Dear Professor Garrett:

Please add this statement to the materials submitted in support of the College’s diversity requirement.

College campuses are the primary venue in which young people in the United States first come face to face with the many differences that define Americans as a nation: our multiplicity of racial, cultural, religious, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds; our variety of sexual orientations and gender identities; our socioeconomic distinctions; our political convictions; and the whole host of other identifications that make us individuals. In the era of online courses and online degrees, the experience of actually going to college with very different people—studying together, living together, playing together, organizing together—remains a crucial form of preparation for civic life. Diversity is one of the things that makes the university what it is.

College campuses are also the place where young Americans (and their international classmates) begin to be politically active in ways that can have far-reaching implications. As USAC’s recent misguided discussion of Rachel Beyda’s candidacy for the Judicial Board reminds us, our students are emphatically still learning basic lessons about representation, civil debate, and the responsibilities of acting in the public sphere. As Chancellor Block has pointed out in his February 24 statement, “Even in the heat of debate, we must cultivate the skill and sensitivity to express opinions without belittling others or losing sight of their humanity.” The cultivation of such skills is one of the key functions of a college education, and one of the few redeeming virtues of the USAC episode is that it has occasioned a moment of real reflection on the nature of civil debate. To repeat a cliché, it has become a teachable moment.

If the university experience is defined in part by the way it exposes young people to diversity, and if one of our aims as educators is to cultivate debate that is both vigorous and civil, then we must consider the possibility of building a sustained exposure to diversity into our curriculum. After many years of consideration and repeated efforts at curricular reform, the faculty of the College have now voted in favor of instituting a modest diversity course requirement for the 85% or so of UCLA undergraduates who take their degrees in the College. While it is impossible for a public school like UCLA to require more intensive experiences of the world beyond a student’s hometown—experiences like mandatory period of study abroad, for example—it is well within our abilities to push students beyond the comfort zone of their own background and their own career goals. True, no student required to take a diversity course will automatically become a sensitive negotiator of cultural differences or master of code-switching; but it is likely that many students who would otherwise miss the chance to see the world from different perspectives
will be inspired by their diversity courses and will take from them lessons with lifelong benefits.

In writing this statement I represent only my own point of view. Still, based on my experience as dean of Humanities I can point out that the division offers hundreds of courses on the diverse languages, literatures, art, and music of the world, and that our corporate and philanthropic sponsors emphasize again and again the importance of having college graduates who are employable not simply for narrow vocational skills but for the human skills they acquire in such courses: their ability to recognize others’ needs, their ability to communicate across frontiers, their ability to learn from one another and to adapt. If you believe in improving UCLA as an educational institution and preparing our students better for the global, versatile lives they are to lead, then you must respect the curricular decision the faculty of the College have made.

Please vote in favor of allowing the UCLA College curriculum to reflect the vote of College faculty and—even more important—to reflect the rich diversity of our students and of the world they are about to enter.

Sincerely,
David Schaberg

David Schaberg 史嘉柏
Dean of Humanities
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