my research approach, defining what panethnicity, politicization process, and political consciousness looks like for the Asian American student activists interviewed in this study. In addition to defining key terms and concepts, I will also review existing research published on the subject of ES and CCCs, highlighting studies that capture the historical and current landscape of ES and community colleges. To begin, I draw from Laura Pulido's research on the impact of the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) and the Ethnic Studies (ES) movement, where Pulido defines politicization as a process of becoming politically aware of the "conditions that shape one's existence" particularly in regards to their own relationship to oppression and one's own capacity to transform or overcome oppressive conditions.¹ Building on Paulo Freire's two levels of awareness of political consciousness, Pulido further articulates political consciousness as one's understanding of the problem beyond individual remedies, referring to political consciousness as the "quality of one's awareness" after one's initial politicization. In the context of Asian American student activists involved in the Third World Left, Pulido emphasizes in her research how Asian American students were often politicized on college campuses through the fight for ethnic studies.² Understanding the historical context of the TWLF in shaping Asian American students' politicization, Pulido's definition of politicization and its effects on political consciousness will be referenced throughout this project, expanding on what contemporary politicization looks like in the context of ES at community colleges.

¹ Pulido, L. (2006). p. 60-61. ² Pulido (2006). p. 105-113.

In addition to defining politicization and the development of political consciousness in the context of CCCs, Yen Lê Espiritu's concept of Asian American panethnicity is also central to framing the four interview subjects in this study. Following Lê Espiritu's 1992 publication, the concept of panethnicity has been further expanded upon by scholars including Jose Itzigsohn, Mehdi Bozorgmehr, Cristine Mora, and Dina Okamoto in considering the international applications of panethnicity as well as the role of state-sanctioned panethnic identity. Drawing from Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities, Lê Espiritu's foregrounding of panethnicity is conceptually relevant as her analysis highlights the role of college campuses in shaping ideas of pan-Asianism and interethnic solidarity during the Asian American Movement. Complementing the historical background of the Asian American movement, Dina Okamoto and Cristina Mora have further expanded on the concept of panethnicity, focusing on the development of a panethnic identity and highlighting the importance of an international and comparative framework in future research. As Dina Okamoto and Cristine Mora have also pushed the conceptualization of panethnicity to be applied on an international level, their work highlights connections of race, ethnicity, and nationalism in shaping panethnic identities.³ Specifically, in the context of this project, Okamoto and Mora's framing of panethnicity also draws connections to how the influence of internationalism, class consciousness, and nationalism shapes Asian American panethnicity under the historical context of the 1968 ES movement. Reviewing existing literature on panethnicity, Bozorgmehr, Ong, & Tosh⁴ also explore the concept of panethnic identity in the context of South Asian and Arab Americans. Specifically, this thesis provides an updated perspective on panethnicity, articulating how state violence and imposed identification also shapes panethnic identities. As one

³ Okamoto, D., & Mora, G. C. (2014). Panethnicity. Annual Review of Sociology, 40, 219–239.

⁴ Bozorgmehr, Ong, & Tosh (2016).

interviewee notes later in the article, their experience of discrimination in Taiwan resulted in their distancing from developing a panethnic Asian American identity. Thus, Bozorgmehr et al's article makes a critical connection with Mora and Okamoto's work for articulating contradictions between imposed panethnic labels in an international context alongside the formation of Asian American panethnicity within the context of the ES and Asian American movement of the 1960s.

Complementing the framework of panethnicity. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's articulation of indigenous internationalism from her work, As We Have Always Done, has also influenced the framing of this project, shaping my understanding of engaging with ES within a settler colonial context. Particularly, the four interviews revealed that there is a gap in understanding Asian American panethnicity in relation to indigenous scholarship and the contradictions that my interviewees grappled with in articulating solidarity building through a legacy of the TWLF. As much of the existing literature on Asian American panethnicity focuses on themes of politicization within social and civil rights movements, including the Asian American movement of the 1960s, reviewing both topics in relation to one another, rather than through a comparative approach, provides crucial context for an interview participant who later reveals a disconnect with Asian American panethnicity because of her identity as an indigenous person from Taiwan. While there has been research published on indigenous panethnic identity formations, much of the research written in English focuses on tribal affiliations in the United States.⁵ Thus, this project also takes into consideration the literature gap bridging together indigenous identity in the context of Asian American panethnicity. As the topic of ethnic studies and California community colleges is discussed across multiple fields, the development of CCCs

⁵ Okamoto and Mora, (2014).

will be addressed in this literature review, followed by the historical foundations of ES and the 1968 strike shaping the current landscape of ES at CCCs.

The Master Plan: The Development of California Community Colleges

Beginning with Dorothy M. Knoell's⁶ report in the California Postsecondary Education Commission, the article describes a comprehensive overview of the historical record for the development of community colleges in California and the state's approach to public, higher education institutions. Specifically, the report highlights the impact of the Donahoe Education Act of 1960 (also known as the California Master Plan), in shifting the educational goals of community colleges from continuing educational institutions to focusing on providing a technical and vocational education, while the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) system emphasized their roles in providing a research and liberal arts education.⁷ Historically, the community college system in the United States identified itself as an open access institution, serving students without the same financial barriers of four-year university tuition costs.⁸ However in 1960, CCCs faced a major turning point where a tripartite system within higher education was established between the UC system, CSU system, and CCC system.⁹ "The Master Plan solution was to... [diverge] of tens of thousands of new freshmen from the public universities to the community colleges for their lower division coursework, with a promise that those who achieved a satisfactory record... would be able to transfer to one of the public universities to complete a baccalaureate-degree program."¹⁰ With community colleges

⁶ Knoell, D. M. (1997). CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *21*(2), pp. 121–136.

⁷ Ferreira, J. (2014). p. 119-120.

⁸ Cohen, A. M., Brawer, F. B., & Kisker, C. B. (2013). *The American Community College* (6th ed.). Jossey-Bass Publishing.

⁹ Knoell (1997) p. 123

¹⁰ Knoell (1997) p. 123

assuming a primary responsibility for vocational training and later in transferring students to the CSU and UC system following the implementation of the Master Plan, this would also later impact the 1968 ES movement, highlighting the struggles faced by students of color hoping to implement ES programs across CC campuses.

After the founding of Joliet Junior College in 1901, community colleges in the United States focused their goals on assessing institutional performance through transfer rates to four year universities.¹¹ However in California, community colleges also offered vocational and technical education courses within the state's Master Plan. Through the Master Plan, the policy planned for CCCs to hold an assumed responsibility and mission to also provide developmental, foundational, and remedial education for students seeking to prepare for college-level coursework.¹² In regards to student populations, the Master Plan originally intended for community colleges to serve recent high school graduates seeking access to higher education at a public, degree granting institution. However, as an increasing number of older students with varying occupational goals and objectives began enrolling at CCs, the demand for foundational courses and English as a second language (ESL) courses became more prominent in addressing student needs.⁹ While ESL and foundational courses were not an anticipated outcome in the Master Plan, many CCCs later shifted their goals, offering ESL and vocational courses to serve the needs of their local communities, which is also seen in the experiences of the former community college students interviewed. Yet, despite the Master Plan shifting its educational goals as an institution, there continues to be issues regarding equitable access for students of color, particularly in regards to student retention and transfer rates.

¹¹ Budd, D., & Stowers, G. N. L. (2015). Group Differences in California Community College Transfers. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *39*(9), p. 866.

¹² Knoell (1997) p. 125

In the contemporary context of CCCs, the Master Plan's emphasis on student transfer rates is reflected in a toll that disproportionately affects students of color. Between 2004 to 2008, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that of first time community college students, "23% of White students transfer[ed] to a four-year institution and 31.6% of Asian and Pacific Islander students transfer[ed]. However, only 16% of African American students, 15.9% of Latino students, and 6% of Native American students had done so."¹³ It is important to note that while the California Master Plan intended for CCCs to also emphasize transfer rates, not all institutions did due to varying local labor market needs and community characteristics that shifted different community colleges to center more on vocational/technical education courses.¹⁴As the issue of educational inequality stems beyond the K-12 system and is rooted in a longer history of slavery, segregation, and white supremacy in the United States, community colleges as a site can only be remedied as a potential pathway towards higher education for historically marginalized and working class students-- not as an overall solution for addressing systemic racism. Thus, this project grapples with the limitations of the community college system, while also recognizing that current transfer rates between ethnic groups by the National Center for Education Statistics also articulates contemporary issues surrounding inadequate support for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students within higher education. Highlighting a case study of the College of San Mateo's College Readiness program that sparked Third World student activism from 1965 to 1969,¹⁵ students of color continue to be challenged in having their needs met by higher education institutions. As community colleges focus on serving working

¹³U.S. Department of Education. (2011) Community college student outcomes: 1994–2009: Table 5A (NCES 2012-253).

¹⁴ Gill, A. M., & Leigh, D. E. (2009). Differences in community colleges' missions: Evidence from California. *Economics of Education Review*, *28*, p. 79.

¹⁵ Ferreira, J. (2014). p.118.

class student populations though offering accessible, vocational training and college courses, CCs can also be sites of possibility for students that may have not had access to guided mentorship and a sense of community prior to attending college. In a report published in 2015 examining the transfer rates between ethnic and racial groups of students at CCCs, it was suggested that "advising programs, tutoring, counseling as well as teacher-student interactions can all provide a supportive environment that can very well make a difference for students"¹⁶ While the impact of ES has been studied extensively in the K-12 system, community colleges can also benefit from ES, prompting possibilities for creating a transformative educational experience cultivating students' political consciousness in higher education.

Back to 1968: Ethnic Studies and Its Impact

In addition to analyzing the historical context of California community colleges, the origins of ethnic studies also informs this project's approach to understanding the politicization processes of the four community college student activists interviewed in this project. Drawing from Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales and Christine Sleeter's research on the impact of ethnic studies for students in the K-12 education system^{17 18 19} Tintiangco-Cubales and Sleeter's work provides critical insight on the impact of ES for students. While both studies focus on the effects of implementing an ethnic studies curriculum at the K-12 level, their research provides crucial information for understanding the impact that an engaged ES curriculum can have on building

¹⁶ Budd and Stowers (2015) p. 877

¹⁷ Sleeter, C. E. (2011). The Academic and Social Value of Ethnic Studies: A Research Review. *National Education Association Research Department*, i-29.

¹⁸ Tintiangco-Cubales, A., Daus-Magbual, A., Desai, M., Sabac, A., & Torres, M. V. (2016). Into our hoods: Where critical performance pedagogy births resistance. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *29*(10), 1308–1325.

¹⁹ Tintiangco-Cubales, A., Kohli, R., Sacramento, J. *et al.*(2015). Toward an Ethnic Studies Pedagogy: Implications for K-12 Schools from the Research. *Urban Rev* 47, 104–125.

students' sense of self, which can later lead to the development of politicization. As Ethnic Studies as a field refers to interdisciplinary programs of study that "focus on the experiences of racial and ethnic minorities with a particular emphasis on historical struggles and social movements"²⁰ – it is evident that while existing research focuses on K-12 education, curriculum models can also be applied to thinking about how an ES and SJ curriculum has an impact at community colleges. Notably, the four interviews conducted in this thesis also highlight how models of ES already exist through de facto practices such as in mentorship from CC faculty, even if there is no ES or ES-adjacent program at the community college. With the ES movement beginning at San Francisco State University in 1968 later spreading onto other college campuses, the fight for Ethnic Studies at four year universities emerged through struggle, emphasizing the role of student activism and the development of political consciousness inherent to the foundation of the field.²¹ Reckoning with the origins of the field, this section highlights the impact of ES published in existing research alongside a case study of the impact that ES can have in the CC system, documented at the College of San Mateo in the 1960s.

Drawing from research reports by scholars in the field of higher education conducted on student civic engagement in 2016, it was found that students in community college that enroll in "a course dealing with social, political, or economic inequality"²² were more likely to exhibit "greater civic agency, capacity, behavior, and knowledge."²³ The connections between Tintiangco-Cubales and Sleeter's work highlights case study examples of how this awareness of

²⁰ Dee, T. S., & Penner, E. K. (2017). The Causal Effects of Cultural Relevance: Evidence From an Ethnic Studies Curriculum. American Educational Research Journal, 54(1), p. 128.

²¹ Jeung, R., Umemoto, K., Dong, H., Mar, E., Tsuchitani, L. H., & Pan, A. (2019). Mountain movers : student activism & the emergence of Asian American studies (1st edition.). UCLA Asian American Studies Center. ²² Kisker, C. B., Weintraub, D. S., & Newell, M. A. (2016). The Community Colleges' Role in Developing Students' Civic Outcomes: Results of a National Pilot. Community College Review, 44(4), p. 330. ²³ Kisker, C. B., Weintraub, D. S., & Newell, M. A. (2016). p. 315.

social, political, and economic inequality also informs youth engagement with their community through engaging in organizing and activism. Complementing Sleeter and Tintiangco-Cubales' studies, the anthology *"White" Washing American Education: The New Culture Wars in Ethnic Studies* edited by Denise M. Sandoval, Anthony J. Ratcliff, Tracy Lachica Buenavista, and James R. Marin also includes references to the struggle that ethnic studies has had across the states of California and Arizona. Building on existing literature on how K-12 youth become engaged with activism and ethnic studies, the specific context of California community colleges provide a compelling angle for studying the impact of ES, specifically due to CCC's focus as a community-serving institution.

Research conducted on Ethnic Studies has mainly focused on its effects at the K-12 level, with some studies expanding onto the experiences of college students advocating for the expansion of ethnic studies as a culturally relevant curriculum (Marrun, 2018; Tintiangco-Cubales, et al., 2015). While it can be argued that Social Justice Studies, Multicultural Studies, and Intercultural Studies also takes on an interdisciplinary lens, many Ethnic Studies programs already employ inherent, interdisciplinary approaches. For example, Ethnic Studies programs such as the Pin@y Educational Partnerships (PEP) program in San Francisco, California demonstrates the role that an Ethnic Studies education can have on personal and social liberation through developing Critical Leadership Practice, self reflection, and community connections among student leaders. In particular, this study highlighted PEP's focus on developing a "pipeline for Ethnic Studies" through challenging models of oppression, domination, and existing models of power within a traditional education system by utilizing Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as a foundational text for coordinators and teachers in PEP, shown in the research study's outcomes of youth leadership (Tintiangco-Cubales et al.,

2016). Additionally, Ethnic Studies has also been utilized to develop research on its effects for youth participatory action research, through developing a critical consciousness and agency for marginalized students. In one study utilizing ethnic studies to mobilize students to engage with youth participatory action research, the study revealed that students became more involved with collective action labor movements in the broader Los Angeles region after implementing an ethnic studies curriculum and pedagogy at multiple Southern California high schools (Bautista et al., 2016). Recognizing that existing Ethnic Studies curricula and research already draws from an interdisciplinary approach, it is crucial to consider the intentions of how SJS, MS, and ICS becomes implemented at community colleges through the lens of interest convergence and an understanding of semantic substitutes in higher education.

As research on ES within the last decade primarily focuses on its impact at the K-12 level, examples of student activism due to ES has also been documented at the College of San Mateo. Drawing from Jason Ferreira's research documenting the impact of the College Readiness Program that enacted Third World student activism from 1965-1969, Ferreira identified how internationalism, class consciousness, and a sense of political solidarity formed at the community college's program directed to serve work-class students at the campus.

Diversity and Liberal Multiculturalism: Interest Convergence at CCCs

Presently, there are 116 accredited community colleges in California with 42 institutions offering a degree or certificate in Ethnic Studies and 63 offering a degree or certificate in Social Justice Studies Subcategories of SJS include concentrations in LGBTQ+ Studies, Women Studies, and Ethnic Studies. As Ethnic Studies course requirements are becoming mandated in California's higher education institutions due to shifting transfer requirements from the California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) system, Ethnic Studies and Social Justice/ES-adjacent programs are also projected to become conflated disciplines at the community college level to fulfill transfer requirements.²⁴ In 2014, the state of California passed the Student Equity Plans (SEP) policy at CCCs. One of the main goals of the policy was to address inequities within the community college system, including racial and ethnic disparities between transfer rates.²⁵ However, despite efforts to increase student equity among underrepresented and historically marginalized student groups, research studies on student transfer rates revealed that for Latinx and African American students, even if campus diversity policies were well intended, they resulted in detrimental outcomes for students of color when framed through deficit-based beliefs and policies.²⁶ Similar to previous studies conducted on deficit-model language, transfer initiatives framed through a deficit model also negatively affect student performance and retention. Programs that were effective under the implementation of SEP only included plans by community colleges that used race-specific (with two or less identified student groups) and culturally relevant events to engage with students through a positive, non-deficit model.²⁷ With the addition of equity initiatives such as SEP, CCCs are coupled with expectations of providing diversity courses as "stand-ins" for Ethnic Studies requirements in the near future, homogenizing terms such as "diversity" and "multicultural" education in place of Ethnic Studies courses. As community college campuses continue to implement equity initiatives alongside diversity requirements in fulfilling transfer student needs for the new CSU Ethnic Studies requirement, it is important to identify that while CCC districts

²⁴ Burke (2020)

²⁵ Felix, E. R., & Fernandez Castro, M. (2018). Planning as strategy for improving Black and Latinx student equity: Lessons from nine California community colleges. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *26*(56) p. 5.

²⁶ Felix & Castro (2018) p. 10

²⁷ Felix & Castro (2018) p. 20

offer "diversity" and "multicultural" education courses for students, they do not cater towards students of color. In another study analyzing CCC student exposure to multicultural education, "the study revealed [that] of the 109 California community colleges, 50 colleges (46%) had a multicultural graduation requirement and the nature of the requirement varied greatly among the colleges. The findings suggest[ed] the state may be falling behind in its goal for multicultural education."²⁸ Highlighting concerns regarding how CCCs will implement ES and diversity requirements, this research will highlight examples of an intentional ES curriculum that engages with local community contexts through four interviews with student activists.

As Ethnic Studies has become implemented within California public universities during the last fifty years, it is important to identify the role that the field holds in creating a safe, yet intellectually critical environment for students of color. Particularly, exposure points for Ethnic Studies departments have become more common through students searching to fulfill diversity course requirements in their undergraduate education, prompting issues regarding the field's curricula within the context of the larger university system. Within the last two decades, studies have shown concerns regarding how diversity and multicultural education requirements affect students of color. In particular, one study conducted on diversity requirements within higher education revealed that diversity courses often have a more positive effect on white students compared to non white students.²⁹ This point in particular has been reasoned due to the fact that "exposure to a systematic analysis of power is [often] newer to white students than it is to students of color...In addition... diversity courses are often pitched toward a white audience.... [while students of color] do not find their own understanding stretched."³⁰ As diversity

²⁹ Sleeter (2011) p. 18

²⁸ Hess, S. L., Uerling, D. F., & Piland, W. E. (2012). Multicultural Graduation Requirements Among California's Community Colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *36*(12), p. 964

³⁰ Sleeter (2011) p. 18

requirements become implemented within university graduation policy, it is important to understand that articulating "home spaces"³¹ are necessary for students of color to expand in their own learning of race, ethnicity, and culture through a deeper level of analysis. This is especially why researching ES and SJ programs are pivotal in moving beyond the institution's imposed diversity approach. Drawing from Yen Le Espiritu's article on the change occurring within Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies moving into the field's fifty year institutionalization, Le Espiritu emphasizes the importance of developing a comparative and relational model. Moving beyond "celebrating particular identities or focusing on personal alienation and personal affirmation... [Le Espiritu identified the] need to engage instead in sustained and systematic studies of social power, social institutions, and socially sanctioned forms of knowledge—especially the complex roles played by race, as well as gender, class, and sexuality, in social relations."³² As Yen Le Espiritu is speaking to her academic colleagues in terms of conducting research, the writer makes a crucial point in articulating Blackwell's (2010) notion of the "home space" rooted beyond diversity requirements both for students and professors in the ivory tower. Identifying the importance of reapplying critical, anticolonial politics to the field of Ethnic Studies and Asian American Studies, the piece provides a crucial reminder for understanding the role of social movement organizing and its relationship to an ES and ES-adjacent curriculum.

Identifying a literature gap in community college research, existing scholarship on the effects of Ethnic Studies programs has mainly focused on the K-12 education system as a solution for at-risk student retention as well as in developing a culturally responsive curriculum.

³¹ Blackwell, D. M. 2010. "Sidelines and separate spaces: Making education anti-racist for students of color." Race Ethnicity and Education 13(4): 473–494.

³² Yen Le Espiritu (2003). Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies: About Kin Disciplines. *Amerasia Journal*, 29(2), p. 204.

In comparison, Social Justice Studies/Multicultural Studies/Intercultural Studies have developed as a relatively new field, focusing on "the social inequality and inequities in society—particularly regarding race and ethnicity, and gender and sexuality—and works in its analysis toward creating a more equitable society" (AA Transfer Social Justice Studies, Foothill College). While many Social Justice Studies programs offer concentrations on race, there is a lack of information published on the development of Social Justice Studies programs in comparison to Ethnic Studies. Thus, the remainder of this section will focus on existing research published on ethnic studies programs. While there are similarities between ES and ES-adjacent disciplines, it is important to consider the implications of a curriculum that frames issues of race and racism as a subcategory under a larger "social justice and activist" education. Referencing Shaun Harper's (2012) analysis of common semantic substitutes within higher education research, the term will be used as a euphemism to expand on Harper's idea of semantic substitutes, questioning if SJS, ICS, and MCS programs are strategic institutional substitutes in place of Ethnic Studies programs. By invoking the broader language of social justice, the institutionalization of ES-adjacent programs provide insight on the implications of what a social justice education entails, without the historical context of fields like Ethnic Studies. In addition, Derrick Bell's (1980) concept of interest convergence in higher education will also be referenced to understand how Social Justice Studies, Intercultural Studies, and Multicultural Studies can operate as a semantic substitute.

Reviewing the contemporary issues written on California community colleges, existing scholarship has focused on students of color through a deficit narrative, depicted through language such as "underrepresented", "nontraditional", and "underprepared." While a majority of the research on community colleges focuses on improving institutional support for students,

the language and framing for support is often depicted through a deficit lens. In one example, Barr and Schuetz (2008) emphasize the significance of academic expectations and barriers that students face when enrolling in community college, focusing on English/ESL and Assessment/Placement practices. In the last decade since Barr and Schuetz's article, CCCs have now adapted to a guided self-placement approach in Math and English. However, recent studies such as Kosiewicz and Ngo (2019) continue to perpetuate a deficit narrative within higher education research, framing Latinx and Black students through a deficit lens in comparison to Asian and white students in their study. By utilizing only quantitative assessments of student enrollment and completion categorized through the subgroups of male, female, Black, Latinx, Asian, and white, the study narrated student outcomes in a clinical approach, reproducing an implied deficit narrative. While the study recognized its limitations for generalizing community college student populations, the article provides crucial insight on how deficit narratives are maintained within research practices in higher education. Thus, it is also important to highlight counter narratives within community college research, including Shaun Harper's (2009) article on Black male student athletes and transfer rates. By focusing on the interest of transfer rates in community college research, Harper also brings into consideration the application of critical race theory and interest convergence into quantitative research practices in higher education. Overall, reviewing research on community colleges through the deficit narratives also puts into consideration how critical race theory and interest convergence can be utilized to reframe future scholarship on community colleges.

When reviewing existing literature on community colleges, transfer rates and transfer readiness are one of the most widely studied topics in the community college system (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Concluding my literature review, I also highlight Erin Doran's recently

published work in February 2022 on Mexican American Studies programs at Texas community colleges.³³ As Erin Doran's research explains how community colleges are often not included in conversations about ES, their research on ES programs at Texas community colleges is an example of growing interest in ES at community colleges. In conversation with Doran's research, this project highlights a growing interest in research ES at the community college level, capturing the stories of student activists that developed their political consciousness alongside their chance encounters with ethnic studies.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Articulated through the literature review, a gap in research currently exists between examining the impact of ES and California community colleges (CCCs). Challenging narratives of ES becoming institutionalized through multicultural and diversity initiatives and course requirements, the scope of this thesis addresses how ES at CCCs becomes part of a larger politicization process for student activists. In this project, the concept of Asian American panethnicity is utilized to understand how four Asian American student activists were introduced to their politicization process through the framing of panethnic identity and political consciousness in the specific context of being a community college student. This framework builds on Yen Le Espiritu's definition of panethnicity, examining the external, structural conditions that facilitate the maintenance of ethnicity and how ethnic boundaries are defined. In particular, because panethnicity is defined through the generalization of solidarity among ethnic subgroups, it is largely a product of categorization.³⁴ As Yen Le Espiritu's book *Asian American*

³³Doran, E. (2022) 'A space for beginning': teaching Mexican American studies in Texas community colleges, Race Ethnicity and Education.

³⁴ Le Espiritu, Y. (1992). 6.

Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities also addresses how Pan Asian identity develops at college campuses following the Asian American movement, Espiritu's analysis of panethnic identity also shapes my approach to interviewing former Asian American student activists at CCCs.³⁵ Addressing my approach to data collection and interview processes, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic will also be discussed on how it impacted the overall scope of this study, shaping the research methods used in this project.

Coming into this study, my initial approach to analyzing ES at CCCs focused on existing ES and ES-adjacent programs in community colleges across the state. While I was interested in both the structural concerns facing ES at CCCs as well as the perspectives of students impacted by ES, it became evident that there were also differences between community colleges that offered Ethnic Studies programs in comparison to Ethnic Studies-adjacent programs, such as Social Justice Studies (SJS), Multicultural Studies (MS), and Intercultural Studies (ICS). Due to the lack of research published on ES and ES-adjacent programs, I first began my research on CCCs through identifying and cross-examining the different ES and ES-adjacent programs and courses across all 116 CCCs. In the process, I noted that while over 100 community colleges offer ES courses listed in their course catalogs, a large number of ES courses are also listed as subcategories under Social Justice Studies or Multicultural Studies. Although there has been limited research conducted on the distinct differences between ES, MS, SJS, and ICS programs at CCCs, I decided to include both ES and ES-adjacent programs/departments within the scope of this study as many ES courses were listed as subcategories in SJS, MS, and ICS. With an exception to Critical Pacific Islands and Oceania Studies at San Mateo College and Kumeyaay Studies at Cuyamaca College, many of the ES-adjacent programs offered across the CCC system

³⁵ Le Espiritu, Y. (1992). 31.

also listed African American Studies, Black Studies, Chicano Studies, La Raza Studies, Latin American/Latino Studies, and Asian American Studies under ES, SJS, MS, and ICS as subcategories within each field. Although there has not been extensive research published on each field's approach to addressing multiculturalism and diversity requirements implemented in the CCC system, I began with cross examining ES and ES-adjacent programs across all 116 CCCs to develop a better understanding of the current landscape of ES in the state's community college system.

In addition, the timing of the coronavirus pandemic heavily shaped my research approach to data collection and interview outreach. As four out of the five in-depth interviews were conducted over Zoom, there were also limitations in developing genuine rapport and interest in student interviews for this project. While student organizations at many CCCs continued to meet virtually, outreach for student interviews became difficult as my initial approach focused on broad outreach to as many CCCs as possible which later became too broad for the scope and timeline of this project. During the recruitment process, I had initially hoped to interview at least 10 students through sending out cold emails to student organizations and faculty at various CCCs, hoping for a response. However, during this process I quickly realized that cold emailing during the pandemic proved to be difficult in receiving responses. Shifting this approach, I focused on conducting outreach to former student organizations at UCLA that I was previously involved in as an undergraduate student, connecting with current transfer students and Asian American student organizing groups at the university. While I had initially anticipated conducting a broader study on CCCs, the in-depth conversations I was able to have with five participants highlighted how their specific experiences were also informed by their age, career interests, as well as their previous exposure to ES while attending community college.

Through interviewing Amy, David, Emily, Eric, and Michael, four of the five participants had reached out to me on social media from personal referrals. The only exception was Amy, who had reached out to me through a cold email. In regards to the interview process, I prepared a semi-structured interview guide with questions about their experience in higher education, as well as their personal reflections prior to attending community college. This allowed for me to develop a better sense of who the participants were before encountering ES and the questions were intentionally listed at the end of the guide following more generalized inquiries. Through engaging in in-depth conversations with four of the participants, I was also able to better understand how each individual's politicization process was also tied to how they viewed their community college experience. With the exception of Michael, a community college counselor invested in ES, my approach from interviewing a broad survey of students shifted to a more focused approach, highlighting the possibilities and potential limitations that can exist for community college students in accessing ethnic studies at CC as part of their politicization process.

Lastly, the role of mentorship is also a significant component shaping both the interview process and analysis of this thesis. With Emily, David, Eric, and Amy all mentioning the role of mentorship from professors that influenced their time attending community college, this project also reconciles with how a sense of community is fostered at CCCs, particularly for the students interviewed in this study. As many of the interviewees mention the role of attending outside office hours appointments and student organization meetings through guidance from community college professors, this study also acknowledges the significance of increasing support for community college professors, recognizing Professor Sam Pacheco (History Dept.), Professor Andrew Soto (Philosophy Dept.) at Hartnell College, Professor Cindy Huynh (Ethnic Studies

Dept.) and Professor Juan Gamboa Jr. (Chicanx Studies Dept.) at San Jose City College, Professor Nyenbeku George (Sociology Dept.) at Cosumnes River College, and Professor Mae Lee (Asian American and Asian Studies Dept.) at De Anza College. Overall, as this thesis hopes to encompass the experiences of four community college student activists and their trajectories through ES, this study highlights the importance of mentorship as crucial labor in shaping the experiences of students of color at CCCs.

Chapter 4: Chance Encounters: Ethnic Studies as part of a Politicization Process

My first encounter with an Ethnic Studies curriculum was through taking a "History of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders," course the spring semester before transferring out of community college. I can still recall that the class was fully enrolled on the first day, but as the semester continued there were fewer students coming to lecture every week. The class was taught by an older, white male professor who had taught the course for the last seven years at the college and while they were well-meaning, it became clear throughout the semester that the course was disconnected from contemporary issues facing Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. At that point, my exposure to Ethnic Studies began from outside of this class, learning about Yuri Kochiyama and Malcolm X through a chance encounter in a previous Sociology course that had already begun to shape my understanding of what I understood ES to be, while this history class helped me articulate an image of what I did not feel ES embodied. For community college students, an ideal exposure to ethnic studies can provide the language for developing one's political consciousness while also situating how class, race, gender, and sexuality informs the context of their own lives. And while it can be argued that fields including

History, Sociology, English, and even Social Justice Studies can also have similar outcomes, the origins of the field and interdisciplinary approach of ES provides a compelling argument for examining what opportunities and limitations actually exist for community college students to learn about ethnic studies. While the interviews reveal the specific experiences of four students, their stories provide an entryway into understanding the opportunities and limitations community college students can have to ES, as well as what a "deeper dive" can potentially look like in the community college system. Positioning my personal encounters with ES in conversation with the four interviews I conducted with David, Amy, Emily, and Eric,³⁶ the stories about their time in community college help articulate an image of the current landscape of ES at CCCs as well as the potential impact ES can have on shaping students' politicization processes.

From the conversations that I had with four Asian American student activists who first encountered ES during their time in community college, I identified that their exposure was often through "chance encounters" where they were initially exposed to ES indirectly, whether it was through mentorship from professors or through a self-selective process of seeking out ES because of an interest in learning about their own identity. Understanding that the students first learn about ES from different entry points, the conversations I had with Emily, Eric, David, and Amy also highlight the influence of semantic substitutes, particularly in the context of how students first come into contact learning about the context of ES. While some of the participants brought up the impact of learning about the TWLF, not all students interviewed shared the same connection to knowing the history of the field. As Jason Ferreira notes in his article, *From College Readiness to Ready for Revolution*, he notes the lack of sustained research on Chicana/o-Latina/o student struggles³⁷ and in the context of Amy, David, Emily, and Eric, their

³⁶ Names of interview participants changed for confidentiality

³⁷ See Ferreira p. 118

interviews also highlighted an ahistorical disconnect from the ES movement. Specifically, as "the movements of the late 1960s often emerged out of a conflict with postwar liberalism,"³⁸ the stories of students and their experience with ES in the context of community colleges today provide an understanding of the effects of ES-adjacent fields that have a different history of institutionalization compared to ES. To know ethnic studies under the context of the 1968 ES movement, the interviews reveal the importance of how semantic substitutes can also overshadow the historical and political motivations of ES. Identifying the themes of mentorship, an analysis of power, and a shared political understanding of solidarity based on the legacy of the TWLF, I reference these three points as covenants for understanding how ES operates at CCCs, informing my interview analysis with Amy, David, Emily, and Eric. Drawing from each interviewee's experience, the three covenants of ES highlight an understanding of the current landscape of ES at CCCs.

Encountering Ethnic Studies in Community College

Coming out of conversations with each of the four student activists, it became clear that the encounters each interviewee had with ES was often through an introduction of ES from a related discipline or mentor. In my first interview, I spoke with David, a 21 year old student that attended Hartnell College and Monterey Peninsula College immediately after graduating from high school. I was initially contacted by David through my social media outreach posts and we had met through brief introductions in the Asian American student organization we were both a part of as transfer students. During our introductions, David shared that his initial encounter with ES in community college was through a general U.S. history course, where he was first exposed

³⁸ Ferreira p. 118

to ethnic studies through learning about the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF), which was covered within the topic of civil rights in the class.

"...[the professor] taught it in themes. Labor was the first one, foreign policies, the second, third one was civil rights– the last one was civil rights. That [was] the end of the year online– that's when we talked about the Third World Liberation Front and that was my first brush with the Asian American movement."

Articulating that his initial exposure to ES was through a chance encounter with a history professor that later became his mentor, David's recollection of the class aligned ES within the context of the civil rights movement based on the professor's organization of the course topics. As David mentioned that his first brush with the Asian American movement was contextualized through the TWLF and an understanding of the civil rights movement, his initial encounter with ES is also contextualized by the key themes of an analysis of power, coupled alongside mentorship from his professor and a shared political understanding of solidarity with other communities of color. While David revealed that his initial exposure to ES shaped part of his larger understanding of civil rights history, our conversation also highlighted how his exposure to learning about the TWLF later reinforced his perception a panethnic Asian American identity and racial solidarity. Alongside the time he spent working and going to school, David also revealed that the jazz club he was involved in at Hartnell College, where he was able to develop a sense of community while attending school.

"So throughout my entire tenure at Hartnell, I played in the jazz band. All four semesters I was there-- five actually, including the summer. And, you know, that was my community at Hartnell...One of the things about community college is that the culture is very much you show up to class, and then you leave after or go home, and go to work or whatever. Jazz band, that was the community I hung out with. Those are the people I went and played with in Old Town Artwalk in Salinas. And we went and did little gigs, and then made little splinter groups, little quartets and stuff like that... We had either people my age, or people that were retired, kind of on the opposite ends of the spectrum...I also learned a lot from those people."

Mentioning how he was able to develop a sense of community through jazz club, David's recollection of meeting students from different age groups and points in their career also informed his understanding of his local community outside of his high school experience. By highlighting that jazz band was his main community during his time at CC, David's reflection also made it clear that in his initial exposure to learning about the TWLF, Asian American movement, and ES as a field, only became relevant after connecting his experiences outside of class to the context of the civil rights unit in his history course. By mentioning that his initial perception of community college was that many students commuted to campus and did not usually engage with student clubs and organizations, his experience in jazz club was also crucial to the development of his politicization. Informed by the mentorship he experienced, and shared sense of political solidarity he developed in jazz club, this later shaped his involvement as a student organizer informed with an analysis of power he developed through his initial exposure to ES.

In addition to understanding David's initial exposure to ES which later shaped his own politicization, I also interviewed Amy— a community organizer in Northern California who shared her experience of learning about ES through an English literature course. Prior to our interview, I did not know Amy and she had reached out to me through email after seeing my social media post looking to interview self-identified former community college student activists. Beyond the initial expectations that I had for our conversation, Amy shared with me how her experience immigrating as an indigenous Taiwanese woman shaped her understanding of Chicana/o/x Studies and Asian American Studies once she encountered the field. Prior to the interview, Amy had contacted me over email explaining her involvement in MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán) while at community college, as well as her current

efforts in preparing for a high school teaching credential in Ethnic Studies at a local CSU. During our one hour Zoom call, Amy brought up topics including her politicization, Taiwanese indigenous identity, and a disconnect from identifying as Asian American. Following our initial introduction, she revealed that her chance encounter with ES happened simultaneously through learning about Asian American literature in an English class, alongside the guidance of a Chicano Studies professor and mentor, which later shaped her identity and politicization as an indigenous Taiwanese person living in the United States. In the interview, Amy recalled that,

"I [was] actually getting an A.A. in English Literature at De Anza... One of the last classes [I took]...we [were] finally read[ing] about contemporary American authors...[and[the last few articles [in the class were] written by Asian Americans. And then I started raising my hand [in class] because I know– because the story we read is also about someone who immigrated here. So I want to just shed some light about that, because, you know, English literature majors, most of my classmates are white people. They don't know the same culture so analyzing the [Asian American] literature will be different from my perspective. So I just raised my hand to say no, let me let me tell you something. And then that was kind of an awakening moment because I didn't know so much of our story was still not told."

As Amy's first encounter with ES was through Asian American literature, her initial encounter with Asian American Studies (AAS) was also informed through her personal reflections as a first-generation immigrant in the United States. This would later influence her preference for gravitating towards Chicana/o/x Studies, as she came to know AAS to focus on second and later generation Asian Americans that were hoping to "find themselves." As Amy's initial encounter with Asian American literature was also contextualized by her upbringing in Taiwan, her initial introduction to ES and Asian American literature would also later be influenced by her physical sense of community at De Anza College.

Although she had already received a bachelor's degree in advertising in Taiwan, Amy recalled that her decision to later pursue multiple associate's degrees, a leadership and social

change certificate, another bachelor's degree, and a teaching credential for ES was because of the sense of community she found in the Chicana/o/x Studies department at De Anza College. As a student, Amy's political consciousness as an indigenous Taiwanese person formulated while attending community college and she revealed that her physical proximity also influenced her sense of community while attending classes.

"Maybe this is only the case at De Anza College, but Chicanx Studies is the only class in-person. The rest is online. So that is also one of the reasons why in this department, everybody feels so connected to each other but not in the other classes....Almost every class in African American Studies is online...and Asian American Studies is also similar... A couple of months ago I was talking about this– I was like why do I always feel a strong connection with classmates in Chicanx Studies but not in other Ethnic Studies departments? I realized, oh, because this is the only course we meet in person."

While Amy was initially interested in ES through learning about narratives of immigration in Asian American literature, her politicization was also determined by factors such as what resources and departments were more readily accessible at her community college. Specifically, because Amy was introduced to AAS through Asian American literature that focused on personal reflections and navigating through one's identity, her emphasis on gravitating towards Chicana/o/x Studies also highlights the limitations of ES at community colleges and the importance of a physical community in shaping one's politicization. Articulating her initial introduction to ES, my conversation with Amy revealed the limitations of personal reflection in AAS, highlighted through her politicization in Chicana/o/x Studies which she found to be more critical in relation to her identity as an indigenous Taiwanese woman.

While Amy and David's initial encounter with ES occurred through introductions in course materials selected by professors, chance encounters can also occur through a more self-selective process. Interviewing Emily and Eric, both interviewees revealed that their initial exposure to ES came through an intentional and strategic process while attending community college, where transfer rates also played an important role in shaping their decisions. For Emily, she attended San Jose City College and De Anza College as a high school senior and later enrolled as a full-time student after graduating from high school. Initially, Emily recalled that her high school had a partnership with a local community college courses, stating

"This was basically an opportunity given to me because my high school [name redacted] had an extension right next door with San Jose City College. So, San Jose City College professors would come to [my high school] to teach college level courses that we could attend after our normal high school hours....During that time I was essentially looking for a change and I wanted to do something that felt meaningful.... So I saw the course, it was [titled] Vietnamese Women in the U.S. and....even seeing that course title made me feel very represented. And I knew that I wanted to take the class because I wanted to end my high school career with something, you know, meaningful to me."

In the interview, Emily noted that after taking a course focusing on the experiences of Vietnamese women in the United States, it was the first time she had been exposed to narratives related to her own community despite the fact that she grew up in San Jose in a predominately Vietnamese American community for a majority of her life. Mentioning that she continues to keep in touch with the professor who taught the class, Emily also added that after taking the course, she began interning with a local newspaper, the San Jose Spotlight, covering issues affecting the Vietnamese American community, including deportations and unhoused residents in San Jose, California. In her interview, Emily's mentioned how her politicization was propelled by ES, stating that,

"I remember reading a paper about Paris by Night Star. It's a program that was created for the Vietnamese diaspora in the aftermath of the Vietnam War and it was basically like a three hour concert that they sold on DVD and all your grandparents would play it during house parties... And I thought that was super interesting because it was a part of my personal history, but also reading it from a research standpoint made so much sense. And it roped me in because of my personal history...After taking that Vietnamese Women in the U.S. class I was also very much interested in writing about my community." Making a personal connection to the class, Emily's chance encounter with taking an ES course at her community college also shaped her perception and expectations of Ethnic Studies. As we continued through the interview, Emily shared how her initial exposure to taking the course led to her becoming more involved in the Southeast Asian (SEA) community both in San Jose and later at the four year university she transferred to. Becoming a student organizer in SEA student organizations and Vietnamese American community organizations, Emily's formation of a panethnic Asian American identity and her initial encounter with ES became a formative part of her politicization process, which later resulted in the development of her political consciousness in the SEA community. As Emily's initial exposure to ES began through developing a personal connection to the course materials, this later informed her work on SEA deportations, aligning her understanding of ES to a larger analysis of power structures building on the initial introduction she had to the field.

Following my interview with Emily, my last interview participant, Eric, shared that his initial introduction with Ethnic Studies was a much more self-selective process as his politicization and initial encounter with ES happened outside of a direct introduction to ES through courses at his community college. While Eric shared that he was also introduced to ES through a professor that mentored him during his time at community college, Eric's politicization was also tied to reflections of his own upbringing and communities he saw himself a part of. Specifically, he mentioned that his politicization occurred in the context of the BlackLivesMatter protests in the summer of 2020, which later propelled him to take ES courses at his local community college. During the interview, Eric reflected that the timing, cultural, and historical circumstances in his

hometown of Sacramento, California influenced his interest in learning about Black and Asian solidarity in the context of George Floyd's death and the COVID-19 pandemic. During his time as a community college student, he shared how he pivoted from majoring in Political Science to Asian American Studies, stating,

"I mean, Asian American Studies is kind of just more specialized in a way than political science...I honestly didn't take my first ethnic studies class until my last semester at community college...called Ethnic Studies 330, Asian American Experience in America or Asian American experience....I kind of chose sociology or political science or Asian American studies because I'm just more interested in.... [the] academic curriculum. Rather than what I was previously doing."

Sharing that his initial encounter with ES was through an already developed interest in Asian American topics, Eric's interview revealed how ES at CCCs can also be introduced through a self-selective process of wanting to learn specifically about Asian American communities and experiences. However, his introduction to ES is also contextualized by the fact that an ES course related to his own personal interest was readily offered at his local community college, which later influenced his experience as a transfer student. By having access to taking an ES course, Eric's background majoring in Political Science also allowed him to articulate a distinct difference between the curriculum he was learning in his political science and sociology courses, in comparison to the other interviewees. Reflecting on his own exposure to ES, Eric also shared how he was able to cultivate his political consciousness through the support of an Ethnic Studies professor at his community college. Highlighting the role of this professor's mentorship in his own educational journey, Eric recalled,

"I wrote an article during the week [of the] George Floyd protests. Just like the summer of 2020....[After writing the article] it was like, straight up, I just felt empowered to be honest. I was like, you know what, I want to write about that. So then, the only person I shared it with was my close friend and then my ethnic studies professor. [Then] she shared it with our class but that was it." By finding support and mentorship through an ES course, Eric's introduction to ethnic studies also provides context for understanding how ES differentiates from disciplines including Political Science and Sociology. In particular, as he became interested in ES because of his own reflections from BLM, his experience also brings into question the role of being introduced to ES through experiences of other struggles. Specifically, through being informed about ES and focusing on the relational aspect between Black and Asian communities in his hometown, Eric's chance encounter with ES also mirrors the experiences of students in the 1960s involved in the TWLF, understanding how Black radical thought has influenced his own politicization during his time at community college. Similar to Emily, Eric's development of his political consciousness also later influenced his experience as a transfer student where he began becoming involved in SEA student organizations and Asian American community organizations, developing a panethnic identity as a second generation Vietnamese American. As an individual that was more self-selective in actively seeking out ES during the end of his time at community college, Eric's initial introduction to ES also highlights how people become introduced to ES through finding solidarity in the experiences of struggles.

In each of the four interviews, it was clear that an introduction to ES propelled the students to think more critically about their identities alongside their educational goals and experiences while attending community college. While their stories are not generalizable, their trajectories into student organizing and activism highlight the possibilities of transformation that can happen within a community college setting, building on top of the knowledge that they had coming into the institution and into the relationships they formed in the context of ethnic studies, student activism, and social justice As each interview participant reflected on how their experience of ES changed their understanding of their identity and developed their political

consciousness, the framework of panethnicity is also helpful for contextualizing how each student perceived their relationship to ES and the communities they saw themselves a part of. Drawing from Amy, Emily, David, and Eric's reflections on their community college experience, the role of developing a panethnic Asian American identity will also be addressed specifically in the context of how each student became involved in student and community organizing, leading to their self-identification as student activists.

(Re)Considering Asian American Panethnicity

While the development of Asian American panethnic identity stems from college campus activism during the Asian American movement, Yen Le Espiritu's research on panethnicity highlights the possibilities of transformation that can also occur at California community colleges. Noting that oftentimes courses in Asian American Studies stress the development of an Asian American identity and experience through looking at highly emotional discussions on subjects such as discrimation, alienation, and racism,³⁹ interviews with Amy, David, Emily, and Eric reveal both the possibilities of political consciousness in developing a panethnic identity as well as the limitations of Asian American panethnicity. Specifically drawing from accounts by Emily and Eric, their exposure to ES in community college highlights how both students immersed themselves into their ethnic communities while developing an Asian American panethnic identity after taking courses in ES about Asian American experiences. In conversation with Emily and Eric's experiences, Amy and David reflect a contradictory aspect of panethnicity, challenging existing frameworks by addressing how Asian American panethnicity can also be limiting when considering factors such as indigenous identity and informal experiences in

³⁹ Espiritu 1992: 36

community college outside of the classroom. Illustrated through each participant's reflections of their educational trajectories, their stories reconsider the significance of panethnicity in cultivating a student's political context in the specific context of California community colleges.

As Yen Le Espiritu's research on Asian American panethnicity derives from studying four year university campuses, the experience of encountering ES in community college provides a more nuanced perspective of when Asian American panethnicity is effective and when it is not. Beginning with Emily, she was initially exposed to ethnic studies through taking a course on Vietnamese American women, where she was able to draw connections of her own experiences to develop a sense of solidarity and politicization within the broader Vietnamese American community in San Jose. Specifically, as Emily recalled in her interview that her exposure to taking an ES course as a high school senior led her to pursuing an internship at the San Jose Spotlight, where she continued to pursue her career goals as an aspiring journalist while developing a political consciousness centered on highlighting community stories. Recalling her interview, Emily shared that,

"Even though I was covering the Vietnamese community...this community that I had grown up with– I was still learning new things about Vietnamese folks in San Jose...My favorite story that I've covered at the Spotlight was on a Vietnamese resident who was facing deportation... I learned that this person who was living in my community had a story that I had never heard before. And something that broke my heart is that they talked about how the Vietnamese community in San Jose...also stigmatized folks like them because of their criminal past and because they didn't really fit into that model minority myth of obeying the law and pulling yourself up by the bootstraps....That was the most impactful interview that I've ever done and it just really made me think...And even if it's happening to not a lot of folks numbers wise, it still matters to talk about [the issue] because it shows that like, the relationship between Vietnam and the U.S. is very complicated and it's riddled with colonialism and imperialism...and I really do credit my eagerness to learn about these relationships to that ethnic studies class I took, because it made me think deeper about like who I am in this country and also, what histories have led to me being here." Listening to Emily's recollection of her experience as an intern journalist at the San Jose Spotlight, it was clear to me that her experience reporting stories about her Vietnamese American community in San Jose was influenced by the time she had spent in the ES course taken at community college. By first making a personal connection through the course materials, Emily was able to expand and contextualize her own experiences while also motivating her involvement with a local community news organization, which also informed her own understanding of power structures through the conversations she was able to have while working on her stories. From the perspective of articulating Asian American panethnicity, Emily immersed herself in the Vietnamese American community in San Jose and became active in community organizations after being introduced to ES as a starting point for her career aspirations. What was initially a course taken out of personal interest became a place where she found mentorship through a community college professor who instructed the course as well as how she also found her voice as a community journalist, highlighting local issues in San Jose which later reflected in her involvement with SEA student organizations after transferring to a four year university.

However, Emily's trajectory into writing about her community also demonstrates a shift from Espiritu's argument of looking at pan Asian solidarity in the specific context of news media. In particular, while Espiritu also highlighted the role of pan Asian journalism in her research,⁴⁰ Emily's exposure to Asian American Studies actually led her to focus more specifically on the Vietnamese American community while covering as an intern journalist during her time in community college. In particular, Emily's experience represents an interesting shift for thinking about how Southeast Asian American panethnicity has developed in the Asian

⁴⁰ Espiritu (1992) p. 40.

American Studies community, especially in considering the panethnic approach to Southeast Asian student organizing and activism. While Emily's flexibility in her community college schedule allowed her to become immersed into reporting Vietnamese American community issues in San Jose, the specific issue of SEA deportations radicalized Emily which also reflected in the SEA student organizing she partook in after transferring to a four year university. Through my conversation with Emily, I also contend with thinking about how pan Asianism has shifted since Espiritu's initial 1992 articulation of panethnicity, articulated through the specific context of Asian American community college students that find ES through chance encounters.

In my interview with Eric, I noted similarities and differences between how he developed a pan ethnic Southeast Asian American identity in community college which overlapped with Emily's experience as well. In particular, Eric's focus on the Hmong and Vietnamese American community in Sacramento after writing about BLM indicates a shift that aligns with Emily's experience in community college, articulating a political Southeast Asian pan ethnic identity. Being more recently exposed to Asian American Studies, Eric's interview aligned with the existing literature on panethnicity, where the role of Asian American Studies programs at college campuses influence student understandings of panethnicity and pan Asian solidarity. By making connections between the Southeast Asian community he grew up with in Sacramento to the BlackLiveMatter movement and the targeting of Asian communities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Eric's introduction to ES later influenced his involvement with SEA student organizations after transferring from community college.

In addition to Eric's involvement with SEA student organizations, one of the most impactful comments during his interview was how he articulated personal connections from what

he learned in his initial exposure to ES to his personal relationships in his family. Mentioning that,

"....my dad [would] tell me stories about his refugee experience....but even back then I'd kind of brush it off and be like, oh, like, that's cool. But now, I learned a lot and you know, kind of understand the things that refugees went through [and] I definitely feel empathetic towards him...Honestly, I don't know if I'm ready to talk about the whole Vietnam War thing with my dad cause you know... [the] unification thing, like... you know, U.S. imperialism. Something like that. I don't know if I'm ready to talk about that. I don't know if he's ready."

From his reflection, Eric expressed a clear contention that he faced where even though he developed his political consciousness and became more involved in SEA student organizations after learning about ES, there was still a conflict with how this impacted his personal relationships By associating unification and U.S. imperialism in the context of the Vietnam War, Eric was demonstrating how even though he was able to grow his own political consciousness and develop a structural analysis of power that shaped his own community, he recognized the political tensions in the Vietnamese American community that he was faced with. Perhaps this is one of the limitations of ES in community colleges. While Eric was introduced to refugee narratives that helped him contextualize his father's stories growing up, his interview also articulated a difficulty in making a personal connection of ES to his family despite his sense of belonging with his peers. As Viet Thanh Nguyen articulates in What is the Political? American Culture and the Example of Viet Nam,"the war matters because the Vietnamese revolution helped to inspire the Asian American movement. If an Asian American methodology is one that not only questions abusive power but also ponders the ethical management of power, then what happened to the Vietnamese under communism should matter to Asian Americans as well as to those interested in the pursuit of a radical democratic culture."⁴¹ Defined as an Asian American

⁴¹ Thanh Nguyen (2005). p. 21.

methodology, Nguyen's intervention in how the Asian American movement was inspired by Vietnamese revolutionaries also reflects in Eric's interview in understanding the complexities of pan ethnic Asian American politics. As Eric was only introduced to the topic of the Vietnam War in his chance encounter with ES, his acceptance of a panethnic SEA identity also addresses potential limitations of what the fullest image a student can have of ES and Asian American Studies at California community colleges. Thus, while Eric's experience of ES helped further his politicization, his interview also reveals how panethnicity introduced through ES at community colleges can only begin to further their political consciousness and a deeper dive into specialized fields such as Asian American Studies would help him achieve a stronger, radical, political consciousness.

Developing nuance for the impact that ethnic studies can have for community college students in cultivating their political consciousness and activism, my conversation with Amy also revealed how the framework of Asian American panethnicity can be limited when considering the varying experiences of community college students. For Amy, her identity as an indigenous Taiwanese immigrant was evident in understanding that "ethnicity is not always voluntary, but may be imposed by a more powerful group," which also aligns Cristine Mora and Dina Okamoto's suggestion of contemporary research needed on panethnicity at an international level.⁴² Within the framework of panethnicity, Amy's experience in gravitating towards Chicana/o/x Studies and away from an Asian American identity directly captures Yen Le Espiritu's argument that subgroup identification within the Asian American category can lead to shifting levels of solidarity, backsliding, or dropping out of the pan-Asian framework. In particular, because pan Asian identity is tied to political interests in the United States and has

⁴² Espiritu (1992) p.161

developed into a categorization of political entities, Amy's experience initially identifying as nationally as Taiwanese and later shifting to identifying as indigenous Taiwanese highlights an example of how the pan Asian framework is also tied to considering how ethnicity is imposed. Specifically, Amy's experience of discrimination, oppression, and marginalization growing up in Taiwan later informed her politicization in the United States, sharing that,

"... feel like if I didn't take Ethnic Studies, I wouldn't notice that's my experience [as an indigenous person]. When I was a kid, I thought...this is how it is. But not until the first meeting with the MEChA. [In the meeting], we were sharing a time about our high school experience and then I shared about how... I don't know how to say the word.... you know the speaker of a high school graduation? So I am this person. My Mandarin has an accent. I just.. I just very unfortunately have an indigenous accent and so the school wanted to make sure I pronounced all the words correctly. So they kept me [after school] to practice and repeat the same thing over and over again the whole week before we graduated until 9 PM [every day]. Before, it was just like a story. For the first time when I shared that in the MEChA meeting, I started crying and then I was like, oh, I didn't know this thing is still hurt[ing]... But just because we all look mostly the same in Taiwan, people don't figure that is actually because you are a different group as well. That [has been] the experience for my education."

While existing literature on Asian American panethnicity looks at the development of a pan Asian consciousness at an institutional level, Amy's interview supports Espiritu's analysis of power dynamics between ethnic groups when it comes to pan Asian solidarity. Specifically,

Amy also shared that in addition to her experiences in Taiwan, she also came into ES with

preconceived notions about each field, highlighting,

"At the very beginning... I actually didn't think about taking any Asian American Studies because at the time, I felt that, I know I'm Asian because I am an Asian....It's different than my peers, because a lot of Asian Americans...[feel that they are] living in between a culture but [for me] I moved to here when I was 24. I was soaking in Asian culture already for 24 years....I didn't even know [what] Asian American [was] at the time. I didn't know Asian American is completely different than Asian. And then so at the time, I thought... I don't have to learn anything from here because I know I'm Asian so I took Black feminism classes." Alongside Amy's reflection of her indigenous identity, her interview also revealed a critical gap in what resources are available for students that have chance encounters with ES while attending community college. While she became politicized through the support of peers and mentors in the Chicana/o/x Studies department at De Anza College, her experience also illustrates the current landscape of ES at CCCs. While she did not have access to American Indian Studies, Indigenous Studies, or Pacific Islander Studies at her community college, her physical proximity and relationships formed in the Chicana/o/x Studies department also shaped her exposure to ES. In addition, Amy's decision of not enrolling in Asian American Studies courses came out of an understanding of AAS course materials and topics that did not address indigeneity in the same way that Chicana/o/x Studies was able to for her. Drawing from Amy's reflection of her first time attending a MEChA meeting, her recollection also gives context to understand how she was also processing her own experiences in Taiwan and in the United States. Specifically, her understanding of political solidarity and an analysis of power was more strongly developed through her mentorship in the Chicana/o/x Studies department at her community college, in comparison to her limited exposure to Asian American Studies. As noted by Professor Hsinya Huang, a scholar that focuses on transnational and transpacific studies, her research highlights how indigeneity in Taiwan consolidates a contemporary connection with oceanic frameworks, "unsettl[ing] territorial ties to the Chinese Mainland and it reframes this de-centered island site as connected with the Pacific Ocean."43 As Amy did not identify strongly with being Asian American and later expressed an interest in Pacific Islander Studies mentioned after our formal interview concluded, Dr. Huang's research also highlights an understanding of Amy's indigenous

⁴³ Huang, Hsinya. "Indigenous Taiwan as Location of Native American and Indigenous Studies." CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 16.4 (2014): https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2576

identity in the broader context of what the field of AAS had traditionally entailed. While the initial goal of early Asian American Studies educators was to develop their curriculum to help students "know who they are,"⁴⁴ Amy's interview reveals a significant critique in articulating an Asian American pan ethnic identity.

During the interview, it became clear that Amy's politicization was deeply tied to her community organizing and activism she was exposed to through the Chicana/o/x Studies department at De Anza College. In particular, Amy also set insightful context for understanding the idea of community building spaces as a crucial aspect within community colleges and Ethnic Studies programs. Although Cupertino, California has a significant Taiwanese population according to Amy, she highlighted that because of her exposure to Ethnic Studies, she became more aware of the differences and power structures in her personal life, which she called "the elite Taiwanese" in comparison to her own background as an indigenous Taiwanese person. Identifying colorism, classism, and how this was tied to the sense of elitism she felt within her local Taiwanese community, Amy shared that,

"I think it is just complicated. But when I was in Taiwan, I did feel like I'm the minority. And it's the way they talk. And then maybe my personality or maybe just my skin color....And taking Ethnic Studies made me realize that oh... there's a lot of ignorant and entitled Americans but, at the same time... I think we also still have a lot of entitled, arrogant Taiwanese as well...My manager, she was also very homophobic and after taking Ethnic Studies and women's studies I was like, okay...I needed to cut ties with the elite Taiwanese because that's the first time I realized that this is not my community. I actually don't feel safe around you. And sometimes still at some level, I feel guilty about saying that because I feel like [people] will be like, well, you're Taiwanese... we have a very big community, a Taiwanese community in Cupertino....And we gather maybe once, twice a month just to have fun, to have food, watching films. Before Ethnic Studies, I didn't realize that a lot of the conversations I have in that room are kind of non authentic, because I feel like I have to talk in the way they'd like, to make them more comfortable. So after that, I was like, okay, I'm not sure...I wanted to be out of this membership...I just feel like I'm not... [break] saying oppressed is way too extreme. I just feel like we

⁴⁴ Espiritu (1992) p.36

are not on the same page anymore...which is very unfortunate, but it is.... It is what it is."

While Amy's introduction to ES initially led to her feeling a sense of community with students in the Chicana/o/x Studies department, her interview also revealed how she was confronted with an uncomfortable reality of how she experienced classism and colorism within the Taiwanese community. Listening to Amy's trajectory in discovering Ethnic Studies through taking Chicanx and African American Studies classes at De Anza College, it also challenged my own assumptions about how Asian American students find their ways into Ethnic Studies spaces. For Amy, the role of mentorship, developing a political sense of solidarity alongside a power analysis tied to ES also led to her gravitating towards Chicana/o/x Studies, where she felt her indigenous identity was more understood by her peers. In addition to her reflections, Amy also challenged my own complacencies as a second-generation Chinese American researcher that was exposed to the idea of panethnicity during my time in community college. While Amy's chance encounter with ES led to her becoming involved with local community organizing in the San Jose region, her experience also demonstrated how she did not fit into a model of what Yen Le Espiritu has defined as Asian American panethnicity, where instead she found herself not needing to identify with other Asian Americans to find belonging, but rather in her identity as an indigenous Taiwanese. Through the conversation I was able to have with Amy, her perspective provides an intervention for thinking about indigenous and immigrant communities within Asian American Studies and Pacific Islander Studies spaces.

As Amy revealed later in the interview that she had actually spent 10 years at De Anza College, her chance encounter with ES also provides an opportunity to consider what impact more resourced ES programs can have at CCCs but also the limitations of being unable to take a

deeper, more critical dive into the discipline. When Amy transferred in 2019, she had already completed multiple A.A. degrees, including English and Intercultural Studies, which is the Ethnic Studies-equivalent degree offered at the community college. As our interview wrapped up and I ended my recording with Amy, she mentioned an interest in Pacific Islander Studies, which she stated that she felt more connected to in comparison to Asian American Studies. However, in our discussion afterwards, it was also revealed that given the geographical location of where she worked and attended school, Pacific Islander Studies was not as easily accessible to Amy in comparison to the Chicana/o/x Studies community that she found in community college. As Amy shared extensively about her experience in Taiwan growing up as an indigenous person, this was something that I had not initially planned to ask about during the interview; however, after the interview we continued to keep in touch as she also expressed an interest in teaching ES to high school students in the San Jose area.

While each interview varied in how participants related to the key themes that make up ES, each interview revealed key examples of how community colleges can be transformative spaces facilitated through ES. Specifically, my interviews with David and Amy provided crucial context for understanding the vast range of experiences that lead students to attending community college, while also challenging assumptions of community college students and the importance of student organizations at CCs. In my interview with David, while he adopted a panethnic Asian American identity after transferring to a four year university with a large Asian American student population, his initial encounter with ES did not result in a strong or clear influence in the development of his political consciousness. Rather, while he was informed about the TWLF and ES, his politicization was based more on his experiences in jazz club and working while attending school. In the interview, David revealed that community college was a

transformative experience of growth which broke him out of feelings of confusion after finishing high school. As a high achieving student throughout his secondary education, David had mentioned that he chose to attend community college because he felt lost after finishing high school, despite getting into almost every UC he applied to. In particular, as Hartnell College and Monterey Peninsula College did not offer ES, David recalled that he gravitated towards History due to his interest in the subject which later informed his lived experiences as a community college student balancing academic responsibilities and working part-time. While his initial encounter with ES in a U.S. history class provided him with an introduction to the TWLF, David spoke mostly about his experience attending school while working night shifts at a local convenience store, as well as his time spent with in jazz band, who he still reconnects with every time he returns to his hometown.

"A lot of my, I guess, education came from outside of the classroom too. I did mention in the email but I worked at 7-11. During my two years at community college I started out as a regular clerk, and then ended as assistant manager, not because I was qualified or anything... [but] because at one point I was one of the only two people that knew how to do everything... I worked with a lot of formerly incarcerated people in that job, because that's one of the few places that will hire anyone, no questions asked. And then working with an owner franchisee that was–just this greedy libertarian, like, no social awareness, no critical understanding of any social dynamics, structural issues and nothing– None whatsoever..."

For David, understanding issues within his local community was tied much more to his lived experiences and relationships he formed while attending community college, whether it was through his part-time job or through the friends he made in jazz club. Specifically, one example that David recalled during the interview was the impact that one of his bandmates had on his politicization. As a former prison guard and police officer who was also formerly incarcerated, David recalled how meeting his bandmate through jazz club also had a significant influence on his educational journey. Recounting his politicization from meeting other students in jazz club, David added on the description of his bandmate during our interview, sharing,

"...now he's doing like a Doctorate in Public Policy, like a professional degree. But, he played saxophone. He's actually Burmese. His parents are from Myanmar. But, you know, talking to him and listening to his stories from prison. His cop stories and then like hearing his critical perspective on, you know this police state we live in, and this carceral state from outside the classroom. And then, just all the experiences like that, you know?"

In the specific context of David's hometown of Salinas, California, David articulated in his comment that in addition to the guidance he received from professors at his community college, the interpersonal relationships he formed in jazz club heavily influenced the development of his political consciousness. While David provided an example of this bandmate that he stated helped him develop his political consciousness, his comment also revealed how he was able to further his understanding of power structures in the context of political solidarity through meeting individuals that also faced their own contradictions in engaging with the prison industrial complex and policing in the United States. This was important to note because as David continued through the interview, it became clear that David found his community college experience to differ drastically from his high school experience and transfer experience at a four year university. Noting that, "I don't know if this is the right way of putting it, but, I had a degree of independence in community college that I really lost here. I feel like a little bit of being at [four year university name] makes me feel like I'm back in high school a little bit." David shared how encountering ES in community college can be a catalyst for students to understand their life experiences, however the specific context of being a community college shaped his politicization in a more influential way, which he highlighted as we concluded our conversation.

As David's experience of politicization is also connected to the concept of Asian American panethnicity, while he did not participate in pan Asian organizations during his time in community college, his proximity to a strong Asian American Studies community after transferring influenced his development of a panethnic identity. Identifying as a mixed race Asian American with a Thai mother and white father, David shared that,

"I did not identify strongly with my ethnicity, my race, initially. It wasn't until high school where I finally thought about it. I had gone through great pains to hide the fact that I was half Asian for at least the first 15 years of my life. Because of things like that, I guess when I got exposed to actually AP US History that I started thinking more about my racial identity."

As the development of his racial identity shifted after transferring, David's development of pan ethnic Asian American identity became especially prominent after he reflected on his transfer experience. Throughout the one hour interview, it became evident to me that when talking about the significance of ethnic studies, it was always tied back to his experience of being a community college student and how that impacted his view on social issues due to the larger community of Salinas that he was exposed to outside of his high school experience. As he put it himself, the experience of being at [university name redacted] was like being in "a bubble and almost galling for community college transfers [like myself]" where he emphasized that his experience in "universities similar to [his] experience in high school." Asking David for his final reflections on his experience in community college, he reiterated that he "would not trade it for the world," wrapping up our interview by reemphasizing the significance of making ethnic studies more mainstream so that it is not just a class requirement. Overall, through the conversation I was able to have with David, he provided critical insight on how the specific context of attending community college can lead to student politicization. While David did not necessarily engage deeply with ES after his chance encounter, his experience of finding community in jazz club which later propelled his politicization demonstrates how students can develop a sense of political consciousness in the specific context of CCCs.

Through interviewing Emily, Eric, David, and Amy, their stories reveal a glimpse into what possibilities exist for introducing community college students to ES. As my conversations with all four participants addressed both the limitations as well as potential for politicization that can come from ES, I also highlight the Knowledge is Power Learning Community (KPLC) at Mt. San Antonio Community College, a pilot program implementing an Ethnic Studies curriculum into general education requirements for students joining the learning community at the community college. Drawing from an interview with Michael, a college counselor at Mt. SAC, he shared that,

"What separates KPLC [from other learning communities] is it was kind of started [after]... this mandate from the CSU, with the ethnic studies graduation requirement and us wanting to...support the importance of that but also wanting to be proactive in setting up our students.... It was predominantly geared towards new students so we have a freshman composition class-that's one of the courses...So yeah, we do it just to get people a little more acclimated to the school but also tying in that cultural and historical aspect of it."

As a college counselor, Michael's background in Asian American Studies has also allowed him to serve as a part of the advisory board for the learning community. Compared to existing learning communities at CCCs, such as Umoja, Puente, and MESA which I mentioned at the beginning of my research, Michael also noted that the goal of KPLC is to create a specific ES focus amidst changing transfer requirements in the UC and CSU system. By developing an ethnic studies learning community as a result of the new ES mandate, the pilot program presents new possibilities for how Ethnic Studies can be implemented at community colleges. Through sharing the stories of Amy, David, Eric, and Emily, their stories also provide a glimpse into the experiences of community college students and the possibilities for cultivating a sense of political consciousness through ES. While there is still much research to be done on Ethnic Studies programs at California community colleges, existing efforts such as the KPLC pilot program provide potential options for understanding how ES can best be implemented to support students at the community college level, shaping the potential of continued politicization processes for community college studies in the future through ethnic studies.

Chapter 5: Conclusion: Returning to 1968

In the four interviews with Emily, Amy, David, and Eric, each participant revealed how they were able to develop their politicization during their time at community college, emphasizing the role of mentorship and a political sense of solidarity through their initial introduction to ES. As this project began under the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the stories of these four student activists highlight the difficulties but also moments of politicization that shaped their activism during their time at community college. Whether through virtual or physical community building spaces, each individual credited their chance encounter with ES at community college as a crucial aspect in shaping their political consciousness and activism. Taking into consideration the circumstances that shaped each student's experience as well as the direction of this project, overall, this study hopes to begin drawing interest for researching ES at California community colleges, lending itself to future studies on the impact of ES, specifically through its influence in shaping the experiences of students of color at the community college level.

As Emily stated in her interview that her exposure to ES also made her realize that something as familiar as *Paris by Night Star* was also tied to a larger history of the Vietnamese American community, I also urge those interested in studying ES to re-emphasize the importance of 1968 and the foundations that shaped the field into what it is today. Making a return to the 1968 student strikes that propelled ES into higher education institutions, this thesis hopes to

highlight both the possibilities and limitations of ES currently at CCCs. Referencing back to Amy's disconnect with panethnicity, this project also grapples with the existing perceptions of ES, as well as the need for a relational analysis between each subfield. Focusing on the experiences of Amy, Emily, David, and Eric, each of their stories highlight a distinct experience of their time in community college and the ways that they were able to engage with their local communities after being introduced to ES through mentorship. As this study also addressed the role of mentors in shaping each student's trajectory in higher education, it is also important to continue supporting the work of community college professors that continue to support students of color through ES. Overall, while each of the four interview participant's shared their own successes becoming student activists following their chance encounter with ES, it is also important to note that there is still work to be done in regards to supporting ES initiatives and programs at California community colleges.

In addition to the politicization that each student highlighted in their interviews, this study also recognizes the efforts already being made for establishing ES at CCCs. In regards to the CSU ES mandate, the KPLC learning community at Mt. San Antonio College is a clear example of how ES also aligns with other programs focused on supporting students of color in higher education. Situating my own personal and political investments in ES, the scope of this project hopes to illuminate how even within the specific experiences of four students, their politicization and introduction to ES influenced their later involvement in their local communities. When discussing the topic of ES at CCC, one of the limitations that comes up is that ES is often conflated with narratives of diversity and multiculturalism in higher education and while ES can be impactful for students of color, it is also crucial to recognize the field's current limitations in response to neoliberal perceptions of ES. On the topic of semantic

substitutes and how it is tied to understanding the role of Asian American panethnicity at CCCs, this project recognizes that there are still institutional limitations for developing students' radical political consciousness. While the issue of semantic substitutes for ES are still contending issues in the CCC system, this project hopes to highlight a return to the 1968 ES movement in conversation with the students interviewed in the article. In conclusion, this research hopes to highlight the impact of ES at CCCs, supporting the efforts of student activists, community college professors, and staff to support new ES initiatives and programs in the community college system. Aligning with a refusal to engage in multiculturalism and diversity initiatives geared towards neutralizing ES curriculums, I highlight an urgency for students, teachers, and comrades in the field of ES to return to the roots of the field and 1968 in the context of today's current political landscape. Overall, as ES becomes more broadly implemented across the state of California, this project hopes to serve as an introduction to the possibilities of ES as a tool for developing student's political consciousness at California community colleges.

Appendix A: Participant Interview Guide

[Participant Guide]

Community College Context

- 1. What community college did you attend/are you attending?
- 2. Were there any other colleges you considered attending?
 - a. Probe: Why did you choose to not go directly to a UC/CSU/Other 4-year? Competitive? Expensive? Not ready? If not ready, what made you feel like you were not ready?
 - b. Probe: Were there any financial factors that made you decide not to go to a 4-year immediately instead of transferring?
- 3. How long have you been attending/did you attend CC?
- 4. What did you major in at CC?
 - a. Probe: How did you choose your major?
 - b. Probe: What is your current major?
- 5. What made you decide on going to CC?
- 6. How did you pay for CC?
 - a. Probe: How much did your parents help?
 - b. Probe: Did you work while going to CC?

ES/SJ Program Experiences/Reflection:

- 7. How did you initially hear about the ES/SJ program at your CC?
 - a. Probe: What about ES/SJ caught your attention?
 - b. Probe: Was it more the social aspect of the program or the academic material?
- 8. How did you become involved with the ES/SJ program?
 - a. Probe: What led you to become more involved?
- 9. What did you find most valuable about the program?
- 10. Were you involved with any student organizations?
 - a. Probe: What did you do in the organization(s)?
- 11. Based on your own experience, what do you think an ES/SJ curriculum should have or include?
 - a. Probe: What do you think is the key purpose/role of having an ES/SJ program at the community college level?

Identity and Activism

- 12. What was your experience in K-12 education like growing up?
 - a. Probe: What was your life like before starting community college?
 - i. Elementary School, Middle School, and High School
 - b. Probe: What kinds of responsibilities did you have outside school? Work? Family obligations?
 - c. Probe: Did you feel like you belonged?
- 13. Are you strongly identified with your ethnic identity?
 - a. Did you always feel this way (towards your ethnic identity)?
- 14. Did you ever consider majoring / minoring in something to help you better connect with your identity with your education?
 - a. Probe: Why or why not?
- 15. What other identities are important to you?
- 16. How did learning about ES/SJ impact you after hearing about it?
 - a. Probe: Did it have any impact on your relationships? (with family? friends?)

Conclusion

- 17. What kinds of students do you think an ES/SJ makes a difference for?
- 18. 10 years from now, what do you hope Ethnic Studies and Social Justice programs will be like? Is there anything you would do differently?

Closing Script

Before we wrap up, I just want to ask: <u>if there is one thing you want me to make sure I</u> remember or take away from this interview, what would it be?

Thank you so much for taking the time today to talk about your experience of the ES/SJ program at your community college! Just to review, the information that you shared in this interview will be used to research the impact of ES/SJ programs at California community colleges on students and the results of this study might benefit future research efforts in supporting ES and SJ programs in the community college system.

Thank you so much! If you have any additional questions about this interview or study, please feel free to contact me through my email at kellyzz98@g.ucla.edu. I will contact you in the future if the information provided in the interview requires further approval. Thank you again!

[Turn off the recorder.]

Appendix B: Key Expert Interview Guide

[Key Expert Guide]

Opening Script

Hello, thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview! My name is Kelly Zhao, and I am a graduate student at UCLA. I am conducting interviews with individuals that have had experience with the ethnic studies/social justice program at their community college and you were selected as a participant due to your involvement and experience with the program at (insert CCC). As we proceed with the interview, feel free to stop me at any point if you have any questions or additional comments. You can also choose to not answer a question if you don't feel comfortable doing so. Now, I am going to read over a guide to the interview procedure. Let me know if you have any questions.

[First, we are required to have all interview participants understand the following:]

- 1. The purpose of the study is to research how Ethnic Studies and Social Justice programs have impacted student experience at a California community college as well as how Ethnic Studies and/or Social Justice Studies has affected your life.
- 2. In this interview, I will be asking you questions about your experience in the program and your understanding of the program's history.
- 3. The interview should last no longer than 1 hour.
- 4. If at any point during the interview you feel uncomfortable or you do not feel like answering a question, you are entitled to withdraw from the interview. You do not have to answer all of the questions and may end the interview at any time without any consequences.
- 5. This research study is voluntary and the information that you provide will be confidential. Your age and school which you attend may be a potential identifier in this study. Your age and school you attend will be used in the research study in order to provide context for the study. Pseudonyms or removal of your name can be used if requested. Only analyzed group information will be published in the final report. Interview data (audio and visual) will be kept in encrypted, password protected files only accessible by the researcher.

For this interview, please provide your oral consent if you wish to continue with this interview. . Please let me know if you would like to continue this interview. Although we will be audio-recording the conversation, I want to assure you that we will not share any parts of the recording that you do not wish to share publicly. If at any point in time you would like me to stop recording the interview, please let me know and I will do so.

Do you have any questions before we begin? [After obtaining consent from the participant, begin recording.]

State: Interview with _____, on [date] at [time], on [location].

Community College Context

- 1. What community college are you currently working at?
- 2. How long have you been working at CC?
- 3. What made you decide to work at CC?
- 4. Before working at the CC, what did you do?
 - a. Probe: What did you major in during college?

ES/SJ Program Experiences/Reflection:

- 5. How did you initially hear about ES/SJ at your CC?
 - a. Probe: What about ES/SJ caught your attention?
 - b. Probe: Was it more the social aspect of the program or the academic material?
- 6. I know you mentioned working on a learning community at Mt. SAC, how did you become involved with the ES/SJ program?
 - a. Probe: What led you to become more involved?
- 7. What did you find most valuable about the program?
- 8. Are student organizations partnered with the program? Why or Why not?
 - a. Probe: What does the program do with the organization(s)?
- 9. Based on your own experience, what do you think an ES/SJ curriculum should have or include?

a. Probe: What do you think is the key purpose/role of having an ES/SJ program at the community college level?

Identity and Activism

- 10. What was your experience in K-12 education like growing up?
 - a. Probe: What was your life like before starting community college?
 - i. Elementary School, Middle School, and High School
 - b. Probe: What kinds of responsibilities did you have outside school? Work? Family obligations?

- c. Probe: Did you feel like you belonged?
- 11. Are you strongly identified with your ethnic identity?
 - a. Did you always feel this way (towards your ethnic identity)?
- 12. Did you ever consider majoring / minoring in something to help you better connect with your identity with your education?
 - a. Probe: Why or why not?
- 13. What other identities are important to you?
- 14. How did learning about ES/SJ impact you after hearing about it?
 - a. Probe: Did it have any impact on your relationships? (with family? friends?)

Conclusion

- 15. What kinds of students do you think an ES/SJ makes a difference for?
- 16. 10 years from now, what do you hope Ethnic Studies and Social Justice programs will be like? Is there anything you would do differently?

Closing Script

Before we wrap up, I just want to ask: <u>if there is one thing you want me to make sure I</u> <u>remember or take away from this interview, what would it be?</u>

Thank you so much for taking the time today to talk about your experience of the ES/SJ program at your community college! Just to review, the information that you shared in this interview will be used to research the impact of ES/SJ programs at California community colleges on students and the results of this study might benefit future research efforts in supporting ES and SJ programs in the community college system.

Thank you so much! If you have any additional questions about this interview or study, please feel free to contact me through my email at kellyzz98@g.ucla.edu. I will contact you in the future if the information provided in the interview requires further approval. Thank you again!

[Turn off the recorder.]

Appendix C: Recruitment Fliers

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED:

RESEARCH ON ETHNIC STUDIES AND SOCIAL JUSTICE PROGRAMS AT CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

We are looking for participants 18 years and older that have enrolled in Ethnic Studies and/or Social Justice Programs while attending a California community college!

PARTICIPANTS WILL BE ASKED TO PARTICIPATE IN:

- A 1 hour interview over Zoom or phone call

- 1 follow-up appointment, if necessary

PARTICIPANTS WILL RECEIVE A GIFT CARD FOR COMPENSATION

If you are interested in this study, please refer to the information sheet below.

If you are unsure if you meet the requirements, email the principal investigator, Kelly Zhao (kellyzz98@g.ucla.edu)

ETHNIC STUDIES/SOCIAL JUSTICE MAJORS THAT ATTENDED A CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE:

Research Study Information

The purpose of this study is to research the effects of Ethnic Studies and Social Justice programs at California community colleges. Identifying the regions of Northern California, the Bay Area, Greater Sacramento, the San Joaquin Valley, and Souther California, this study is documenting how Ethnic Studies and Social Justice programs affect multiracial consciousness, activism, and social movement organizing for students at California community colleges. If you are a student majoring in Ethnic Studies or Social Justice, student leader, professor, or community member involved in the Ethnic Studies or Social Justice program at your California community college and is interested in participating in this research study, please continue reading below.

Interview participants will be asked to participate in an interview lasting between 45 minutes to 1 hour conducted either through Zoom or an in-person meeting. Participants will be compensated for their time. Participants will also be informed if they wish to continue to follow up with the study and the information that will be used in the overall research project.

For this study, we are seeking participants who...

- Have attended or are attending a California community college and enrolled in an Ethnic Studies or Social Justice course, majored in the program, or was involved with Ethnic Studies efforts
- Have worked or attended an accredited California community college for a minimum of at least 1 year
- Are 18 years of age or over

If you have any questions or are unsure if you meet the requirements, email the principal investigator, Kelly Zhao at: kellyzz98eg.ucla.edu PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH STUDY ON COMMUNITY COLLECE STUDENTS AND ETHNIC STUDIES / SOCIAL JUSTICE PROGRAMS!

Transfer and Community College Students:

SWIPE TO LEARN MORE!

What is the <u>stu</u>dy about?

This study is documenting how Ethnic Studies and Social Justice programs affect multiracial consciousness, activism, and social movement organizing for students at California community colleges.

swipe to see who we're intereviewing!

If you are/were a student majoring in Ethnic Studies/Social Justice, a student leader, professor, or community member involved in the Ethnic Studies or Social Justice program at your California community college, *please consider participating in this study*!

— selected participants will be compensated with a \$45 gift card for their time

We are seeking participants who...

Have attended or are attending a California community college and enrolled in an Ethnic Studies or Social Justice course, majored in the program, or was involved with Ethnic Studies efforts

 Have worked or attended an accredited California community college for a minimum of at least 1 year

Are 18 years of age or old

Interested?



Participants will be asked to partake in: - A 1 hour interview over Zoom or phone call - One follow-up appointment, if necessary

Contact

If you have any questions or are unsure if you meet the requirements, email the principal investigator, Kelly Zhao at: kellyzz98@g.ucla.edu

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