Against the “Diversity” Requirement

Thomas Schwartz

Because “diversity” has become code for certain values of the political left, the requirement would have an ideological slant. You do not have to oppose that slant to oppose having ideological graduation requirements, of the left or the right, in a public university.

Diversity in some sense may be a consensus value, but the “diversity” currently promoted is less diverse than that: it covers but a handful of differences, chiefly ones of race, sex, national ancestry, and sexual preference. To celebrate those differences, as the champions of “diversity” do, is to disparage others and to encourage people to “identify” with their natal categories more than their voluntary affiliations and affinities. It is also to promote feelings of guilt, resentment, and separateness and to reject American exceptionalism and the ideal of a color-blind society.

More ominous than a required “diversity” course is Senate endorsement of an ideological label. In future that could justify ideological scrutiny of admissions, hiring, and promotions. Neither Prop. 209 nor the norm of academic freedom would prevent UCLA from giving extra rewards to those who, apart from their own natal categories, helped advance an official academic objective, in this case “diversity.”

The “diversity” requirement is intended to remedy bigoted attitudes and behavior. Although the malady is deplorable—assuming it exists—the prescribed remedy is costly enough that proponents must bear four burdens to make their case.

One is to show that more than a handful of students are bigots. Where is the evidence? Of the two examples proponents love to cite, one involved hateful printed signs of unknown origin, the other, bigoted medical residents—not exactly students, much less undergraduates. The vaunted Moreno Report, about biased procedures for adjudicating complaints, says nothing about bias among undergraduates. Some student activists sense biased attitudes all around. But student activists typically get so good at hunting witches that they find them not only where they exist. The idea that 21st century American 18 year-olds who have been admitted to UCLA are so afflicted with bigotry that they must be forced to endure an attitude-altering course is preposterous. It is like forcing Norwegians to get inoculated against malaria.

A second burden is to show that a diversity requirement would remedy the problem. Proponents cite studies in which students who took “diversity” courses scored well on tests of “correct” attitudes compared with other students or with their own pre-course scores. But the subjects were volunteers, who in all likelihood had no bad attitudes to begin with and easily learned to give the “right” test answers. More important, despite scraping the bottom of the academic barrel, “diversity” proponents could not find a single study that even purported to show that “diversity” courses cured bad attitudes. Besides, any students who really “need” the treatment are the least likely to swallow the medicine. Certainly they would never pick a “diversity” course whose focus was the group they disliked. Certainly, too, most students would be drawn to courses about their own natal groups; almost all students could find one. That would encourage ghettoization—
something that the most ardent champions of “diversity” actually applaud, by the way, as witness the defense of “racially themed” dorms by a current candidate for Vice Chancellor for Diversity.

The third burden is to say what the “diversity” courses would teach and how the requirement would be implemented. What we have so far is a pig in a translucent poke: a vague criterion, a bizarre list of submitted courses, and a biased procedure. We are told that a “diversity” course must talk about the experiences of two or more groups of any sort and emphasize inequality and conflict as well as fairness and inclusiveness. The obvious problem is that most Social Science courses and quite a few Humanities courses can be described that way. The teeth of the proposal are in the procedure: “diversity” enthusiasts would join a Senate committee and vet course proposals by fellow enthusiasts. The one clear thing in the proposal is its assurance of an ideological slant.

The final burden is to show how students, who have trouble enough meeting all their requirements in four years, would accommodate a “diversity” course in their schedules. We are told that the requirement could be met by courses that also meet other requirements. That would shift enrollment from some current courses to others without helping most students find tolerably congenial “diversity” courses that fit their schedules and were not overenrolled. To their credit, proponents have conceded that an adequate increase in the supply of courses would suck up millions of dollars that could pay for scholarships instead. And who would teach the extra courses? I fear a lowering of standards by the lumpenprofessoriate of junior-colleges adjuncts and interest-group organizers who would have to be hired solely to teach “diversity.”

Proponents tout demand by students—actually by about 10 percent of them. That is a worthy thing to consider when students ask to study something new. But in this case student activists have asked that other students be forced to study something new. As so often, the activists are bullies, who are enjoying themselves too much to be taken seriously. Or if you think their goal is rather to make the UCLA degree more valuable, go ask them whether they would support an increase in math, science, or language requirements, or more written work in their courses.

Opponents of the “diversity” requirement have asked for a poll of the whole UCLA faculty because the earlier, very close vote of the L & S College Faculty was illegitimately rigged. Contrary to Senate By-Laws, the ballot did not contain a summary of arguments pro and con: professors who were properly too busy to follow the discussion of the issue saw only a yes – or – no plebiscite on a course requirement presented as non-controversial by some official committee.

Stripped of ideology, diversity is a legitimate academic concern. In our world it is not anarchy but a surprising measure of cooperation that has rapidly emerged to fill vacuums of political power. But it is cooperation within ethnic and other natal groups rather than between them, and it is aimed at the subordination, enslavement, even massacre of others. With our expertise in the culture and experiences of many groups, in the social psychology of inter-group attitudes, in the economic and political mechanics of competition and collective action, and in international organization and law, UCLA is in an ideal position to become a center of focused research on conflict and comity between those groups. One reason we have not made more of this opportunity is that, when most of us were not looking, campus crackpots hoisted the standard of
“diversity” on behalf of a costly program to force students to swallow snake oil for a malady they don’t have.
i vote against the new requirement.

________________________________

IMPORTANT WARNING: This email (and any attachments) is only intended for the use of the person or entity to which it is addressed, and may contain information that is privileged and confidential. You, the recipient, are obligated to maintain it in a safe, secure and confidential manner. Unauthorized redisclosure or failure to maintain confidentiality may subject you to federal and state penalties. If you are not the intended recipient, please immediately notify us by return email, and delete this message from your computer.
CON STATEMENT: WHY VOTE NO

A ‘ghettoization’ effect

The proposed requirement is supposed to provide our students “with the ability to understand the perspectives of others whose views, backgrounds, and experiences may differ from their own.” To that end, the diversity courses were to “substantially address conditions, experiences, perspectives, and/or representations of at least two groups using difference frames that include but are not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, religion, disability, age, language, nationality, citizenship status and/or place of origin.” The aim of the two-group rule was to ensure that the diversity courses would have a relatively broad focus. But the report of the Diversity Initiative Implementation Committee makes it clear that in practice many courses that focus on the experience of just one identity group would fulfill the requirement.

The gutting of the two-group rule is a serious matter in its own right. Indeed, it makes some opponents suspect that the requirement, if adopted, would be implemented in a way that reflects the ideological agenda of the “diversity” lobby. But many opponents also believe it will have one major and under-appreciated effect. Many students would probably end up taking courses associated with their own identity group. As it is, students enrolling in such courses tend disproportionately to be from the corresponding identity group. And it is important to remember that the vast majority of our undergraduates come from such groups. White Non-Hispanics from the United States currently comprise 27% of our undergraduate body. Of that group, more than half are women. Of the remainder, many belong to various identity groups (Gays, Jews, Armenians, and so on). That means that over 90% of our undergraduates belong to one of the identity groups covered by the diversity requirement. Nothing in the proposed requirement obliges those students to take courses relating to groups other than their own, and if they do, as seems likely, end up enrolling disproportionately in courses dealing with their own group, the result would be a form of ghettoization.

The purported goal of the proposal is to sensitize students to the point of view of others whose experiences differ from their own, but in practice the requirement seems likely to have the opposite result. It might well simply encourage students to retreat into their various identity group enclaves.

Thought reform is not our mission

It is clear from the College Diversity Committee’s report that a basic aim of the proposal is to reshape our undergraduates’ “attitudes about race.” One goal, for example, is to break down “White students’ color blind racial ideology.” The aim, it seems to many opponents of the proposal, is to get the University to adopt a kind of official ideology—a set of beliefs and attitudes it would try to inculcate in its students.

A recent statement in the Daily Bruin, signed by nine student backers of the “diversity” initiative, shows what lies in the hearts of some of the most fervent supporters of the proposal. The mere fact that a number of professors wanted the whole faculty to have a chance to vote on the issue proves, to these supporters of “diversity,” that those professors are “bigoted.” They want the University authorities to hold those “renegade faculty” accountable. “There must be consequences,” they say, “for actions that prevent diversity initiatives from being implemented” (link). Voting NO would make it clear that we reject that vision of what UCLA should be—that we do not accept the idea that the University should be a place where a degree of ideological uniformity is expected.

Many of our colleagues thus oppose this measure because they believe the faculty should not sanction the politicization of the University. They think that we, as an institution, should not want to instill in our students a pre-packaged set of beliefs reflecting a particular ideological perspective. They believe that our
business is education, not indoctrination. And they would take the same view if the threat were coming from the right—as in fact was the case during the McCarthy period—and not just from the left.

The case for adopting the requirement is weak.

For many opponents, the most important reason for rejecting the proposal is that it would place an additional burden on undergraduates in the College—students who, in many cases, already have their hands full just completing the coursework required for their major. By forcing them to take a “diversity” course in order to graduate, we would be limiting yet further their already limited ability to take electives that interest them. The burden is particularly great because (according to calculations some of our colleagues have made) there probably would not be enough diversity courses offered to enable students—and especially transfer students—to meet the requirement and still graduate on time. Given these problems (among others), the case for imposing this new requirement should be compelling.

The proponents, in particular, would need to show that whatever problems we have here at UCLA with racial, ethnic, or gender insensitivity, the diversity requirement would be a good way of rectifying them. But the evidence the Diversity Committee cited to prove that the requirement would have the desired effect is not impressive. In some of the studies it cites, for example, students are surveyed at the beginning and then at the end of a “diversity” course (in one case before the grades were in); the “improved” answers they give at the end is then taken as evidence that the course has worked. But such conclusions are suspect because of the tendency of those surveyed to give what sociologists have called “socially appropriate answers.” The favorable findings might simply show that students had learned to give answers those administering the survey wanted to hear.

A question of fairness

This is the second time this proposal is being put up for a vote this year. The October poll of the College faculty produced a margin of 332 to 303 for the diversity requirement. Some of our colleagues feel that that first vote should have been dispositive. That point might have a certain force if the process leading to that first vote had been fair. But it wasn’t. Arguments pro and con, for example, did not accompany the ballot, as the Senate by-law governing this process required. Our colleagues, moreover, have been bombarded with numerous emails from administration officials (including some department chairs) urging a YES vote, while the opponents have not been given a chance to lay out their own views in the same way. On the eve of that October vote, the Daily Bruin, which supports the proposal, simply refused to publish a statement by one of our colleagues outlining his reasons for opposing it. And more recently proponents of this measure have been trying to prevent the whole faculty from getting a chance to vote on this issue. They have complained that “a small group of opponents”—the 80 or so professors who have signed the petitions—have undermined the “democratic process” that culminated in earlier votes by the College faculty and the Senate’s Legislative Assembly by “forcing a campus-wide faculty vote.” But petitioning for a full vote—clearly provided for in the by-laws—can scarcely be seen as a subversion of the “democratic process.” And it is certainly strange to see people who view themselves as the heirs of the civil rights movement—a movement in which voting rights loomed so large—trying so hard to prevent the whole faculty from voting on this important question. What are they afraid of?

Many opponents feel that the whole faculty should have the right to vote because they believe a YES vote would have far-reaching implications. If this measure is approved, we would not just be imposing a new requirement on the undergraduates in the College. We would also, in effect, be giving our seal of approval to a certain vision of what the University should be. To do so would be at odds with the basic idea of a politically-neutral university committed to free and open inquiry.
A more extensive, footnoted, version of this statement, along with other supporting material, is available at http://realdiversity.org/
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.
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.
Con Ballot Argument
(Opposing the Diversity Requirement)

There has been inadequate planning to manage the major new burden the Diversity Requirement would impose on students already struggling to graduate. There is longstanding concern that the Diversity Requirement-approved courses will fail to provide enough capacity to meet the realistic projections of student demand (10,000 spaces in 2015-6; 16,000/year starting in 2017-8). This concern was heightened yesterday, when we finally learned which 57 courses were approved for the Diversity Requirement by the ad hoc Diversity Committee. These include 14 which are not stand-alone courses (since they have pre-requisites or are supposed to be taken within a multi-course series). Three-quarters of the 57 courses do not carry GE credit. This means that the great majority of students will not satisfy Diversity simultaneously with a GE requirement. For most students, the Diversity Requirement will require them to take an additional course (or courses) on top of all their GE and major Requirements, contrary to previous claims.

Since 39 of these Diversity Courses are in the Upper Division, few of their enrollment slots will be available to freshmen before their 3rd year. With only the currently approved Lower Division classes, the Diversity Deficit (the difference between the number of new undergraduates entering UCLA and the number of undergraduates completing their Diversity Requirement) will be about 2500 students in the first year.

That is a huge gap to fill. The proponents pin their hopes on the remaining 88 courses under consideration by the ad hoc Committee. But these also include courses with prerequisites, and 70% of them are Upper Division, while only 19 would also satisfy a GE requirement. Most of these were classified as “Category II” by the Implementation Committee (which included some members now on the ad hoc Committee), because they could not determine whether or not they would satisfy the Diversity Requirement. Indeed, based on the submitted syllabi, many of the large GE and Lower Division courses (e.g. “Introduction to Archaeology”; “Natural Disasters”) do not appear to satisfy the plain language of the Diversity Requirement criteria. But even if the Committee were to ignore its own rules and decide that almost ‘anything goes’, the total Lower Division capacity of all these possible Diversity courses would still fall far short of the required 10,000 spaces per year. Thus the Diversity Deficit from 2015-6 will continue to mount in the second year. In 2017, the added problem will be for the 3000 arriving transfer students. They will have completed their distribution requirements except for Diversity, and will be heavily focused on completing their majors in a short time. The problem is particularly acute for students in the Sciences, who have room for very few electives after satisfying all their current requirements. Examination of transcripts of graduating transfer students in the Physical Sciences revealed that only 16% of them had taken any of the 145 possible Diversity courses. Full information on the
feasibility problems of the Diversity Requirement will be posted on: 

Spending a million dollars on Diversity courses will not sustain them permanently. The budget is a zero-sum process. What would instead be required is an immediate and permanent faculty mobilization to transfer a substantial fraction of current teaching and Departmental resources into Diversity, and out of non-Diversity courses.

In all the discussion, we will not be hearing anything from the largest, most vulnerable group, those with the most at stake; the future students who will enroll at UCLA are not here yet. Many of them would voluntarily take a Diversity course. However, requiring students to do what they were going to choose freely on their own accomplishes nothing beyond symbolism. In some ways it could even be counter-productive.

The debate is largely about our future students who might prefer to choose different electives. Without the new Requirement, they might wish, for example to study Economics, a foreign language, or the culture and history of a distant, or ancient civilization, even though such a course would not “substantially address conditions, experiences, perspectives, and/or representations of at least two groups”. Course selection is also a zero-sum process, and the Requirement advocates are not willing to permit these other (non-“Diversity”) choices. They are absolutely certain that they know better than these students. We claim that we may not know better.