TO: To whom it may concern  
FROM: Chris Tilly, Professor of Urban Planning and Director, UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment  
RE: Campus-wide vote on College Diversity Requirement  
DATE: March 9, 2015

I am writing to register my strong support for the College's Diversity Requirement. I have strong ties to two divisions/schools: my teaching appointment is in Urban Planning in the Luskin School of Public Affairs, outside the College; and I direct the Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, which resides in the Social Science Division of the College (where I also hold a nonvoting 0% appointment in Sociology).

Because my teaching appointment lies outside the College, I did not vote in the College-wide ballot on the Diversity Requirement. But I have heard and read the pro and con positions in some detail because I represent the Department of Urban Planning in the Faculty Assembly, and took part in votes there. I find the case for a College requirement compelling, and the arguments against one less so. I will briefly rundown several reasons for this, and then go into more detail on a couple of points. The brief rundown:

- It is uncontestable that diversity along numerous dimensions is growing, and will continue to grow, in the settings our students are encountering and will encounter over their lives and careers.
- There is a growing body of evidence that being exposed to ideas and discussion about diversity helps people to navigate that diversity. This is subject to the usual caveats about social science—studies are typically further from being controlled experiments, and measures further from precisely capturing concepts, than is often the case in the natural sciences.
- Because there are sure to be numerous opportunities to double-count courses as meeting the Diversity Requirement along with other requirements (notably General Education), this requirement seems unlikely to add to the total number of required courses taken by students, at least in the large majority of cases.
- Since there are a large number of existing courses that appear to satisfy the Diversity Requirement, the requirement would not lead to diversion of faculty effort away from current teaching.
- Critics have suggested that because the criteria for Diversity classification are broad, they will lead to inclusion of courses that won't actually have value in deepening students' understanding of diversity and increasing their capacity of dealing with it in life. This is certainly a risk, but I would argue that it would be unwise to try to micro-specify the requirement at the outset; instead we should establish it, monitor and learn from outcomes, and remain open to further refining the requirement when we have information on which to base revisions.
- The faculty of the College voted for the requirement. While one can picture situations in which a School somehow acts in contravention of University policy and has to be brought in line, this seems like a pretty clear-cut case of appropriate self-governance in determining the College curriculum (and when critics appealed to the Senate to override, the Senate chose instead to
affirm the College’s vote). Anyone considering voting to override the College’s decision might want to contemplate whether they would welcome a campus-wide vote on their school’s curricular requirements.

• The majority of UCLA student support a diversity requirement.

Beyond all these points, I would emphasize two things that I know about in more depth. First, though I am not particularly familiar with the literature on learning about diversity in school settings, I am fairly familiar with the literature on diversity in work settings, and to some extent in community settings. There are two striking findings regarding diversity of work teams. The first is that people feel most comfortable working closely with others who are “like” them in various ways. But the second is that diverse work teams are more innovative and creative. The implication is that in order to achieve innovation, it is important to grapple with and overcome barriers of discomfort. The reality is that our society is still quite segregated: though black-white residential segregation and male-female occupational segregation are declining nationwide, progress is glacially slow—and some dimensions of segregation, such as residential segregation between Latinos and Anglos and between people of different income levels, have increased in recent decades. Continuing segregation means that it is a continuing struggle to overcome discomfort with those who are “different,” and also makes it imperative that we step up that struggle.

Another important social science finding bears on bias and discrimination: people of color and women perceive much more bias against their groups than white Anglos and men perceive against those same groups. The gap between white and black respondents is especially wide. This suggests that white and male observers may significantly underestimate the incidence of bias—which helps explain some of the findings of the Moreno Report, as well as why different populations viewed the report rather differently.

Finally, I would like to anecdotally say something about my own experience as a teacher who first stepped into the classroom more than 30 years ago. This is based on teaching courses that were listed as Economics, Management, Public Policy, and Urban Planning. I have worked issues of social diversity into most of those courses, gingerly at first, and with growing confidence over time. Based on what happened in those courses themselves and on selective contact with former students, I am quite convinced that students learned important and useful things about diversity that they had not thought through before. I’ve generally gotten positive evaluations and feedback from students as well. Lastly, my own comfort level with, and understanding of, diversity has been greatly advanced by thinking, lecturing, leading discussions, and grading student work on these subjects. I am certainly not suggesting that every professor should take on this subject matter—but I am suggesting that my own long experience in the classroom ratifies the value of taking up issues and concepts of diversity in the curriculum.