PRO DIVERSITY REQUIREMENT STATEMENT

A first-class public university has a duty to prepare students to perform both professionally and civically, that is, to prepare students to live productively in the multi-ethnic democracy that is America. There is no doubt that professional performance will be enhanced by knowledge of the likely experiences of colleagues of differing genders, ethnicities, religions, and physical abilities. Civic engagement—at school meetings, government hearings, and the ballot box, for example—will be enhanced by the same. To be sure, a single course (even were it longer than ten weeks) cannot turn a multitude of disparate experiences and histories into one American history, one American sociology, one American literature, one American .... (you name it). What it can do is teach students to understand that in American history differences have usually resulted in hierarchies and have often resulted in conflict. It can teach that difference, unless critically examined and thoroughly understood from the point of view of the “other” rather than from the point of view of a particular (especially a dominant) group, can warp one’s thinking and can worm sexism, racism, ageism, classism (any of the -isms) into the psyche of even the most benevolent of persons. It can teach critical self and societal examination via rigorous academic disciplines that have been honed over the last fifty years.

I ask you to consider the following list of ten unhappy results from academic or government studies, results that none of us would wish to be party to:

1. College professors, across race/ethnicity and gender, are more likely to respond to queries [for mentorship] from students they believe are white males.
2. White people, including white children, are less moved by the pain of people of color, including children of color, than by the pain of fellow whites.
3. White people are more likely to have done illegal drugs than blacks or Latinos, but are far less likely to go to jail for it.
4. Black men are sentenced to far lengthier prison sentences than white men for the same crimes.
5. White people, including police, see black children as older and less innocent than white children. [A UCLA study]
6. Black children are more likely to be tried as adults and are given harsher sentences than white children.
7. White people are more likely to support the criminal justice system, including the death penalty, when they think it’s disproportionately punitive toward black people.
8. The more “stereotypically black” a defendant looks in a murder case, the higher the likelihood he will be sentenced to death.
9. Conversely, white people falsely recall black men they perceive as being “smart” as being lighter-skinned.
10. A number of studies find white people view lighter-skinned African Americans (and Latinos) as more intelligent, competent, trustworthy and reliable than their darker-skinned peers.

[List compiled by Kali Holloway and published on Alternet March 3, 2015. For a full discussion and links to the published studies, see: http://www.alternet.org/news-amp-politics/hey-smug-white-people-how-you-yes-you-are-racist-too ]
We can hope that the younger generations will be able to change such statistics (and similar ones involving gender, ethnicity, disabilities) and thus create a more inclusive society. Let us give them one small tool to help them start.

Katherine C. King  
Professor of Comparative Literature and Classics  
Member of the Undergraduate Council  
Past Chair of the Faculty of the College of Letters and Science  
Past Co-Chair of the Chancellor’s Advisory Committee on the Status of Women