

Democratic Education on Trial: Teacher Preparation Programs and the Struggle for Pedagogical Freedom

Amy Gong Liu, UC Irvine

Project Summary

This research project examines how UC-based teacher preparation programs shape educators as they navigate tensions around curriculum, instruction, and professionalization. I draw on interviews with teacher candidates, program faculty, staff, and teacher alumni to investigate how these programs can better prepare K-12 teachers to enter an increasingly contested environment around American education.

Impact

Much of my work was concentrated in the MAT programs at UC Berkeley and UC Irvine, and I was able to connect with folks at UC Santa Cruz and UC Riverside's education programs as well. A cross-UC grant studying Ethnic Studies/social studies teacher preparation programs is in the works, spearheaded by representatives across different UC programs.

Participants included MAT program staff, faculty, and currently enrolled teacher candidates. About halfway through the year, I began conducting interviews with recent alumni of UCI's graduate program as well – who are current classroom teachers in public school districts.

I solicited about 25 interviews across both Berkeley and UCI's campus, and the number is ongoing. I will be continuing to conduct interviews here at UCI and plan to source about 15 more for the project through Summer 2026.