March 9, 2015

TO: Joel Aberbach, Chair, Academic Senate, Los Angeles Division
    Neal Garrett, Secretary, Academic Senate, Los Angeles Division

FROM: Reynaldo F. Macías, Professor of Chicana/o Studies, Education & Applied Linguistics, and affiliated faculty with African American Studies & with Civic Engagement

re: College Diversity Requirement Re-Vote

Dear Chair Aberbach,

I write to voice concerns regarding the UCLA College undergraduate diversity requirement divisional membership revote. While I consider the called-for divisional revote on this already-college-faculty adopted issue awkward at best and a violation of our academic freedom at worst, I am asking my UCLA divisional colleagues that they cast a YES vote on this question. Let me indicate why.

We have a process of divisional review and approval of Faculty unit curricular and degree requirements that are based on peer and collegial review. This provides for the local faculty units (departments, schools, colleges) independence in initiating or modifying degree programs they are responsible for and the curricular requirements within those programs, followed by a subsequent review and approval process that include faculty executive committees, undergraduate and graduate councils, committees on planning and budget, and, finally legislative assembly—all of the latter bodies reflecting divisional memberships, and serving as working surrogates for the divisional membership. The committee and assembly review and approval process is best viewed as advice and consent respecting the collective academic freedom of the local faculty units to fashion program requirements as they see fit. These committees and the legislative assembly are in a position to raise practical, budgetary, and even substantive issues regarding these academic requirements. As issues are raised, and they are resolved or attended to in the committee and assembly review process, our respect for colleagues’ authority to exercise their academic expertise and visions AS IT RELATES TO THEIR OWN UNITS should become more paramount, lest we provide opportunities for abuse of our recognized collective expertise.

In this particular case, the issues raised by the very small number of faculty and students who called for the College of Letters & Science undergraduate diversity requirement to be taken out of the consent agenda and dealt with separately at the LegAssembly meeting had already been raised and satisfactorily answered in the multiple committee review and approval process—to the
satisfaction of quite a number of our colleagues on these committees. The resolution of these questions were so convincing that the turn-out vote of the College faculty was significant, and in substantial majority favor of the change (out of the overwhelmingly large voter turnout of 635 college faculty voting, 332 voted for, and 303 against—52% of those voting in favor. NOTA BENE, this was passed alone by more faculty than ALL of the faculty who voted on this issue the last time it was unsuccessfully raised, which numbered just over 200 faculty votes pro and con). And this process was repeated in the debate that took place at the LegAssembly meeting as these same criticisms (along with some ad hominem arguments impuning pro faculty of political motivations and the absence of intellectually respectable content of the requirement) were raised by the nay-sayers and answered yet again, by the large number of faculty who spoke in favor of the regulation.

The resulting and overwhelming positive vote by the divisionally representative Legislative Assembly delegates (85 for, 18 nay, 4 abstentions for a near 80% support) should have settled the matter of this one regulatory change, as it often does on similar changes. Degree requirement changes are brought through this process to the LegAssembly and are often considered non-controversial and placed on the consent agenda. In this exceptional case, a losing faculty member asked for it to be withdrawn from the consent calendar and for it to be made a main motion, precipitating the debate (and subsequently making it possible to call for a divisional membership vote if his side lost again since according to ByLaw 155 (A), only “main motions and amendments thereto ... may be submitted to a mail or electronic ballot”). Seldom are degree requirements subject to main motions reflecting this divisional recognition of respecting the academic freedom of each faculty unit to determine program requirements. One need only look at the relatively non-controversial process of a similar diversity requirement which was approved for another academic unit previously (School of Art & Architecture) and without the frequent, and consistent rancor that our opposing colleagues have generated on this College of L&S regulatory change.

Let me suggest that the rationale for submitting actions of the LegAssembly or Division to ALL of the voting members of the division as a revote of an issue should be intended to validate actions that affect the entire division, which may include positions on socio-political issues, or divisional or system wide application and changes. If the actions do not affect the entire division, as in this case since it adds one requirement to the undergraduate degree only within the College of Letters and Science, then I believe calling for a membership revote should not be available. In the alternative, if a full divisional membership vote is called for, it should imply application of the results to all the divisional programs—meaning that if the nays have it, then the existing diversity requirement in the School of Art & Architecture would be nullified; and if the ayes have it, then there should be a diversity requirement for all the degree programs at UCLA. Otherwise, the collegial respect for the academic freedom of the individual faculty units should be respected, with the advice and consent of the divisionally-representative review committees and the LegAssembly as constituted, representing the faculty of each academic department on campus.

PRESERVE ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND COLLEGIAL MUTUAL RESPECT.
VOTE YES ON THE ISSUE OF THE COLLEGE DIVERSITY REQUIREMENT.