A Con Argument (Opposing the Proposed Diversity Requirement)

Research Cited in Support of the Diversity Requirement is Unconvincing

Proponents of the Diversity Requirement cite research purportedly demonstrating the beneficial effects of similar requirements at other institutions. However, the cited studies do not indicate that the Diversity Requirement will achieve its goals, which are not primarily academic. The typical cited study measured some self-reported student attitude, such as “multicultural competency, pluralistic orientation, attributional complexity, social agency, moral development,” or scores on a Modern Racism or Color Blind Racial Ideology Scale. Improvements in these scores were then correlated with, for example, enrollment in a Diversity course. These studies confused correlation with causation. None of the studies randomly assigned some students to a Diversity course, and others to a control (no Diversity course). Thus it’s impossible to attribute a causal role to the courses. Some studies found improvements in students’ attitudes at campuses having generally higher levels of diversity activity, “regardless of whether or not they personally were involved in such classes or workshops”. These findings also indicated a self-selection effect from pre-existing differences in the student bodies of different schools (think about Oberlin vs. Ole Miss). UCLA’s student body is very diverse, and we devote substantial resources to nurturing that diversity, as we should. Many of the cited studies found equal or larger gains from extracurricular activities undertaken voluntarily, such as increased cross-racial interaction, participation in workshops, etc. We can encourage all of these worthwhile voluntary activities—with faculty involvement—but the cited data provide no compelling argument for imposing a new course requirement. Thus it is not surprising that, outside of the UC system, the overwhelming majority of leading colleges and universities have not adopted diversity graduation requirements.
Executive Summary of Con Arguments (Opposing the Diversity Requirement)

1. The required courses would not necessarily expose students to the perspectives of others – most students could fulfill the DR by taking a course that focuses on their own identity group.

2. The research purportedly showing the benefits of a DR is unconvincing. The cited studies lack the controls required to demonstrate that mandatory diversity courses cause improvements in students’ attitudes about intergroup relations.

3. The general goal of the DR is to instill certain beliefs and values in students, so it is unsurprising that some of the DR courses reflect an ideological position. Many opponents of the DR believe that students should have the option to steer clear of politicized courses.

4. The implementation of the DR has not been carefully planned. It is still very doubtful whether enough enrollment slots in DR-approved courses will be available to meet demand starting this Fall.

5. Although, in principle, the DR could be fulfilled by courses that satisfy major or GE requirements, for most students the DR will in fact constitute an additional course requirement on top of all their other currently required courses.

6. The University’s budget is a zero-sum process. The projected requirement of teaching DR courses to 16,000 students every year will require substantial resources, and these will necessarily be drawn from other parts of UCLA.

7. We need to focus on the actual results of the DR, not its symbolism.