

Oral History Transcript

OH# UA-016-11
Narrator: Jason Nice (year of birth - 1978)
Interviewer: Marley James
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Date: November 1, 2024
Location: Chico, California
Language(s): English
Project: Preserving Chico State Voices for Change

Audio Format(s): wav
Length: 00:43:19
Transcript: Digitized. Verbatim & edited; 19 pp [Kaltura]

Ava - Hello. My name is Ava Colton, and today is Friday, November 1, 2024. It is 2:10 P.M. in the afternoon. My partner, Marley James, and I are conducting this interview in the Meriam Library Podcast studio in Chico, California. And we are here with Dr. Jason Nice. [giggling] This interview is part of the oral history project, preserving Chico State voices for change, which aims to [um] archive and narrate the history of community activism at Chico State. Dr. Nice, before we get started, we need to formally ask you, do we have your consent to record this interview?

Jason - Yes.

Marley - So with that, let's jump into the questions.

Jason - Okay.

Marley - So the first one is, what was the process like when implementing ethnic studies courses into Chico State curriculum?

Jason - That's a big question. I'm trying to think about where to begin. Um. So, I guess just a little bit of background about how I was connected to that first. And so, from 2018-2022, I was the chairperson of the General Education Committee, which on our campus, everyone calls CAB, the Curriculum Advisory Board. And underneath general education, Chico State has other graduation requirements for students, too, of one of which was called U.S. Diversity. And that's been around for quite a long time, and that included quite a few ethnic studies courses, but a lot of courses beyond that. Ethnic studies defined by the legislation focuses on four groups, and the

U.S. Diversity includes a lot of other different groups. And so there were dozens of classes that have that, and the GE Committee would look after those. And that was- predated me, been around for a long time. The process was extremely fast and impacted and did feel very much connected to the activism of 2020. And so, it was also, I guess, for context, looking back now. This is fully during the lockdown. Everybody's at home. Everything is being - you guys remember that - and everything is being conducted on Zoom through email, electronically. So that was that. And what took place, though, is during the summer of 2020, the governor...[pause]

Ava - Gavin Newsom

Jason - Gavin Newsom, um, proposed legislation that was approved. And, um... Well, he didn't propose it. It was, um, proposed in an assembly bill, but he signed it into law, and it happened very quick, and it charged the CSU campuses to implement an ethnicities requirement in 13 months, basically, which is extremely fast for a normal timeline because, um, catalogs have to be changed and student records have to be changed. That's really is a very short timeline. And so, the process was... was really quick, and ethnic studies was created as a general education area formally, and therefore, it was kind of under the purview of the general education committee that I chaired. We didn't have any ethnic studies expertise on the committee, though. And so the process was to try to work with and empower a group of experts on our campus to identify the courses, get them to count and then to kind of work with the whole university to kind of get the whole thing through, which entailed changing the policy, which required a lot of a... lot of work and a bit of a fight. And so... in the end, though, we did it, and it was a job well done, I think. We got the courses ready for the first group of students to come in that fall. So, yeah.

Ava - Yeah, a personal question. Could you ever see us creating a whole college of ethnic studies? Because I know that's happened to other universities. Do you see us heading in that direction?

Jason - That's a [pause] awesome question, San Francisco State has an ethnic studies college. And, um, I think the first step would be to have a department, and we don't actually have a Department of Ethnic Studies. We did, used to, and I think it was during the 1990s, they changed the name to multicultural and gender studies, and so that what we call MCGS, is the quote-unquote, ethnic studies department. But there are definitely faculty who are interested in creating a department of ethnic studies, and then maybe something more in the future.

Marley - Um, [pause] tell us about what got you interested in, like improving curriculum like this.

Jason - Awesome. So [pause with a sigh] again, it was probably connected to that moment in 2020. I think it was both the events of that year, but also, um, since you two are my former students, and you know, I like the Book in Common. The Book in Common that year was a book called *How to Be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi and one of the main things that he talks a lot about in that book is that it was his belief that, um, social change had been really slower than I think a lot of people were hoping for because there was an emphasis on really, through education, but elsewhere as well, trying to change people's hearts and minds first and then hoping that change would follow and that that wasn't happening so much. And so, he really, um, kind of encouraged people in whatever spaces they occupied to try to change structural things and policies where you can. And so, University curriculum kind of felt like a way to do that. Um, and the creation of that ethnic studies requirement kind of gave our campus a focus that year that felt real, and so I was grateful for it.

Ava - Um, what changes have you personally made at Chico State towards enhancing curriculums? I mean, I know we were both in your humanities class and we would talk about these kinds of things.

Jason - Yeah.

Ava - And I know you're in the process right now of writing a book.

Jason - Yeah, yeah.

Ava - It talks a good amount about this.

Jason - Great question. Um. So, my training is not in ethnic studies. And so, I guess the way that I interact with it is the way that you guys interact with it. And the way that I kind of hope for the legislation is to interact with it is to try to get people more aware of the, you know, histories, lives, experiences of these communities and to kind of integrate it and think about it. And so, I teach European history, which kind of on the surface, or at least that's what my PhD was. I do a lot of other things, but that's kind of the main thing. That doesn't feel as applicable really so much, and yet it totally is. And there's things that I've learned in the last few years, questions that I've asked and things I thought about. Like, when you put together a list of required readings,

um, making sure you get a kind of representation of the historians doing the researching and the writing. Both in terms of, you know, everything as much as you can, um, different types of diversity in the authors that you're assigning. But even in the primary sources, I do... and the questions that historians have been asking, that's been really interesting, so I work on 16th century England, and the fact that there were black Londoners during that century is really interesting. There's been books written about it, and students are interested in it. And so, there's just been, kind of a lot - a lot more consideration. This is European history. My colleagues in American history obviously have more direct impact. In the honors program, though, also, one of the things that we were able to do was the... one of the things that legislation requires for ethnic studies, but doesn't for other general education areas is that the Ethnic Studies Department, which on our campus MCGS, has to have a cross list of a course in ethnic studies. And what that means is so for Honors, we have this Honors 300, which is Honors/MCGS 300 and so it's cross listed. There's two different sections. Um, and so that was really valuable. I thought for the honors program to have that ethnic studies class, um, but then connecting it to that department, and so, you know, working with that department to bring faculty in. Yeah. Which is the class that you guys are in-

Ava - Yes

Jason - for this project?

Ava - Yes. Um. I would say I did appreciate, during our humanities class, especially during that one week where, um, you were kind of like, well, what should we learn about this week? What should we talk about? So, we decided to talk about the Bidwells and the Mechoopda and I think that's a good thing to kind of get students to talk about what we want to learn about.

Jason - Right, mm, hmm. Mm, hmm.

Ava - Why do you believe that we need more [pauses to read question] courses focusing on ethnic studies?

Jason - I believe there needs... I don't want to say there should be more courses. I leave that to the ethnic studies experts of how many different like different courses there are. So, one of the really tricky things when we created it was like, for example, in other general education areas, there's History 130. That's the course for the whole thing.

Ava - Yeah

Jason - So maybe there should be one course. If ethnic studies faculty had decided there should be intro to ethnic studies.

Ava - Yeah

Jason - As the course, everybody takes it. Cool. But I guess to kind of reframe your question, um, I think that students take ethnic studies for all the reasons that the legislation points out, and the number one being just, you know, empathy and understanding, but also kind of social action, and also ethnic studies are just different than other disciplines on campus. I've learned that over the years. In some of the hard times of that implementation, I think it was definitely hard for some faculty around campus, who had for many years had taught a course that had that diversity status but then was told that it's not ethnic studies by ethnic studies faculty. You can imagine that was a hard thing. So, um, yeah, I guess, the big takeaway for me is, you know, all of these decisions. It's not really my decision. It is trying to make sure to kind of empower the people on our campus who you know what they're talking about, to kind of make those really important calls for students.

Marley - Kind of encouraging them in a way.

Jason - In a way, yeah. And empowering and that's kind of- Ava to your question about, should there be a college? Like, those things do matter ultimately or if there's a department because that's the way that institutional kind of power structures run and decision-making about the budget.

Marley - Yeah.

Jason - What to support, hiring faculty, and all that kind of stuff. And so, yeah.

Ava - Furthermore, I feel like ethnic studies should be a requirement for high schoolers, too, because I know my high school is just an elective that you could take if you wanted, but there was no diversity requirement.

Jason - That's changing right now, yeah. So, there's the high schools are implementing an ethnic studies requirement. Different school districts are going to implement it in different ways. They run into some of the same situations that the CSU runs into, and also the community colleges, right? Because if it's a CSU requirement, it's also now a requirement for the community colleges.

Um, and that's... [pause] There are not enough faculty to teach these courses. And so, training up faculty and teachers to be proficient, to explain these things that are difficult sometimes is [pause] important, is coming.

Marley - What are some of the benefits maybe that you have seen or, like, learned about, um, regarding learning about ethnic studies and ethnic-focused materials?

Ava - Especially for students.

Marley - Yeah, especially for students.

Jason - Yeah, I think [pause] you know, there's the light bulb moments, hopefully, you guys have had in college several times. I see it kind of the most when it kind of bumps up against ethnic studies material. And so, you know, whether it's in my own classes or talking to students that take other classes, or talking [phone buzz] to students maybe that are from a part of California that didn't know about, like, our stuff that we talked about like Bidwell Mansion. Almost all communities have a version of that and kind of being kind of keyed into that, paying attention to that. Um... I've heard stories from my colleagues about Dodger's Stadium. I don't know if you have yet about where it's built and the communities that were dislocated, and just kind of, like, processing through understanding more about just the place that you live in and the history that it has.

Ava - Yeah. [To Marley] I'm going to skip this one (referring to a question from the list). How have you worked alongside other professors, including Dr. Gloria Lopez (our HNRS 300 professor) to implement positive change into our curriculums?

Jason - Great. Yeah. So... so Doctor Lopez is in the same department as mine which is history. And so I'm the directing honors program, but I'm also a history professor, which is what Dr. Lopez as well. And so, she and I have worked on, um, honors curriculum, but also on the history curriculum, and so we've done a lot. But one of the things that I was really fortunate in back in 2020 and 2021 when we implemented this was that there was a committee created of these ethnic studies faculty, and, um, there was the chair of that committee, um, is a professor in the School of Education and in multicultural gender studies, Browning Neddeau. And so, he brought his expertise together, and we actually presented on this topic at a conference. It was really important to me to kind of work with him. But also, that- I was not on that committee. I'd kind of

let them do their recommendations, but every now and then, I could kind of go in and hear how it was going and, um, see the process that they were working through and how they were trying to, you know, think about a way that the four different groups could kind of be equally represented across the offerings to students and kind of also following student interest and faculty interest. And, um... No, working with faculty and ethnic studies has been awesome.

Ava - Well, do you think... do you work with a lot of faculty in the MCGS department as well as history?

Jason - Yeah, um... So... I became the director of the Honors program; I think in 2019. And so, we went through a process of redesigning the program at the same time that the ethnic studies requirement was coming on. And one of the purposes of creating the ethnic studies requirement was to kind of build up these departments across the system. And so actually, like, in the first few years of ethnic studies being, um, [pause] implemented here, MCGS hired a bunch of new faculty. And since we had created this course, and I had worked together with these faculty quite a bit, they had a lot of we had connections and trust with the Honors program. And so quite a few of those faculty have taught in Honors, which was really awesome.

Ava: Oh cool.

Jason: And so yes, like Honors 101, 102 have been taught by MCGS faculty before, Honors 300, obviously, and other courses as well. And so that was just awesome.

Marley - Um, this is not on our list, but I have a question about [pause to think] like you mentioned that 2020 kind of catapulted this into our curriculum. What was it like before that? Before everything was kind of implemented, and people really believed that-

Ava - Did a lot of students still take ethnic studies classes?

Marley - Yeah. Was that even an option? Like...

Jason - So there was this U.S. Diversity requirement that you all still have and usually, students, um, will complete that requirement naturally with a course for their major, maybe a GE course or an honors course or something that might have that designation. But it had kind of just grown over time and there was a lot of different courses in it. And there have been efforts within the CSU system to create an ethnic studies requirement. But the way that curriculum change works on campuses, it really is a multiple-year process. Long time. And universities, since their

foundation, back in the 13th, 14th centuries, faculty has kind of always controlled the curriculum and likes to debate it and discuss it and figure out what to teach students. It's called shared governance. And, um, there had been attempts by the CSU system, which is based down in Long Beach to kind of tell campuses, 'Hey, get this kind of going,' and campuses were really slow to respond or wanted there to be more time or whatever. It wasn't happening. So then ultimately, it was like, 'Nope, time to do it.' Now you have to do it.' But one really interesting thing that you might find noteworthy is in those couple of years before 2020, the Associated Students, in particular, became really, really focused on sustainability issues. Climate change became really [pause] front of mind for a lot of students. And there was a... during the regular AS election, there was a ballot measure. I should've... I don't know the exact number, but there was a question, like 'do you think that there should be basically a sustainability climate change requirement in global cultures and U.S. Diversity?' Huge majority of students said, yes. And so, one of the really really hard things that we had to kind of think about was okay. We have this U.S. Diversity requirement. Now we have an ethnic studies requirement. Clearly all the ethnic studies classes are going to be US diversities that basically negates that other requirement, right? Because take ethnic studies and they are going to meet that requirement. So, everything else in there. These could be classes that don't focus on those four groups, might focus on a different group, might focus on a different type of diversity, maybe ability, or something else. So there was a really difficult discussion between should we create a sustainability climate change requirement because students want it. Or do we... that's kind of pulling the rug out from all the other forms of diversity not part of ethnic studies. What- what do we do? And so, it was difficult and ultimately, it was determined to take the ethnic studies as a nation, sorry, take the U.S. Diversity designation off the ethnic studies courses and keep the other ones there. So, you guys in your catalog, still have to do U.S. Diversity. Um-

Ava - Okay. So, taking an ethnic studies course doesn't count as a U.S. Diversity?

Jason - No

Ava - Okay.

Jason - So that you then have to take another one.

Ava - Okay.

Jason - Right? And something that's not one of those ethnic studies courses. Um [pause] that was really hard, and it kind of- it's like one of the hard debates of that era, um, was focusing on, basically, is it, like, you know, social justice, racial justice or climate justice? And at the same time, a lot of us are like, well, they're connected, right? There's like environmental justice, and it's hard to take those apart, but it really did kind of turn into kind of a black or white choice for people that was hard.

Ava - Yeah.

Jason - So that's where that is. Interesting.

Ava - We were wondering between today versus when you very first started teaching, because I believe you taught in the UK for a little while? [Jason nods] Yeah, between when you first started teaching, how have you seen these changes kind of impact students? Do you feel like students are more open-minded nowadays because of the new requirements?

Jason - Yes! Um, I believe very much in general education. It's interesting you mentioned the UK. They don't do GE in the UK. And so actually, when you're 16- [laughing] Marley, you're like, blown away. And in the UK, when you're like 16 or 17, you choose three subjects to focus on.

Ava - That's so scary.

Jason - And then you go to college and focus on one. And that's your thing. And it is a three-year program and then you're out. Um, and so I went to grad school in the UK and definitely felt like the other grad students in history knew more history maybe than I did for sure, but they didn't do that general education thing, which I could feel, right, that I was able to kind of be able to talk about, like art and politics, a little bit of science- not much- and other things like that. Not as much as ethnic studies. I did have to take a kind of U.S. Diversity history course at my undergraduate institution. But no, I see the value is just profound, and like, when students go abroad from the US, I think they do great-

Ava - Yeah

Jason - because they're able to just roll with this new stuff in a pretty impressive way. And ethnic studies is definitely a really big part of that. Um, and I have completely seen a change in the way that a lot of traditional disciplines have been teaching and, um, really a lot more focus paid on

what kind of skills and abilities students bring into the classroom rather than, um [pause] how we were taught, how we should teach.

Ava - Yeah.

Jason - Make it like that. And so, I've definitely noticed that change as well.

Marley - Is there anyone or any, like, thing or group of people that was particularly resistant to these, like, implementations?

Jason - Um, resistance... [pause] yeah, I guess I'll break it up into two different ways. The first one is that when the legislation was approved and when the Board of Trustees of the CSU told us we had to do it. It was basically, like, you have to create this three-unit requirement, but you cannot add units to graduation, which is basically saying you have to cut something. And so as soon as you say that you're going to know that there's going to be a big chunk of people on campus who are going to... [pause]

Ava - Be very upset?

Jason - Be very upset, but also to lose work, right? So, to kind of think about it as a workplace. So, in this case, what it was... was it was one less social science requirement. And so, for you guys, you have to take one lower-division social science class. It's called Area D; I think for you guys in your catalog. Before 2020, it was to take two of that one. And so that was a big deal. So, um, there was a lot of concern about that. And it was really tricky to kind of balance that concern [pause to think] with supporting ethnic studies, right, not being opposed to ethnic studies, but also not wanting your area to get cut, and then it is cut, and that was really hard. The other thing though was that and I'll use my department as an example, history- well I'll use history and anthropology. Um, both there's like history of, um, I don't know the exact names of the classes, or they've changed, but of Native Americans or an anthropology course about Native Americans. And there was a sense that those were or should be ethnic studies. Just because, and that's not the way that it was perceived. It is a different... It is a different thing to teach an ethnic studies course about those groups than a history or anthropology course. It's not to say the history or anthropology course-

Ava - Is that because they approach history in different ways?

Jason - Yeah. I, um... [pause] The ethnic studies requirement is more community, social-minded, activist-minded, it's part of what ethnic studies is, and the disciplines don't necessarily address it that way. That's not to say that some classes don't, however, there are absolutely history or anthropology classes that are ethnic studies courses that have been deemed as such or taught by ethnic studies faculty. But just because it has a certain title, didn't make it one. You can imagine that did lead to some conflict, um, especially when you layer on to that, the faculty might have been teaching those classes were not from the community being studied. And so that adds to that as well. And so... I will say though that for the most part, the discourse, the kind of personal stuff didn't elevate. It could have been because we were on Zoom or it was more when things got tense, it was more of the big structural bureaucratic things or people like we fight about the social sciences losing a class rather than a specific thing.

Ava - With the implementation in 2020, just looking at Chico State, did we grow as a university, or did we just solely change balances? Uh...

Jason - Do we have more students? Or-

Ava - Yeah. Like, because of this did... yeah, did we grow, I guess, the student population?

Marley - Maybe encourage more people to attend cause they found interest in that, and maybe wanted to look into that more?

Jason - I don't know. Yeah. I would hope so. That's anecdotally, I don't know. Yeah. I don't know.

Marley - Um, this is not on the list again, but, um, how have you seen, like ethnic studies bleed into other categories? I know you mentioned history and some other courses like that. How have you seen [pause] this curriculum kind of trickle out into those?

Jason - I've definitely seen it in history, for sure. Um, I think I would love to see it in more areas. You guys know my kid goes to San Francisco State, and it's really interesting looking at ethnic studies there. What they did at San Francisco State over the many years that there was an ethnic studies college was basically to have ethnic studies in almost every GE area. And so, you can take your math requirement, your government requirement, life science requirement, all like an ethnic studies course, which is really interesting and not... And so, as a result, actually, there were a number of ethnic studies faculty at San Francisco State that did not like being told about

this ethnic studies requirement because they had kind of created this whole structure, right? And now they had this other thing. [Noise from Marley adjusting her microphone] That's a different story, but, um, I think there's a lot of room to grow in that regard. And also, in your... in your majors, and kind of how majors think about courses or, some majors do have a specific ethnic studies course for students to take, um, others don't. Yeah.

Ava - Yeah... [points to a question] I'll do that. Let's see. What is your... Maybe we've already asked a question similar, but what's your proudest achievement regarding curriculum change at Chico State? Can you pick one?

Jason - Um. Yeah. Okay. Besides the Honors program, which I'm pretty proud of, [pause] sort of parallel but separate. During 2020- and this is, kind of, it's an achievement that kind of happens just by hanging around spaces of power. Not really being in power, but kind of knowing what people are doing. And in 2020, most universities passed resolutions committing to social justice, racial justice, really wanting to think about and prioritize dismantling practices, especially classroom practices that could be disproportionately harming a group of students or benefiting a group of students or basically making it equitable. So, those commitments were being put out as, like, kind of almost like value statements by universities. But ours... is called Academic Senate, which kind of is a collection of faculty and staff and students and others, um, [pause] had really specific language about that courses should commit to dismantling these practices. And so anyways, in that year, when the ethnic studies requirement happened, even though the ethnic studies faculty kind of took over that program. What I had to do was change our general education policy, working through the GE committee which then had to go to the Academic Senate to be approved. Long story. I took the language from that resolution, though and put it in the GE policy. And so, I don't think any students know this, but every GE instructor, not just every class, every five years has to go through a self-study [used air quotes] to kind of identify how they are using anti-racist teaching practices in their courses. Um, and I was not the GE chair of the committee that kind of implemented it. And so, I don't know how well it's been going, but I'm pretty proud that we kind of got to the point where the academic center approved it. After quite a lengthy debate about it. So... Then the goal of it is not to punish or shame, but more just to kind of increase awareness for faculty, especially those that don't maybe teach courses that are immediately about that. And there are- there are things in there that could be like, um, free or

reduced cost textbooks or, you know, just how you approach classroom discussions or just kind of things and so having faculty just kind of reflect on that.

Ava - Things that kind of relate to...

Jason - Yeah, or like the example that you gave in our class of asking students last class-

Ava - Oh, yeah.

Jason - Like, what are we going to do? Which way should we go? Or kind of things like that. And so... That's good. Yeah, I feel proud of that.

Marley - When did that start, like the five-year training?

Jason - Well, so it's really common on university campuses to just kind of make sure, like, take a... let's think a different category... a humanities class. Like just to have a humanities class show like... say, 'Hey, we're doing the stuff that you're supposed to do in a humanities class, and okay, yes, keep doing it because students need it.' Um And so usually those things happen every five years or so. And so, it's like every five years, when that happens, this is like an additional thing that faculty have to do. When did it first start? I think they first implemented it- like the first time they had faculty through that process was last year.

Ava - Oh okay. So, this is very recent.

Jason - Yeah. Yeah, so this is just sort of just starting to happen. Um... yeah. And so, the idea is what has to happen is, Honors is included in this, so... I just got an email recently from the committee chair and says, 'Hey, we're- we're assessing this GE area as part of that.' You need to fill out this form. So, then you need to survey your faculty.' And that's a- that's a whole thing. But yeah.

Marley - Are you already seeing impacts in that? Or is it too early to tell?

Jason - I have seen impacts kind of in my department. I know the... It's really reassuring. Departments across campus are talking about the stuff. You probably can imagine there's like a generational disconnect, sometimes between faculty having these conversations, but the conversations [pause] are happening. And this is kind of, that was... [pause] when you talk about impact. I know it's such a low bar. And I kind of want the impact to be much more concrete, and like, yes. And if you want, like the concrete impact it's that Chico State is making progress in

some areas, not all areas in reducing kind of graduation rate gaps or GPA gaps between students from different groups, and so... But it's impossible to kind of connect that directly to anything, other than I do think there's just an increased climate of engaging with this stuff.

Ava - Definitely. I have noticed. I feel like a lot of my professors who maybe are younger and newer to teaching are more open to allowing us to voice our opinions. Um, they're a little bit more flexible, and I definitely have some professors who are very set in stone.

Jason - Yeah.

Ava - No changes. They don't want to hear it from many of us. [laughing]

Jason - Yeah. No, I mean, that's true across... that's a- that's not just a Chico State phenomenon. [laughing] It's a pretty widespread university phenomenon. And also, this is not- I can't generalize for across every discipline, but for most faculty that teach at universities, we never took a course on how to teach a class. And so, these are- that is not the purpose of getting a PhD. It's to take more courses, learn more stuff, and do a big research project. And then and so then when you then get a job, if you get a job, then you go to university, and your only experience is how you were taught. And so, for your-

Ava - That's always been interesting to me.

Jason - So for your faculty that we went to grad school in the 80s or 90s, that was a real different university back then. [laughs]

Ava - Yeah.

Jason - Versus, you know, so I went in the early 2000s. Very much the way I teach is kind of weirdly connected, I think, to 9/11, which I know before you guys were born. Uh-

Ava - We talked a lot about that in our ethnic studies class.

Jason - Yeah. I mean, I really does make a difference when I mean, it's... social scientists have shown that whatever's happening in your life when you're like 18 to 20 kind of almost sets your world view for the rest of your life. So, there you go. Um... but yeah. You have faculty that went to school in the 2010s and now the 2020s. And so... it changes. Like, if you guys go on and get a PhD, like, you will take into that what you're learning from us now, which is very different from 20 years ago.

Ava - Exactly.

Jason - Yeah.

Ava - Do you think you could see the honors program expanding to more general education areas? Because I know right now it doesn't cover every area.

Jason - Yeah.

Ava - It covers a lot of them.

Jason - Yeah.

Ava - But not all.

Jason - Um. I feel good about the number of classes required for getting honors in GE.

Ava - Yeah.

Jason - Um, I think I can interview you back on that. Um [pause], I am kind of the type of person- and this is what students wanted a few years ago, but we could redo it now of making it super straightforward, like, these are the GE areas. Do this one, this one, this one, this one. And then there's little substitutions that you can do and that's it. Or it could be there's an honors course in every area, choose five or six. Like, that's another way to go. So, what do you think?

Marley - I think it could be interesting to be able to pick which ones you choose. Because I know some people are super interested in science, and that's their major. So maybe taking a GE science class through Honors wouldn't be as beneficial to them, or kind of stuff like that if you're interested in humanity.

Jason - Yeah.

Marley - And you want to kind of delve into that a little bit more.

Jason - Yeah.

Marley - Maybe you don't have the option to if you're in honors.

Jason - Yeah.

Marley - That's the only class you can take.

Jason - Yeah. I mean, the obvious one that we don't have in honors that we probably easily could and should have is social science, lower division. So that would be at least where we choose... And then we don't have critical thinking either. And so...

Ava - Right. Yeah.

Jason - Probably the most successful one that we added- and the reason why we added the ones that we did was because, um, you know, if you take an AP test and stuff, you know, that counts.

Ava - Yeah.

Jason - So we tried to find ones that are the least likely to have AP tests, the communication studies one is easily number one.

Ava - Oh yeah.

Jason - So we have students do honors 100.

Ava - Yeah.

Jason - They don't test out of that usually.

Ava - And that was a good class. [laughing]

Jason - Yeah.

Ava - Well, we were wondering a little bit- we don't know that much about the book that you're writing, but our understanding is that you're on sabbatical right now, and you're spending your time-

Jason - Yeah.

Ava - Writing up a book, and I think some of it has to do with curriculum changes?

Jason - Yeah, sure. Yeah. I'll talk briefly about it. Um...

Marley - Only if you're comfortable with it. We don't want you to spoil the whole book.

[laughter]

Jason - Don't worry about it.

Ava - No spoilers, no spoilers. [laughter]

Jason - So in the process that I went through, I think I, mean I've hinted at it, but it did get pretty feisty at points, and faculty do come at loggerheads a lot. And I wasn't... [pause] It's kind of behind the scenes, but it can get pretty pretty personal. And this is true again across universities. And so, I had taught in a period 500 years ago in Europe, where I knew that there were really fierce debates in universities about, like what to teach students and how? And who? Um, and so I had a hunch that I knew that general education- I knew kind of where it came from because that's the period that I teach a lot, which is kind of coming out of the Renaissance.

Ava - Yeah.

Jason - I knew how it started changing in America, and then about the CSU system in the 60s and 70s and now ethnic studies- big changes. I knew that they had big arguments about them, but I also knew they were moments of big social change in universities. And so, I've written the first chapter, which I focused on the Renaissance because, again, it was my starting point. And what was interesting is that the arguments that the different professors were making about curriculum change really seemed to me to be kind of really arguing about social change at universities. And so they were kind of using curriculum as a space to kind of work through as like a gentle way to put it or fight back against changes in the student body, which- and so just to kind of- 'You're like, how bad could it be?' Hyperbolic, but one guy said that another professor, like hired 67 assassins to take him out. Like, really, like, extreme. And like the level of vitriol is crazy. But the really, really, really big social change, it's not going to- it's weird to think about in terms of historically underrepresented but was wealthy white men. Didn't used to go to university. Universities in the Middle Ages were mostly for men, um, but were for poorer or people with less means who went into the church. Um, during the Renaissance, there became, the universities became a place where aristocrats or wealthy merchants would want to send their kids to learn all this stuff, general education, basically, right, to become proficient in languages and culture and go out there and rise in the state and be powerful and do all these things. Um, but meanwhile, at the universities, there was this sense that they were invading and really wanted to push back against the changes to curriculum, but I think they're pushing back also against changes to society. And so, the other thing is then in the 19th century, they're going to change GE again. That's when um, more kind of middle-class students start going, and then there's more working-class students, more women, more students of color, and then with each of these different changes, general education changes, and people start fighting about it. So just kind of... It's a big

thing. I guess this will be a way- you asked earlier about how I think studies maybe influenced me. It's kind of like thinking bigger because for- during my life and in universities if you got a PhD, it became like you get kind of- you're in biology, I think, right? [Marley confirming] Get more and more focused on your little thing. And that was true in history, down to you focus on a specific place a specific year and it's missing the bigger thing. And so, the thing I'm trying to do now is like a 500-year thing. Which- it feels kind of weird as a historian because you do have to make generalizations, which historians usually cringe about. Um, [pause] but I'm just having to be okay with that. And I'm not saying that's what ethnic studies faculty do, but there's a sense that, like, um, I'm always impressed by ethnic studies faculty who are kind of willing to kind of say the thing much more clearly than some other disciplines that use all kinds of other technical language and specialization. And so, yeah, so it is kind of autobiographical in terms of my experience. But it's, yeah, looking at other stuff cultures.

Ava - Um, are you planning on doing any sort of traveling in order to help?

Jason - Um, no, sadly. This is my second sabbatical. My first one I spent in England and France.

Ava - I was just thinking about our Book in Common.

Jason - It was totally amazing. It's like the main reason to be a history major or was so you could travel, whether it's in the US or overseas, but, um... that stuff is digitized now. So, it sucks, but also at the same time, it makes it much more able to get a lot more done. Like here. Or what I found, like, when I did a lot of my research, iPhone had just been kind of developed and so archives were letting you take pictures of stuff before they had digitized things, and so you just spend your whole time taking pictures without actually reading it. And so, I'll read it in some magical day in the future, but that didn't happen. So now I'm just trying to- trying to get it done.

Ava - Cool. Any other questions?

Marley - Is there anything else? Anything else burning that you want to mention?

Jason - Uh, I don't think so. I appreciate the conversation.

Marley - Yeah, thank you so much.

Jason - Sure.

Ava - Thank you so much. Let me see you. Is there anything we have to end off with? Um. I don't think so. All right. Well, this was a great interview. We appreciate your time.

Jason - Okay. Well, thank you.

Marley - Thank you so much.

Jason - Bye.

Marley - Bye.