

UCLA to Hire 'Discrimination Officers' To Tackle Campus's Alleged Systemic Racism

by Staff



UCLA is in the process of hiring two “discrimination officers” to handle racial discrimination complaints – a move expected to make it easier to probe grievances over racism – something alleged to be systemic among faculty at the public university.

Both employees and an independent report suggest that the university’s current procedures for addressing faculty racism complaints over hiring, advancement and retention decisions are insufficient, ambiguous and overly complicated.

“Concerned faculty members described a campus racial climate in near-crisis,” stated authors of a report released last fall which probed UCLA’s alleged racism epidemic and its supposed inadequacy at handling bias complaints. “(S)enior faculty members and former administration officials contended that the recent high-profile racial incidents at UCLA were only the tip of the iceberg, and that the campus racial climate, for a variety of reasons, has regressed since the mid-twentieth century.”

Currently, faculty can take complaints of racism to Academic Senate committees, the Title IX Officer, the Vice Provost for Diversity & Faculty Development, and the Office of Ombuds Services, among others. This makes things too complicated, doesn’t track and record all the bias incidents, and let’s grievances fall through the cracks, the report found.

“Relevant university policies were vague, the remedial procedures difficult to access, and from a practical standpoint, essentially nonexistent,” stated the report, which titled itself an “Independent Investigative Report on Acts of Bias and Discrimination Involving Faculty at the University of California, Los Angeles.”

“Faculty of color at UCLA must rely on a patchwork of diversity resources and the generic Faculty Senate complaint and grievance procedures in order to seek redress,” the report added. “While this ad hoc process has sometimes succeeded, it has failed to adequately record, investigate, or provide for disciplinary sanctions for incidents which, if substantiated, would constitute violations of university nondiscrimination policy.”

The discrimination officers, once hired, will be a one-stop shop of sorts, there for those who feel marginalized, giving them one, clear avenue to which they can take their complaints. UCLA Chancellor Gene Block says their hiring is imminent.

In an interview with The College Fix, a UCLA spokesman explained “these new officers will investigate any reported allegations of racial and ethnic bias or discrimination and will help review and reform the policies and procedures for investigating such incidents.”

Last fall’s report had come at the behest of 30 professors, who in the summer of 2012 had asked for a review of the “campus racial climate” along with an independent committee to address UCLA’s policies and procedures for

responding to racial discrimination, the Daily Bruin reports. That demand letter was prompted in part by UCLA surgeon Dr. Christian Head's high-profile racial discrimination lawsuit against UCLA medical school.

Last summer, Dr. Head was awarded \$4.5 million in a settlement.

"The agreement settles the lawsuit, filed in April (2012), that accused the university of failing to prevent discrimination, harassment and retaliation against Head," the Los Angeles Times reported. "The head and neck surgeon alleged that he was retaliated against for filing complaints through normal channels and was denied teaching opportunities."

Some faculty acknowledge that the large payout should motivate administrators to move on the perceived systematic racism at UCLA.

"Rather than seeing it as an isolated case, we wanted (UCLA administrators) to use that moment as a way to look deeper and understand the issues that face this faculty," Chon Noriega, director of the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center and one of the faculty members who initiated the report, told the Bruin.

The report had also suggested the discrimination officers conduct mandated diversity training for administrators and develop annual reports summarizing all the bias incidents and their outcomes.

In addition to the diversity officials, UCLA is looking to mandate a diversity class as part of the general education requirement for students.

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