

ACADEMIC SENATE
of
CALIFORNIA POLYTECHNIC STATE UNIVERSITY
San Luis Obispo, CA
AS-928-21

**RESOLUTION TO INCLUDE CASTE IDENTITY IN CAL POLY’S STATEMENT ON DIVERSITY
AND CAL POLY’S NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY**

Impact on existing policy: modifies AS-807-15 by adding caste identity to Cal Poly’s Statement on Diversity; advocates for more expansive CSU non-discrimination policy.

- 1 WHEREAS, Cal Poly follows the California State University’s (CSU) non-discrimination policies
2 as stated in Executive Orders 1096 and 1097 affirming CSU commitment to
3 maintaining an inclusive community that values diversity and fosters tolerance
4 and mutual respect; and
5
- 6 WHEREAS, EO 1096 and 1097 specifically prohibit discrimination and Harassment because
7 of any Protected Status: i.e., age, Disability (physical and mental), Gender (or
8 sex), Gender Identity (including transgender), Gender Expression, Genetic
9 Information, Marital Status, Medical Condition, Nationality, Race or Ethnicity
10 (including color or ancestry), Religion (or Religious Creed), Sexual Orientation,
11 sex stereotype, and Veteran or Military Status; and
12
- 13 WHEREAS, caste is a rigid structure of social stratification and hierarchy characterized by
14 hereditary status and social barriers sanctioned by custom, law or religion; and
15
- 16 WHEREAS, caste identity is inextricably intertwined with legally recognized protected
17 characteristics such as ancestry and other intersecting social identities, but it is
18 not an officially recognized “protected class” within US federal law or current
19 executive orders of the California State University EO 1096, and EO 1097; and
20
- 21 WHEREAS, caste-oppressed groups in the US, California, and Cal Poly continue to experience
22 discrimination and harassment based on their caste status; and
23
- 24 WHEREAS, clarification and guidance is needed on how the Cal Poly community will address
25 campus-based discrimination and harassment as it relates to caste; therefore, be
26 it

- 27
- 28 RESOLVED: that Cal Poly's Statement on Diversity, as described in AS 807-15, be augmented
29 to include caste identity, as shown in the attached document; and be it further
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- 31 RESOLVED: that the Academic Senate recognizes caste identity as falling within the purview
32 of Cal Poly's current policy and procedure for addressing discrimination and
33 harassment based on race, color, ancestry, religious creed, and national or ethnic
34 origin; and be it further
35
- 36 RESOLVED: that the Academic Senate of the California Polytechnic State University urges the
37 CSU to include caste in its non-discrimination policy by updating the language
38 within Executive Orders 1096 and 1097; and be it further
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- 40 RESOLVED: that the Academic Senate of the California Polytechnic State University urges the
41 CSU to affirm its commitment to recognizing and taking adequate action to
42 address the inequities faced by caste oppressed students, staff, and faculty.
43
- 44 RESOLVED: that this resolution be delivered to Cal Poly President Jeffrey Armstrong; CSU
45 Chancellor Joseph Castro; the California State Student Association; the Chairs of
46 the twenty-three CSU Academic Senates; Chair of the Academic Senate CSU
47 Robert Keith Collins; and the CSU Board of Trustees.

Proposed by: Academic Senate Diversity Committee
Date: October 26, 2021

ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND ON CASTE

Caste, generally speaking, is an infrastructure that maintains a hierarchical social order and determines the distribution of resources, opportunities, and respect on a society. Isabel Wilkerson points to three major caste systems in human history: the caste system of Nazi Germany, the race-based caste system of the United States, and ‘the lingering, millenia-long caste system’ present in South Asia.¹ In the context of South Asia, caste is a structure of oppression affecting over 1 billion people worldwide, based in birth that determines social status and assigns “spiritual purity”.² There are four main caste groups: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras, and those outside the caste system entirely, with lower caste Shudras and those outside the caste system, known as Dalits meaning “broken but resilient” and formerly known as “untouchables”, considered oppressed by caste.³ Caste is now present in some Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist communities; throughout South Asia, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal; and globally such as in the indentured communities of the Caribbean, proving to be an inter-faith, international issue.

Caste discrimination has long been overlooked by American institutions, with almost all institutions in the United States failing to protect caste oppressed people, highlighted most recently by the recent lawsuit filed by California Department of Fair Employment and Housing against Cisco regarding caste discrimination in the workplace.⁴ The inequalities associated with caste status have become embedded in all of the major South Asian American institutions, and they extend into American mainstream institutions that have significant South Asian immigrant populations, with some of the caste social locators being last names, whether a family eats meat, whether they own land in their country of origin, who they want to marry or be in romantic relationships with, and whether they are allowed to be out in their place of worship and community.⁵

Caste discrimination appears to be widespread. 25 percent of Dalits who responded to a survey executed by Equality Labs reported facing verbal or physical assault based on their caste in the United States, one in three Dalit students report being discriminated against during their education in the United States, two out of three Dalits surveyed reported being treated unfairly at their workplace in the United States, 60 percent of Dalits report experiencing caste-based derogatory jokes or comments in the United States, and 20 percent of Dalit respondents report feeling discriminated at a place of business because of their caste in the United States.⁶

¹ Wilkerson, I. (2020). *Caste*. Allen Lane.

² <https://www.equalitylabs.org/castesurvey>

³ <https://www.equalitylabs.org/castesurvey>

⁴ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/01/tech/cisco-lawsuit-caste-discrimination/index.html>

⁵ <https://theaerogram.com/caste-privilege-101-primer-privileged/>

⁶ <https://www.equalitylabs.org/castesurvey>

The CSU has a large and growing body of international students, specifically from South Asia, making caste a global issue that impacts sites of higher education such as Cal Poly and the CSU.⁷ Numerous Dalit and caste oppressed students outed themselves as caste oppressed during the public CSSA meeting to testify to their personal experiences of caste-based violence within the CSU,⁸ and are at risk without defined protections. In @ShadesOfCalPoly, an unofficial platform exposing discrimination at Cal Poly, one testimonial from a Cal Poly student read, “I remember boys of Indian Student Association asking people about their caste as a joke, but I didn't see the joke in that,” making clear the caste consciousness amongst South Asian students on CSU campuses.⁹ Other Dalit and caste oppressed students have published their experiences of caste-based discrimination in both the *Los Angeles Times*¹⁰ and *San Francisco Chronicles*.¹¹

Other universities have begun taking steps to address caste discrimination. In November 2019, Brandeis University recognized the importance of adding caste to its anti-discrimination policy, understanding that “caste identity is so intertwined with many of the legally recognized and protected characteristics, discrimination based on a person’s caste is effectively the same”.¹² In February 2021, the Academic Senate of UC Davis passed resolution #8 to include caste as a protected identity,¹³ and UC Davis now explicitly lists ‘caste or perceived caste’ as a legally protected characteristic under the broader category of ‘national origin’.¹⁴ Most recently, in October 2021, Colby College also added caste to its nondiscrimination policy.¹⁵

Other actions have been taken in the CSU system since early 2021. In February, the Faculty Diversity and Equity Committee of CSU East Bay’s Academic Senate passed “20-21 FDEC 3: Resolution in Support of Providing Protection to Dominated and Oppressed Castes at California State University, East Bay.”¹⁶ At Cal Poly, the ASI Board of Directors, representing the official voice of Cal Poly students, unanimously passed “Resolution #21-01: Resolution Calling for Cal Poly and the CSU to Include Caste in the Anti-Discriminatory Policy.”¹⁷ In April, the Cal State Student Association (CSSA), which serves as the official voice of students CSU-wide, unanimously passed “Resolution for the CSU to include Caste in Anti-Discrimination Policy, SR 2020-2021:05.”¹⁸

⁷ As Dalit scholar and thinker Dr. B.R. Ambedkar wrote, “if Hindus migrate to other regions on earth, Indian caste would become a world problem.”

⁸ <https://fb.watch/5hmRq6ao2k/>

⁹ https://www.instagram.com/p/CEzsbpLDPwa/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

¹⁰ <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2021-07-04/fight-to-add-caste-as-protected-category-in-us>

¹¹ <https://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/openforum/article/Opinion-Caste-bigotry-is-real-And-it-s-16195583.php>

¹² <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/12/20/university-adds-caste-nondiscrimination-policy>

¹³ <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ovl07-WLExQntFM3N84LeOvezDD5IHXI-iAZZt8pLmQ/edit>;

<https://theaggie.org/2021/02/26/senate-bills-53-55-and-senate-resolution-8-passed-at-feb-11-asucd-senate-meeting/>

¹⁴ <https://hdapp.ucdavis.edu/discrimination>

¹⁵ <https://news.colby.edu/story/caste-added-to-colbys-nondiscrimination-policy/>

¹⁶ https://docs.google.com/document/d/1SPkv__aESzMIuP8wPtF9dnW_clfQJ2ESRa7tWR8ilGY/edit

¹⁷ <https://www.asi.calpoly.edu/discover-asi/public-documents/agendas-minutes/board-of-directors-resolutions/>

¹⁸ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/16/california-student-body-demands-ban-on-caste-based-discrimination>

Cal Poly Statement on Diversity*

At Cal Poly we believe that academic freedom, a cornerstone value, is exercised best when there is understanding and respect for our diversity of experiences, identities, and world views. Consequently, we create learning environments that allow for meaningful development of self-awareness, knowledge, and skills alongside attention to others who may have experiences, worldviews, and values that are different from our own. In so doing, we encourage our students, faculty, and staff to seek out opportunities to engage with others who are both similar and different from them, thereby increasing their capacity for knowledge, empathy, and conscious participation in local and global communities.

In the spirit of educational equity, and in acknowledgement of the significant ways in which a university education can transform the lives of individuals and communities, we strive to increase the diversity at Cal Poly. As an institution that serves the state of California within a global context, we support the recruitment, retention, and success of talented students, faculty, and staff from across all societies, including people who are from historically and societally marginalized and underrepresented groups.

Cal Poly is an inclusive community that embraces differences in people and thoughts. By being open to new ideas and showing respect for diverse points of view, we support a climate that allows all students, faculty, and staff to feel valued, which in turn facilitates the recruitment and retention of a diverse campus population. We are a culturally invested university whose members take personal responsibility for fostering excellence in our own and others' endeavors. To this end, we support an increased awareness and understanding of how one's own identity facets (such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, social class, caste, and nation of origin) and the combinations of these identities and experiences that may accompany them can affect our different worldviews.

* The definition of diversity is specifically inclusive of, but not limited to, an individual's race/ethnicity, sex/gender, socioeconomic status, cultural heritage, caste, disability, and sexual orientation.



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

MEMORANDUM

To: Thomas Gutierrez
Chair, Academic Senate

Date: January 21, 2022

From: Jeffrey D. Armstrong
President

Copies: Amy Fleischer
Damon Fleming
Bruno Giberti
Jerusha Greenwood
Maren Hufton
Denise Isom
Cynthia Jackson-Elmoore
Al Liddicoat
Christine Theodoropoulos
Andy Thulin
Marilyn Tseng
Dean Wendt
Philip Williams

Jeffrey D. Armstrong

Subject: Response to AS 928-21 Resolution to Include Caste Identity in Cal Poly's Statement on Diversity and Cal Poly's Non-Discrimination Policy

By way of this memo, I acknowledge receipt of the above-entitled Academic Senate resolution and provide my agreement with the intention of this resolution.

I accept the first resolved clause that Cal Poly's Statement on Diversity, as described in AS 807-15, be augmented to include caste identity, as shown on the supporting document provided with the resolution.

The remaining resolved clauses are specific to Academic Senate actions. I appreciate the legal issues being highlighted and recognize the disheartening realities around caste-based treatment as outlined in the "whereas" statements. Caste is not specifically identified as a legally protected class in California. However, in most (if not all) circumstances, caste is inextricably intertwined with protected categories and would be addressed by Cal Poly's current policy and procedure for addressing discrimination and harassment. The determination of whether caste identity is specifically included in the definitions in CSU system-wide policies is within the purview of the Chancellor's Office. It is important to note the new [Interim CSU Policy Prohibiting Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Misconduct, Sexual Exploitation, Dating Violence, Domestic Violence, Stalking, and Retaliation](#), which just went into effect on January 1, 2022, now references caste.

As a campus community, we can support recognition of the realities of caste as a basis for intentional oppression and work together to prevent it. I accept the Academic Senate's efforts in this regard.

Please express my appreciation to the Academic Senate members, the Academic Senate Diversity Committee for their attention to this important and sensitive matter.