March 8, 2015

Professor Neal Garrett
Secretary of the Division and Associate Dean for Education and Faculty Development
senateoffice@senate.ucla.edu

Dear Professor Garrett,

I am writing to submit respectfully the following statement in favor of the Undergraduate Diversity Requirement. But instead of reiterating the now familiar arguments in support of or in opposition to this requirement, I wish to emphasize its symbolic value for individual perception and institution change.

Sylvia Hurtado (http://gseis.ucla.edu/directory/sylvia-hurtado/), a nationally respected colleague of ours in the Department of Education and the Department of Information Studies, has recently published an article, titled “Diversity Assessment, Accountability, and Action,” in the Association of American Colleges & Universities journal Diversity&Democracy (http://www.aacu.org/diversitydemocracy/2014/fall/hurtado-halualani). With her co-author Rona Halualani, Hurtado observes that institutions tend to quote numbers to document their commitment to diversity, but that “relatively little is known about whether campuses take significant action in light of these annual reports, or how campuses hold individual units accountable for progress on diversity goals.” Given this ambiguity, Hurtado and Halualani explain how important it is to demonstrate explicitly a variety of organizational practices. This concerted effort, they contend, “affects how individuals perceive and experience the work and learning environment.” It promotes diversity as an essentially visible part of the learning process in a mutually supportive campus environment.

Hurtado and Halualani offer rich insights into the challenges that universities face with diversity issues, but for me the most eye-opening aspect of their argument has to do with the positive impact that an explicit requirement, one that is pedagogically sound and institutionally supported, has on every member of community. Last fall, the faculty in the College of Letters and Science approved this requirement through a transparent democratic process and this approval signaled to the UCLA community that racial, sexual or religious discrimination did not reflect its cosmopolitan openness. The news also made headlines nationally (http://chronicle.com/blogs/ticker/jp/ucla-faculty-members-approve-diversity-course-requirement). Based on Hurtado and Halualani’s research, reversing this decision now would not only annul the votes of faculty, students, and the Legislative Assembly, but it would implicitly send the hurtful message that prejudicial acts did not exist or could be tolerated on our campus.

I grew up in Germany, South Korea, the Netherlands, Spain, Mexico, and Venezuela where the color of my skin or my initial language competency regardless of national citizenship excluded me from membership in the political community. On the basis of this experience, I understand how pivotal it is to make diversity, tolerance, and communication key elements of civic engagement in global civil society, and my hope is that UCLA will lead the way in this direction. Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to share my thoughts with you.

Cordially,
David D. Kim
Assistant Professor of German