



## Policy Brief

# Evolving Higher Education Institutions to Fight Historical Revisionism

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## 1. What is the Issue?

Amnesty International (AI) estimates that during Ferdinand Marcos' Martial Law in the Philippines, 70,000 people were imprisoned, 34,000 were tortured, and 3,240 were killed between 1972 until the ouster of the dictator in 1986. In 2013, a law was passed that acknowledges the human rights abuses during the Marcos regime and grants financial reparations for the victims. The same law was granted extension by the Philippine congress in 2018 to allow the availability and distribution of the funds to the victims<sup>1</sup>.

Even with these evidences, there have been indications that documents the presence of an organized effort to sanitize the atrocities that occurred during the Marcos regime<sup>23</sup>. Victims expressed alarm over the efforts to rehabilitate the Marcos family's image with the ultimate goal of regaining the national power, which started with Marcos's burial in the heroes' cemetery in 2016<sup>4</sup>.

## 2. Why there is a need to fight revisionism

Allowing the sanitization of the Marcos brutalities can create a widespread misconception that the state can easily and justifiably curtail and even remove basic human rights of citizens. Academics also warn that when rhetoric such as "discipline is necessary for our society to progress.... creates a society that disregards the virtues of democracy and community-building"<sup>5</sup>. And similar to what happened during the Martial Law, critics of the government, including academics and researchers, are now being attacked and targeted when they criticize the extrajudicial killings and human rights violations committed in the drug war of the Duterte government.

## 3. Research Findings

Policy recommendations stated in this brief are based on a study that aimed to document the collective memories of the Filipino youth on the Marcos regime<sup>6</sup>. University students interviewed in the study reported that education is the most influential and powerful social institution in the generational transmission of the memories and lessons learned from the Marcos regime. However, the study also

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<sup>1</sup> Various sources. See: <http://nine.cnnphilippines.com/news/2018/08/09/Commission-on-Human-Rights-martial-law-House-Senate-resolutions-victims.html>

<sup>2</sup> Ong, J. C., & Cabanes, J. V. A. (2018). Architects of networked disinformation: Behind the scenes of troll accounts and fake news production in the Philippines.

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1068051/troll-armies-wage-history-war-to-push-marcos-comeback>

<sup>4</sup> <https://news.abs-cbn.com/focus/09/28/18/lack-of-reckoning-fueling-martial-law-revisionism-human-rights-chief>

<sup>5</sup> Jayeel Cornelio during the launch of the *To Be in History: Dark Days of Authoritarianism*. See <https://www.rappler.com/move-ph/229724-book-martial-law-to-be-in-history-launched>

<sup>6</sup> This study is supported by SHAPE-SEA.

revealed that illustrating the period as a horrific and shameful period in the history of the Philippines is difficult when there is no sound grounding on human rights education through either of the following means: (1) a specific subject on human rights, (2) integrating human rights education in existing courses or (3) sustained program of activities aimed at human rights education.

Nevertheless, the fact that students affirm the important role of education in cultivating accurate accounts of the past prove that learning about the Marcos regime and human rights in university level is not too late and can be effective in fighting historical revisionism.

#### 4. What should be done?

##### 1. *Adequate and relevant space for the integration of the Marcos Regime in tertiary education curriculum*

The study on which this proposal is based on documents the following recommendations from the Filipino youth on how the Marcos regime need to discussed in the universities:

- a. A separate subject (1) dedicated to the discussion of the Marcos regime or at least a (2) history subject dedicated to all events that occurred “after Rizal’s death”. Moreover, the students suggest that the discussion on the martial law must be conducted by someone well-versed with the constitution.
- b. Should there be courses that include a portion on the Marcos regime, the discussion needs to be objective in presenting with an aim of widening the perspectives of students. This means that both (or all) sides of the martial law, good or bad, must be presented and allow the youth to decide for themselves on how to evaluate the Marcos regime.
- c. Discussions of the Marcos regime need to be complete and extensive to (1) include concrete evidences to support the descriptions about the period, (2) present the experiences of both the victims and ordinary citizens, (3) be presented in “chronological order beginning from the events that became the basis for the declaration” and (4) discuss the provisions in the 1935 constitution for martial law.

##### 2. *Integration of discussions on the Marcos regime in the new GEC curriculum*

The department of education (DepEd) which governs the primary and secondary education in the country has affirmed their commitment of “highlighting the importance of learning the lessons of

history... by [enabling] learners to remember and understand the country’s history and the impact of Martial Law to the lives of Filipinos today”<sup>8</sup>. On the other hand, the commission on higher education (CHED) which oversees operations of universities and colleges in the country issued a directive in 1996 to incorporate human rights concepts in all curricular offerings<sup>4</sup>. However, responses by students and teachers in this study indicate that the directive was not carried out to its full extent.

The new general education curriculum mandates higher education institutions to develop Filipino students to be critically informed citizens contributing to nation building. At the same time, the new GECs also provide fresh opportunity for universities and professors to strengthen their roles in fighting against historical revisionism, especially to events of the Marcos regime.

In order to take advantage of these higher education reforms, the following are recommendations from students on how to teach the Marcos regime through the new GEC subjects:

<b>GE subject</b>	<b>Description (from CMO 20)</b>	<b>How Human rights can be integrated</b>
Understanding the Self	Nature of identity; factors and forces that affect the development and maintenance of personal identity	Human rights as integral in the personal identity of every person
Readings in Philippine History	Philippine History viewed from the lens of selected primary sources in different periods, analysis and interpretation.	<p>An analysis of primary sources, which document the human rights abuses during the martial law period, i.e., sworn statements of victims, Swiss bank documents of the Marcoses which detail their accounts, etc.</p> <p>A discussion centered on the provisions in the 1986 constitutions meant to uphold human rights, freedom of speech and academic freedom, all of which curtailed during the martial law.</p> <p>An examination of current economic woes of the country as rooted in the foreign debt acquired during the Marcos regime.</p>

<p>The Contemporary World</p>	<p>Globalization and its impact on individuals, communities and nations, challenges and responses.</p>	<p>A discussion on international humanitarian law, universal human rights norms the Philippines is bounded by, foreign debt acquired by the country during Marcos's reign, etc.</p>
<p>Mathematics in the Modern World</p>	<p>Nature of mathematics, appreciation of its practical, intellectual, and aesthetic dimensions, and application of mathematical tools in daily life.</p>	<p>An examination of the forced disappearances and extra-judicial killings during the Martial law and why these numbers are alarming.</p>
<p>Purposive Writing</p>	<p>Writing, speaking and presenting to different Communication/ audiences and for various purposes.</p>	<p>A discussion on the curtailment of free speech during the Martial law period and the significance of the provision of academic freedom in the 1986 constitution.</p>
<p>Art Appreciation</p>	<p>Nature, function and appreciation of the arts in contemporary society.</p>	<p>An appreciation of the films, art pieces and literary works produced during the martial law period. This subject is also an opportunity to examine how the image of Marcoses was carefully crafted to project an image of a strong benevolent leader amid the human rights violations of the period. Human rights can also be discussed in how 169 workers were buried under quick-drying wet cement in the construction of the Manila film center.</p>
<p>Science, Technology and Society</p>	<p>Interactions between science and technology and social, cultural, political and economic contexts which shape and are shaped by them;</p>	<p>A discussion on upholding human rights amidst technological advancement.</p>

	specific examples throughout human history of scientific and technological developments.	
Ethics	Principles of ethical behaviour in modern society at the level of the person, society, and in interaction with the environment and other shared resources.	This subject is most appropriate in the discussion of human rights in all its aspects.

### End Notes

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