As one who has made critical investments over the past year in the preparation and passage of the College of Letters and Science Diversity Requirement, the lessons learned in this process have simply increased my dedication to addressing the concerns that have driven in this effort. Trained primarily as a quantitative behavioral scientist, I learned early to rely on empirical evidence to settle scholarly debates—even when the question of “rightness” or “wrongness” was less clear. The “data” I’ve derived from working in the trenches of this campaign provide compelling evidence that this measure is “right” for UCLA and “right” for society in general:

1. Even as we’ve entered a moment in history in which certain forms of flagrant disrespect of others is not tolerated, the intensity of bias on this very campus continues unabated (perhaps more subtle) and many students, faculty, and staff simply have not been embraced as part of the UCLA whole. Our UC-wide climate survey and the Moreno Report make clear this reality. There is robust and consistent empirical evidence that adopting a diversity requirement increases levels of tolerance in the community as a whole. If this were the only goal of this requirement, the need for such is unequivocal—just as every other long-standing university in the UC system has already realized.

2. Success in our increasingly global and interconnected society is now, more than ever, dependent on our abilities to communicate across difference AND to understand and respect the perspectives of others. Having travelled widely this past year, I’ve asked a variety of people outside of academia (often corporate leaders) about what they expect of their employees. All have made it clear that they would not hire anyone without the demonstrated ability to understand and communicate with others unlike themselves. The need for this core competency is just as true of professionals in engineering and the biomedical fields, as it is in the humanities and public policy. The proposal itself cites national employer surveys that make this point empirically. Failure to include this kind of training in the core undergraduate curriculum is a failure to educate our students for the world that is and that will be.

3. There are people of good will from absolutely every sector of this university who have embraced the goals of the diversity requirement and have worked tirelessly to implement this widely supported initiative. I have made new friends across wide disciplinary boundaries and am humbled by their extraordinary efforts to move this initiative and this campus forward. Even within departments with higher numbers of opponents, many of their colleagues have remained staunch supporters of the College’s curriculum proposal.

4. Our students already know that gaps exist in their preparation for work and leadership in the “real world.” Past student votes have made it abundantly clear that they realize the benefits of a diversity requirement for career preparation and campus climate. Your vote is an endorsement of student will and their informed assessments of their educational needs.
5. The entire faculty has already voted on this initiative and supported it in overwhelming fashion. The Legislative Assembly (LgA) is our representative body — much like Congress represents the people of the United States. No one would entertain an attempt to subvert a congressional vote by bringing it before every individual U.S. voter. Every teaching unit in the entire university has seats on the LgA. On November 20, 2014, your representatives voted 84-18 (with 4 abstentions) to strongly support the College of L & S Diversity Requirement. They voted on your behalf. This attempt to undermine the will of the College through a division-wide faculty vote threatens the autonomy of every teaching unit – including yours.

6. Whatever the outcome, the UCLA division-wide faculty vote on whether to uphold the College’s vote to implement a diversity requirement will send a strong message nationwide and beyond. This vote will symbolize UCLA’s commitment to inclusion and training its students to work and lead in our new more diverse and complex world. Will we be counted as leaders or laggards in the movement to deal forthrightly with the challenges and opportunities before us?

In summary, the opposition has striven to obfuscate the real issues — which are clear and direct — by throwing up false arguments in an attempt to divert (i.e., we already know that we’ll have more than enough courses for the new demand; that all education is designed to mold students into productive members of our global society; that this initiative implements a student-desired core competency; that the range of courses submitted clearly demonstrate that no particular political orientation is evident). Please use your vote to demonstrate that UCLA is serious about educating its students for the future — not the past — as well as its commitment to realizing its Principles of Community. Please support curricular autonomy at UCLA.

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