I’ve spent most of my career documenting the added value of learning in a racially diverse educational environment. When I conducted my first study over two decades ago, I didn’t expect to find anything. Now the research evidence supporting the educational benefits associated with diversity are overwhelming. I know, however, that this evidence is unconvincing for some people. Even for me, it only really hits home in the classroom.

My first academic job was teaching at an institution that was into its third-year of requiring all freshmen to take a course that addressed the dynamics of race in the U.S—a very specific diversity course requirement. I taught one of those courses every semester for two years. I typically began the course with a show of hands of those who were only there to fulfill this requirement— invariably 80% of the students. I ended with a show of hands of those who had learned something revealing and meaningful about the world and society— invariably 100%. Most began the course never having heard of certain landmark U.S. Supreme Court decisions such as *Plessy* and only about half had heard of *Brown*. Even fewer had heard of Japanese American Internment in WWII, and still fewer had heard of the Chinese Exclusion Act. They explored this history and considered seriously how it shaped present circumstances. I was shocked by how little they knew and pleasantly surprised by how much one course helped them become more comfortable and facile engaging in these issues.

If the course had not been required, might those students still have learned this history to help them engage our nation’s pressing problems? Perhaps, but this institution chose not to leave it to chance. Instead, it embraced the responsibility to educate students in ways that increased their potential for improving the social and political fabric of our society. Given how scary little students knew when they started the course, I’ve become a strong supporter of such requirements and would urge others to give it a chance. The risks associated with not passing this requirement are much greater than with passing it.

Respectfully,

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