PRO STATEMENT FOR DIVERSITY INITIATIVE
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I write in total support of the diversity initiative at UCLA. It is long overdue!

I come from a rural, isolated area of eastern Oklahoma. It was not known for its diversity. Everyone was Indian, part Indian or married to an Indian. Those who had a western religion were either Methodist or Baptist. My early years were spent in four different Bureau of Indian Affairs’ schools with a brief period toward the very end of WW II at an ordinance depot/prisoner of war camp while my father was fighting in Germany. I graduated from high school in southern Oklahoma and started college at a small, state school in east central Oklahoma in 1960.

As I met various types of people, gained experiences—including those of the Civil Rights Movement—and became educated I grew to greatly appreciate our increasingly diverse society. I have seen diversity within the academy increase significantly during more than forty-five years as a professor at four different universities. Diversity, however, has not by itself produced equality or acceptance or even tolerance or accurate knowledge. (It is amazing how little accurate knowledge about American Indians exists on the UCLA campus, a lacuna that fosters disrespect and insult among other things. This is true for many other groups as well, irrespective of how they are defined.)

I teach about American Indians. I tell my students what they believe about American Indians is their business but what they know about American Indians is my business. My responsibility is to impart accurate knowledge that will assist them to interact competently with the world and form their own opinions. I hope that education lessens prejudgment and prejudice, produces understanding and acceptance, and leads to equality and fairness (and think it does as that has been my experience); but fundamentally it leads to competency.

The Diversity Initiative will assure that graduates from UCLA’s College of Letters and Science are provided with comparative knowledge about at least two different groups. The knowledge will enable them to better understand others, more effectively deal with others, and make heightened informed decisions about others. As such, our graduates will be more competent citizens of our world. And our future world will be a better one.