To Whom It May Concern:

A glance at UCLA undergraduate admissions “Quick Facts” webpage (https://www.admissions.ucla.edu/campusprofile.htm) situates UCLA amidst one of the most culturally and geographically diverse topographies in the world – Los Angeles. Scrolling down, the information conveys the rich ethnic diversity of the undergraduate student body. The last two headings are “Campus Safety/Crime Statistics” and “Life After UCLA.” Prior to life after UCLA, where alumni thrive in government, businesses, entertainment, medicine, and so forth, students are confronted with the intense social geography within the college and extending beyond its borders into the greater LA region. What they encounter at UCLA will forever shape the way they approach life and the fields in which they will impact others. I find it interesting that those two headings should conclude the Quick Facts webpage, but it serves as a reminder that the celebrated differences intimated above the headings can often lead to disagreements. While disagreements are not wrong per se, such conflict can escalate to violence and crime – hate crimes, discrimination, and biases (as evidenced in the Moreno Report) that also impact life at and after UCLA.

Since there has been overwhelming support of the Undergraduate Diversity Requirement and numerous reports that share with us the benefits of its inclusion in curriculum, I do not feel the impulse to reiterate each individual point. Through a more personal story about discrimination and the importance of “life after UCLA” as encompassing more than one’s employment, I aim to relate the mitigation of crime and promotion of campus safety though community engagement and appreciation of difference.

My father, the son of impoverished Eastern European Jewish immigrants, grew up with the specter of the Holocaust and a commitment to contributing to a world where that never happened again by valuing his culture and all others. UCLA gave my father that opportunity. He was the first person in the family to receive a college degree, and his life after UCLA has been devoted to workers’ compensation (much of his clientele is Chicano). My father would often speak to me about social justice and the necessity of investing in education and supporting public schools, but the community in which I lived as a child was fairly homogenous. Getting into punk music and the subculture, I was exposed to more diversity and the ability to articulate issues in one way, but, like my father, I needed institutional guidance in learning how to articulate what I experienced. At UC Berkeley, I took a number of courses that helped me think critically about alternative practices of everything from class socialization to sexual cultures. With my ability to engage social issues, I co-founded the Marshallese Educational Initiative, a nonprofit that connects research to educational outreach to raise cultural awareness about the Marshallese population and provides them with work and educational opportunities. In addition to my outreach and research, my teaching incorporates multiple perspectives.
I point to my academic and outreach endeavors that helped afford me the position to write this letter aimed at institutional change to evince the generational impact of an undergraduate education at UCLA and the amazing opportunity we have right now to shape generations and advance interpersonal and social relations through critical work and communal engagements. Life after UCLA is not just about post-graduation employment, but how one interfaces with the world and impacts future generations. Behind the flashing screens and glossy images showcasing what UCLA can provide, we need to show our students that we value diversity and difference by establishing this requirement and giving them the time and space to learn and appreciate difference as well as articulate their feelings in a safe space.

The fast pace of life in the 21st century—in LA, CA at least, makes it easier to forget about the Holocaust and the many other devastating crimes against humanity inspired by intolerance and—fundamentally—a close-minded approach to others, to difference. If anger is the manifestation of the emotion “fear,” and we are often afraid of what we do not know, then isn’t it our job as educators to expose our students to other ways of being, looking, sounding, making, doing...living? If fears can be addressed by the critical engagement of students in the classroom, where they are growing intellectually and socially, then perhaps, anger can be mitigated and the last subheading before “Life after UCLA” will be, for more and more students, a reminder of how the atmosphere on campus made them, as unique individuals, feel safe, and less about the crimes that have occurred based on difference or the fear they have felt as potential targets of misdirected anger based on fear of the unknown.

I am therefore in full support of the diversity requirement and joining the other UC campuses that already have such requirements to uphold our collective motto, “Let there be light.”

Respectfully,

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