Pro statement on the Diversity requirement

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The UCLA Academic Senate has responded favorably to a petition to hold a vote open to all Academic Senate members on the diversity requirement for undergraduates in the College of Letters and Science. In light of this development I would like to explain the basis of my support of the requirement.

The “Foundations of Scientific Inquiry” component of our General Education requirement obliges all UCLA undergraduates to take two courses in the Physical Sciences and two courses in the Life Sciences. In addition, at least one of those four courses must have a laboratory component. This is one of the most stringent of such requirements on any campus of the University of California. There is a reason why we at UCLA take this imperative so seriously. Given the import of many of the most pressing questions that must be addressed by the citizens of this country—including climate change and its effects, the origin and control of various diseases, nuclear power and nuclear arms—a grounding in science and an understanding of the nature of scientific inquiry is an essential component of the education of an informed citizenry. Without this education, our graduates will be ill equipped to distinguish conclusions based on rigorous and repeated testing from unsupported conjectures and wishful thinking. They will not be able to participate properly in the kind of discussion and decision making that is essential to the future of our society.

Similarly, our graduates are now entering a world in which diversity is a fact of life. They can expect to be a part of a workforce consisting of people from a variety of backgrounds, cultures and world-views. If they are unprepared to communicate with, cooperate with and provide leadership to people who do not share their life experiences, then they will find themselves at a profound disadvantage as they make their way through life. Furthermore, our society will be deprived of citizens who are able to engage in the kind of meaningful exchanges that underlie a properly functioning democracy. Just as a proper introduction to the nature of the scientific enterprise is an irreplaceable component of a complete education, an exposure to rigorous scholarship on diversity is essential preparation for life in the world that awaits our graduates.