

# High schools struggle to offer multiculturalism

By Mandy Baucum  
Emerald Reporter

Isabel Kim, a Churchill High School senior, said she is tired of the way history classes speak about her culture.

Kim says people of Asian culture may only be mentioned in the context of the Vietnam War era or "how we are taking over in technology."

"Mostly negative things about Asian culture are brought out in our education system," Kim said.

Alba Alonso, a Churchill student, said she wishes the history classes offered at her school would spend more time talking about Chicanos other than "how they work in the cornfields."

Alonso and Kim said they would like to be able to take an elective course about their own and other cultures. However, despite the growing demand for cultural education, none of the local high schools have such elective class offerings.

Local high school history teachers are faced with the difficult task of incorporating everyone's historical background into a one-year U.S. history course.

George Westergaard, South Eugene High School social studies department chairman, said all Oregon high schools are required to offer one year of global studies and one year of U.S. history.

Westergaard said a government class is also required, but is "basically ethnic free."

"The purpose of academic freedom is to try to make a point to deal with the required curriculum without excluding something else," Westergaard said. "You end up making some group stand out. Our goal is to give an overall picture. The teacher has to pick and choose."

Steve Handran, North Eugene High School's social studies chairman, said there is a problem with adding everyone's history into a one-year history class because, "when you include something, what do you take out?"

District history teachers agreed the global studies class teaches very little multicultural history. They said



Photo by Michael Shindler

Student Union groups at Churchill High School offer a chance for minority students to discuss their cultures.

the amount of history that must be crammed into U.S. history just doesn't provide students with the multicultural background teachers would hope for.

However, history teachers, like Timothy Meinzen of Pleasant Hill High School, said their advanced placement courses give them the chance to require ethnic readings outside of the textbook.

Byron Dudley, the assistant principal of curriculum and instruction at North Eugene High School, said he knows there is a lack of history available for and about minorities, but recognizes the effort teachers are making to fill in those gaps.

"My bias is that it is a very limited historical perspective," Dudley said. "I know from observing the U.S. and A.P. (courses) that there is certainly an attempt to look at the role of minorities in history. Unfortunately, history is not perceived as a high-interest area."

Gail Nelson, Churchill's social studies department

chairwoman, said because of Eugene's changing demographics, more demands are being made on the schools to offer a more balanced history curriculum.

Steve Handran, social studies chairman at North Eugene High School, said minority awareness is now becoming more of a priority in student education.

"In the last decade there has been a significant push to recognize the contributions of minorities to the history of our nation," Handran said.

Handran said North has been approaching the lack of culturally balanced history by purchasing a textbook titled *The American Odyssey*.

"The book provides more than just a caption of a famous minority, like Mr. Luther King Jr.," Handran said.

The hiring of Anselmo Villanueva in March 1990 as Minority-Community Liaison for 4J is an example of the district's attempt to address representative concerns.

Villanueva said part of his job is helping schools establish a plan to address the schools' minority populations.

District schools have different needs and therefore require different strategies to do this, Villanueva said. Some schools, like Churchill, are in constant contact with him and in use of his services.

Churchill has created student unions to fulfill the needs of their minority students. The unions are given an hour a month to meet and talk about their culture, interests and minority issues.

John Sappington, Churchill's assistant principal, said Churchill is the model school as far as multicultural promotion and awareness.

Villanueva said "that depends on how you look at it."

Villanueva said he has his own way of how to tell if a school is promoting a multicultural environment.

"A school is successful when there is across-the-board participation," Villanueva said. "If the student body has a 10 percent ethnic minority population, then 10 percent of the football team, for example, should be ethnic minorities."

## HISTORY

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history professors and concerned students.

Garcia said he believes there are problems with the ethnic curriculum offerings, one being that his class is not counted toward the University's race and gender course requirement. Another problem is that students are paying for a class the teacher isn't being paid for.

There is nothing wrong with the white perspective, Garcia said, but it should not be the only perspective taught in history classes.

"My perspective is that if you have a Euro-American teacher teaching a class

that deals with people of color," Garcia said, "you need to be clear on the fact that it is a Euro-American perspective on Chicano studies."

The issue, he believes, is one of life experience.

"The University likes to hire people with credentials. I think life experience has more to add," Garcia said. "A person with life experience can humanize the content. If you balance experience with research, you've got a great teacher."

Is the University making a sincere effort to meet the student demand for a more ethnic curriculum?

Most history instructors, such as assistant history Professor Jeffrey Ostler, said they try to incorporate minority groups

in their teachings.

Quintard Taylor, a professor and acting director of the ethnic studies department, said the issue is a complicated one. The problems the history department faces are multi-faceted and encompass everything from fiscal restraints to the growing need for classes on the history of Japanese, which is quickly becoming the United States' largest trade partner.

Assistant history Professor William Toll, a white man currently teaching the African-American history class, said he is aware of the complex issues around minority hiring and ethnic course offerings but believes if the University were truly committed to offering more

multicultural classes, then something would be done.

Toll said he believes because the University has a primarily caucasian student body, it doesn't feel as much pressure to diversify its courses.

"For example, if you were at Wayne State University, you would have to respond to the ethnic needs, or you wouldn't have a University," Toll said.

"If you compare (the University) with other universities, Oregon is a backwater place," he said. "The curriculum offerings are not acquainting students with the real world, which for the most part has more of a minority population. You see a much greater effort in 4J school district than you do at the University."



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