

Executive Summary on Development of the Critical Race and Ethnicity Studies Department
Prepared for Augsburg Faculty Meeting, October 21, 2020

Introduction: In November 2019, Augsburg students, staff, and faculty convened an informal working group to design a Critical Race and Ethnicity Studies department at Augsburg. In the months since, the working group met regularly to study options and share models. In the wake of the murder of George Floyd and President Pribbenow’s subsequent call on Augsburg to “do better,” we demanded that Augsburg immediately create a department of Critical Race and Ethnicity Studies (CRES). In June 2020, President Pribbenow and Provost Kaivola accepted those demands.

With that backing, the CRES working group began proposals to establish a department and outline a curriculum (with corresponding undergraduate majors and minors as well as a stand-alone graduate certificate in critical race and ethnicity studies that compliments and serves MAL, MAT, MEd, MAN, MSW, and MFA programs).

CRES is an interdisciplinary field that equips undergraduate and graduate students with the multidisciplinary tools and critical thinking skills needed to understand and challenge the ways in which race and ethnicity permeate American life. Augsburg’s students started advocating for such a curriculum in 1968. 52 years later, in the wake of George Floyd’s murder, it remains more essential than ever.

Project Development: As our work progressed, we determined that in order to develop a CRES curriculum focused on creating change, we needed to situate the program as an interdisciplinary department. Critical Race Studies and Ethnic Studies represent entire epistemologies, philosophies of looking at the world, and experiences that are often marginalized or filtered through a dominant cultural lens in traditional Eurocentric models of education. Our group recognized the importance of the following for CRES:

- The curricular centering and validation of historically marginalized communities’ worldviews, ontologies, epistemologies, histories, cultures, and achievements through a department focused on the cultural, political, and social experiences of those highlighted by the area;
- Generating curricular and co-curricular spaces as intersectional sites of learning, empowerment of cultural identity, thoughtful and impactful action, social justice, and dismantling systems of oppression and entrenched racism;
- Engaging students’ nuanced identities and cultures through a theoretical and community-focused curriculum;
- Intentionally creating a department that would be able to grow and expand over time and in response to ongoing changes in society;

- The positioning of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary scholars within one department/program. This positioning validates the areas of study, which is key to the students and faculty involved, and stimulates and promotes the ongoing creation of new insights and understandings within the department and across the multi-disciplines encompassed within it;
- The need to hire interdisciplinary faculty in the CRES focus areas. Interdisciplinarily-trained scholars infuse teaching and learning with a range of methods, pedagogical approaches, and theories. Intentionality on this count insures the necessary intersectionality to provide a robust Critical Race and Ethnicity Studies curriculum and degree;
- The inclusion of staff, community knowledge holders, and students--as well as faculty--in shaping the growth and direction of the department.

Objectives:

- a minimum of five full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty in a range of academic fields of study that reflect the best interdisciplinary practices and methodologies of the related fields;
- the creation of a stand-alone interdisciplinary department, that complements existing curricular and co-curricular spaces;
- a primary focus on—at the least—Africana Studies, Latinx Studies, and Asian American Studies;
- offering a major and a minor in Critical Race and Ethnicity Studies; and
- departmental course offerings being included in general education requirements.

Supporting Structures: Finally, the working group proposed a named (and as soon as possible, endowed) chair in Critical Race and Ethnicity Studies to help launch the department in the current school year. As you know, Professor Bill Green was named the inaugural M. Anita Gay Hawthorne Chair in Critical Race and Ethnicity Studies, for his many community and scholarly contributions to questions of race and ethnicity in our community.

Impacts: The creation of a CRES department as outlined above will ensure that Augsburg is (rightly) seen by prospective students and the broader community as a leader in social justice and anti-racism practices. Furthermore, CRES will provide Augsburg students the option to center their identities (especially students whose who are Black, Indigenous and People of Color, or from other communities who have been racialized as non-white) in their coursework. This will insure they become informed citizens, thoughtful stewards, critical thinkers, and responsible leaders.