

Higher Education News
2022-2023 Archive

February 2023 Archive

From the College Board on the African American Studies course:

I am writing to share a [public statement](#) issued by the College Board related to *AP African American Studies*. It is our hope that this statement – and our future actions -- will clarify our position on some of the public controversy that has distracted from what should have been a celebratory launch of this course.

We cannot continue to tolerate the misinformation the DeSantis administration and the Florida Department of Education are circulating about *AP African American Studies*, so we've released this statement to shed light on the tactics they are using to limit educational opportunities for students in Florida and beyond.

This statement will remind readers that the goal of the *AP African American Studies* course is to provide students with a rigorous college-level introduction to the discipline, while also aiming to make it available as broadly as possible.

We remain fully committed to the launch of this course. Today's announcement does not impact the launch of the course, which remains on track for the fall of 2024. Nor does it impact a second year of piloting, beginning in the fall of 2023.

Thank you for your continued engagement with us as we seek to make the strongest possible course for students, teachers, and the discipline.

The statement appears here, as well as below my signature:

<https://allaccess.collegeboard.org/our-commitment-ap-african-american-studies-scholars-and-field>

Cathy Brigham, Ph.D.

Executive Director, Academic Relations

AP Higher Education

Full Statement:

Our commitment to AP African American Studies is unwavering. This will be the most rigorous, cohesive immersion that high school students have ever had in this discipline. Many more students than ever before will go on to deepen their knowledge in African American Studies programs in college.

Teachers and students piloting this course are everywhere voicing their enthusiasm for the discoveries they are making. They are thriving in the openness and respect of the classroom environments they have built.

There is always debate about the content of a new AP course. That is good and healthy; these courses matter. But the dialogue surrounding AP African American Studies has moved from healthy debate to misinformation.

We are proud of this course. But we have made mistakes in the rollout that are being exploited.

We need to clear the air and set the record straight.

1. We deeply regret not immediately denouncing the Florida Department of Education's slander, magnified by the DeSantis administration's subsequent comments, that African American Studies "lacks educational value." Our failure to raise our voice betrayed Black scholars everywhere and those who have long toiled to build this remarkable field.
2. We should have made clear that the framework is only the outline of the course, still to be populated by the scholarly articles, video lectures, and practice questions that we assemble and make available to all AP teachers in the summer for free and easy assignment to their students. This error triggered a conversation about erasing or eliminating Black thinkers. The vitriol aimed at these scholars is repulsive and must stop. Rather, scholars are essential to this course, and each AP teacher must select works by scholars to include in the syllabus they submit for AP course authorization, as they do in a range of other AP courses that require secondary sources in the syllabus. We are requesting copyright permission to include works on our AP Classroom digital platform by every author mentioned in any iteration of the framework, bringing these readings to students worldwide by enabling AP teachers to assign them with one click.
3. We should have made clear that contemporary events like the Black Lives Matter movement, reparations, and mass incarceration were [optional topics in the pilot course](#). Our lack of clarity allowed the narrative to arise that political forces had "downgraded" the role of these contemporary movements and debates in the AP class. The actual pilot course materials teachers used were completed on April 29, 2022—far prior to any pushback. In these pilot materials, teachers were told to pick only one such topic. This topic could be assigned after the exam since it didn't count and would have no impact on the student's AP score.
The official framework is a significant improvement, rather than a watering down: three weeks are now dedicated to a research project of the student's choice, which counts as 20% of the student's AP Exam score for college credit. This model better aligns with the flexibility colleges themselves often provide students to do an extended paper on a topic of their choice. We encourage students to focus their projects on contemporary issues and debates to ensure their application of knowledge to the present.
4. We have not succeeded in focusing the conversation on the remarkable work and flexibility of the pilot teachers in different states. The fact is that pilot teachers everywhere are introducing the core concepts of this discipline with skill and care. Sadly, in some states teachers have more room to maneuver than others. We recognize that in some states teachers and students will be able to draw more widely on Black Studies

scholarship than in others. But we must resist the narrative that teachers in states with restrictions are not doing exceptional work with their students, introducing them to so much and preparing them for so much more.

By filling the course with concrete examples of the foundational concepts in this discipline, we have given teachers the flexibility to teach the essential content without putting their livelihoods at risk. The committee will continue to evaluate this approach, making further changes to the framework if they decide to do so.

5. While it has been claimed that the College Board was in frequent dialogue with Florida about the content of AP African American Studies, this is a false and politically motivated charge. Our exchanges with them are actually transactional email about the filing of paperwork to request a pilot course code and our response to their request that the College Board explain why we believe the course is not in violation of Florida laws.

We had no negotiations about the content of this course with Florida or any other state, nor did we receive any requests, suggestions, or feedback.

We were naive not to announce Florida's rejection of the course when FDOE first notified us on September 23, 2022, in a letter entitled "CB Letter AP African [sic] Studies." This letter, like all written communications we received from Florida, contained no explanation of the rejection. Instead, Florida invited us to call them if we had any questions.

We made those calls, as we would to any state that says they have unstated concerns about an AP course. These phone calls with FDOE were absent of substance, despite the audacious claims of influence FDOE is now making. In the discussion, they did not offer feedback but instead asked vague, uninformed questions like, "What does the word 'intersectionality' mean?" and "Does the course promote Black Panther thinking?" FDOE did not bring any African American Studies scholars or teachers to their call with us, despite the presence in their state of so many renowned experts in this discipline.

Since FDOE did not make any requests or suggestions during the calls, we asked them if they could share specific concerns in writing. They said they had to check with their supervisors and get permission. They never sent us any feedback, but instead sent a second letter to us on January 12, 2023, as a PR stunt which repeated the same rejection but now with inflated rhetoric and posturing, saying the course lacked "educational value."

On the day after Florida sent us that second letter, the AP executive overseeing the process of developing this course—the only AP leader who participated in the telephone calls with FDOE—followed up with the College Board's FDOE liaison to ask whether we should ever expect any actual feedback from Florida. This is the response:

"I don't think they [FDOE] intend to provide any notes. My guess is that [the FDOE staff member] shared his notes with leadership (as he told us he would) and they shut it down. He might have even been instructed not to share notes."

We have made the mistake of treating FDOE with the courtesy we always accord to an education agency, but they have instead exploited this courtesy for their political agenda. After each written

or verbal exchange with them, as a matter of professional protocol, we politely thanked them for their feedback and contributions, although they had given none.

In Florida's effort to engineer a political win, they have claimed credit for the specific changes we made to the official framework. In their February 7, 2023, letter to us, which they leaked to the media within hours of sending, Florida expresses gratitude for the removal of 19 topics, none of which they ever asked us to remove, and most of which remain in the official framework.

They also claimed that we removed terms like "systemic marginalization" and "intersectionality" at their behest. This is not true. The notion that we needed Florida to enlighten us that these terms are politicized in several states is ridiculous. We took a hard look at these terms because they often are misunderstood, misrepresented, and co-opted as political weapons. Instead we focused throughout the framework on providing concrete examples of these important concepts. Florida is attempting to claim a political victory by taking credit retroactively for changes we ourselves made but that they never suggested to us.

FDOE's most recent letter continues to deride the field of African American Studies by describing key topics as "historically fictional." We have asked them what they meant by that accusation, and they have failed to answer. The College Board condemns this uninformed caricature of African American Studies and the harm it does to scholars and students.

This new AP course can be historic—what makes history are the lived experiences of millions of African Americans, and the long work of scholars who have built this field. We hope our future efforts will unmistakably and unequivocally honor their work.

The College Board

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Colorado Commission on Higher Education releases statewide plan that focuses on serving more learners with programs of value

DENVER, CO – Feb. 2, 2023: With the support of Gov. Jared Polis and Lt. Gov. Dianne Primavera, the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) and Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) released a statewide plan focused on advancing the economic mobility of Colorado's learners and earners by aligning postsecondary talent development with industry and statewide needs.

"Colorado wants more learners to complete postsecondary pathways that are valuable and help all learners unlock their economic potential," said CCHE Chair Sarah Hughes. "At a minimum - if learners can't recover the true cost of attendance over the course of their lifetime we are

clearly not doing right by Colorado students. This report marks a shift in culture and a step forward in how we measure student outcomes."

[Building Skills in an Evolving Economy](#) sets a bold vision to increase the number of learners not being served by the state's postsecondary ecosystem. The plan prioritizes educational pathways that are economically viable –those that lower costs for students, invest in proven learner support programs, and increase collaboration with employers.

"We know that the primary reason learners pursue a postsecondary education is for career advancement and economic mobility," said Josh Scott, CCHE Vice Chair. "CCHE is therefore updating Colorado's strategic plan from a focus on credential attainment to ensure that the education investment learners make delivers value."

Three strategic pillars display progress toward the goal and the opportunities available to institutions, policymakers, and others that affect change. The plan also calls out promising practices by Colorado's colleges and universities aligned to each of the strategic pillars.

- Strategic Pillar #1: Identify and improve pathways with a negative return on investment
- Strategic Pillar #2: Focus on equity and enable more learners to succeed
- Strategic Pillar #3: Catalyze increased postsecondary/workforce collaboration, alignment, and co-creation of new pathways that offer a positive return on investment

"The strategic plan will guide our work over the next five years as we strive to make all learning count and build a higher education ecosystem for all," said Dr. Angie Paccione, executive director of CDHE. "We remain committed to erasing equity gaps and ensuring equitable access to earn-and-learn opportunities, work-based learning, career services, and professional connections."

Elevating and calculating the value of postsecondary credential completion to the individual will play a central role in the new plan. Aligned with that goal, [HB22-1349](#) directs CDHE and CCHE to develop new measures of postsecondary and workforce success. A technical working group appointed by CCHE will work over the course of 2023 to identify new measures, propose methods of calculations, and inform future work to upgrade data systems and establish data connections across state agencies in well-governed, responsible ways.

About the Colorado Department of Higher Education

Working with the Colorado Commission on Higher Education, we support students, advocate and develop policies to maximize higher education opportunities for all. The Department believes every Coloradan should have an education beyond high school to pursue their dreams and improve our communities. To read the strategic plan for higher education, visit <https://cdhe.colorado.gov/about-us/cche/strategic-plan>.

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