My name is Steve Smale and I am writing in support of the Diversity proposal as Professor and Vice Chair for Undergraduate Education in the Department of Microbiology, Immunology, and Molecular Genetics (MIMG), which spans the College of Letters and Science and the David Geffen School of Medicine. Because of my role in guiding curricular development for MIMG majors and monitoring their time to degree, I took the time to carefully evaluate the Diversity proposal to determine whether its implementation was or was not feasible. I also evaluated resource requirements for implementation, since funds for MIMG’s own educational programs are in short supply. This careful analysis revealed that the Diversity requirement is not only feasible to implement and will have no impact on time to degree for our students, but it also will require only minimal new resources, which have already been committed. It became clear from my analysis that the feasibility and resource concerns that have been highlighted by those opposed to the requirement have been severely mis-represented.

I would like to emphasize that I have focused the above statement on feasibility and resources because, in my opinion, the ideological issue is straightforward and difficult to oppose. In brief, the ideological question is as follows: Is it appropriate for a university to require its students to gain exposure, in an academic setting, to at least one cultural perspective which differs from that with which the student is most familiar?

I would like to close by emphasizing an additional concern, which is the negative national publicity UCLA will undoubtedly receive if the favorable vote by the College faculty is overturned by the campus-wide vote. The negative publicity will extend beyond the national and international press to organizations dedicated to increasing representation in STEM disciplines by ethnic groups that currently are under-represented in these disciplines, including the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. These organizations would be left with the strong and perhaps accurate impression that a large number of UCLA faculty members are insensitive to diversity issues and to the needs and viewpoints of students from under-represented groups. The UCLA case would likely be used for years as evidence of the great need for diversity training, not only for its student body, but also for its faculty. If our faculty do not appreciate the value of a simple Diversity course requirement, can we expect them to appreciate the unique educational needs of students from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds who come to UCLA with the goal of pursuing a career in a STEM field?