LSA SG passes resolution to add Middle Eastern/North African option to University forms

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LSA Student Government passed a resolution last Thursday in support of the addition of a Middle Eastern / North African box on all University of Michigan and LSA documents and applications requesting racial or ethnic information.

While this resolution does not ensure the category will be added, it took action by sending a letter to University President Mark Schlissel, LSA Dean Andrew Martin, Evelyn Alsultany, chair of the Islamophobia Working Group and other administrators to bring the issue to their attention and urge them to make the change.

In its official letter, LSA SG cited the problems with current forms, which they claim pigeonhole Middle Eastern and North African students into picking an identity other than their own.

“Students who identify as being Middle Eastern/North African currently are forced to identify either as Caucasian, African, or Asian on nearly all University or College documents that ask for racial or ethnic information,” the letter reads. “This not only denies the identities that these students hold, but further hampers these communities and the University at large from being able to study and understand the needs and status of these communities on campus.”

Central Student Government unanimously passed a similar resolution in February, saying the absence of such a box denies the identities of Middle Eastern and North African students on campus. LSA Student Government had similar rationale.

“LSA Student Government believes that the institutional denial of the existence of this community on campus is one that needs to be corrected in order to not only embrace the ideals of the DEI plan, but further enhance and invigorate efforts surrounding it,” the letter reads.

The resolution also notes the United States Census Bureau’s plan to add a Middle Eastern/North African category to the United States 2020 census.

LSA junior Sadallah Farah, who identifies as Middle Eastern, said he often has trouble deciding what box to check on forms. It’s not a problem he finds specific to the University, but he sees having a box that reflects his identity on school forms as a step in the right direction.

“It can sometimes feel as though I am being forced to mask my identity,” Farah said. “I am often uncomfortable choosing a race that I do not self-identify with simply to check one of the boxes on a form, however that is not something I find specific to the University of Michigan. … Although I am not sure how much will change logistically because of this, it serves as a sort of moral victory for myself and other Middle Eastern students because it feels to me as though the university is extending its hand and making an attempt to show us we are in fact welcome here.”