

## UCLA's ethnic studies centers look back on accomplishments, discuss goals for future

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UCLA's ethnic studies centers' directors met at the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library to speak to students, alumni, and visitors about the history of the centers. (Rachel Hefner/Daily Bruin)

The UCLA Institute of American Cultures and its four ethnic studies research centers celebrated their 50th anniversary and talked at a panel about what they have accomplished since their creation in the field of ethnic studies.

The directors of the UCLA American Indian Studies Center, UCLA Asian American Studies Center, Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies and UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center spoke to alumni, students and community members about the current projects they are involved in and how they are incorporating students into organized

research. For example, the Bunche Center for African American Studies has launched a new undergraduate and graduate research fellowship program.

Karen Umemoto, the director of the Asian American Studies Center, said she hopes events like the panel can help students realize how the ethnic studies centers help develop a diverse campus that is dedicated to social justice.

"It wasn't something that was given, it was something that was fought for. It's something that we continue to work very hard at expanding and developing," Umemoto said. "Most universities across the country don't have ethnic studies classes."

Directors also shared their respective center's individual contributions and their aspirations for the future of ethnic studies at UCLA.

Kelly Lytle Hernandez, director of the Bunche Center for African American Studies, said the ethnic studies centers aim to connect students to meaningful research and to one another.

"We prioritize research that is not just about existing in academic journals or at the library alone. We want to do research that is going to move the dial on improving the conditions of life, on improving our understanding on the conditions of black life in the past, present and future," Hernandez said. "We do this through cross-campus connectivity."

For example, Hernandez said she is working on a project to estimate the fiscal and human costs of mass incarceration for communities in Los Angeles.

David Yoo, vice provost of the UCLA Institute of American Cultures, said each of these centers is committed to advancing social justice research and creating a space for the diverse student population to gather, learn and connect as a community.

"Our centers, through our projects and 135 affiliated UCLA faculty members, are addressing some of the most pressing issues of our times such as immigration, incarceration and access to education and health care," Yoo said. "We are the only (University of California) campus with these kinds of centers and together we are a powerhouse advancing research for social justice."

Umemoto also said the ethnic studies centers help students find their community on campus and understand their place in it.

"I think ethnic studies teaching, research, service activities allow students to see themselves as part of the fabric of American society, to see their contributions to this country, and to see how they can contribute both to their communities and to society as large, specifically in pursuing social justice," Umemoto said.

Shannon Speed, director of the American Indian Studies Center, said she hopes the event highlighted the centers' contributions to diversifying the university and engaging students in community-based research. Speed said a goal of the center is to continue increasing the number of Native American students on campus and the resources available to them.

Speed also said while the centers have made progress since their establishment, they still have more work to do in order to pursue their goals regarding social justice.

"We would also like to see the centers have a higher profile within the university," Speed said. "We are doing really important work and I think we are often overlooked as the universitywide resources we are."