

Faculty Diversity Initiative Town Hall Meeting Transcript February 13, 2004

What follows is an edited transcript of comments made by the chairs of the faculty advisory committees of the four ethnic studies centers at the town hall on faculty diversity. This event was held on Friday, February 13, 2004, one year after the centers submitted a UCLA Faculty Diversity Initiative to Chancellor Albert Carnesale. The event was co-sponsored by the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies, the Asian American Studies Center, and the Center for American Indian Studies. Vice Chancellor Claudia Mitchell-Kernan presented the keynote address, which provided an overview of the past year and looked ahead to the future. Nearly 100 faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community members came out to support the initiative.

Dr. Belinda Tucker, UCLA Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences

This is, in my view, a very pivotal moment at UCLA. This university was once at the forefront of one of the most important scholarly developments in this nation's history: ethnic studies. The stories, the experiences, the contributions, the problems and the potential of people other than white men actually become a part of the fabric of the academy. The world-class reputation of ethnic studies at UCLA is due to this development, but also due to a significant commitment of faculty resources, which Dr. Mitchell-Kernan just explained as critical. We need this enlightened view of faculty diversity to spread across campus to other disciplines.

For this same university is now associated in the minds of many across the nation with the potential demise of ethnic studies. The decrease in the number of students of color, particularly of Latino and black students, on this campus and at Berkeley's campus, combined with the new governor's budget that eliminates outreach, attacks financial aid, and decreases funding for research units such as ethnic studies centers, simply reinforces perceptions of this demise. The irresponsible comments made by our regent chair cements these perceptions across the country.

To many, the greatness of a university is most evident in its advances in science and technology. It's easy to focus on new developments in medicine, on new engineering feats, on new realms of thought in physics. But what forges new societies and nations, or tears them apart, is what we in this room are most interested in: the issues of inequality, racism, poverty, political movements, and so on. Advances in these areas are advances in the quality of life for human kind. And ethnic studies faculty tend to be more committed to making societal contributions by making advances in these areas.

This faculty diversity initiative seeks to ensure that a mere two dozen faculty positions be appointed with ethnic studies uppermost in mind when weighing potential candidates' research agendas, teaching agendas, and careers. This is a modest request that is going to have enormous import.

Dr. Daniel Solorzano, UCLA Department of Education

I was asked to respond to Claudia Mitchell Kernan's response to the chancellor. I want to begin with the demographic context, which we made pretty clear in the Chicano Studies faculty letter we sent to the chancellor last year supporting this initiative, but I want to reinforce it one more time. Five short years from now, in the year 2009, of the K-12 public school students in the state of California, around 75 percent— *75 percent* —are going to be African American, Latino,

Native American, or Asian American. That's the demographic context in which we must talk about these issues. Those are the students who will be coming into the California State University system, the University of California system, and the California Community College system, for their post-secondary education experience. Somehow people don't want to talk about that demographic reality in this state, but that is the demographic reality, and that's probably the conservative estimate. Some demographers argue that we are going to reach 75 percent even sooner.

Claudia Mitchell Kernan mentioned the budget crunch that we're in, but the bottom line is that we are still hiring faculty. I can tell you that my school is still hiring faculty due to turnover, resignations, and retirements. We may not be hiring due to growth, but we're constantly hiring faculty. My hope is that we can overturn that curtailment of student growth at the University of California, since it is going to adversely affect students of color on every campus in the system. But it is search committees who determine the faculty we're going to be hiring. The critical lynchpin in hiring faculty are other faculty. This is where the research comes in. Vice Chancellor Rosina Becerra put out a report called "Diversity Statistics of Regular Rank Faculty, October 2003" which shows that many departments here at UCLA have no faculty of color—none. Or you'll find one. She or he is all by his or her self in that department. And so she or he has to pressure that department when there's going to be new appointments or new faculty research search committees. She or he has to participate in that process as an isolated person. Now they are other departments that are doing quite well in terms of diversifying the faculty, and you'll see which ones those are in this report. But the bottom line is that many departments—and I think students will tell you this—have no faculty of color in their classrooms.

In bad economic times, Claudia Mitchell-Kernan suggests, asking for the full twenty-four ethnic studies slots is probably unrealistic. She argues that we should ask for four the first year and then four every other year for the next five years, so that every year each of the ethnic studies centers can actually search for a faculty member to work with the respective center. And I think that's feasible, and that's a good roadmap. I'd like to get a lot more than that, but at a minimum, I'd like to begin this process of four searches, one for each of the ethnic studies centers, as soon as possible.

Finally just to reinforce what Claudia Mitchell Kernan and Chon Noriega and the assembly person's spokesperson mentioned, we have unity and purpose around this issue, and I think that's unprecedented, and I think we are seeing the same thing among students and ethnic organizations as well.

Dr. Nancy Rifle, UCLA School of Dentistry

I believe that the ethnic studies centers are critical to our school and the medical school and to any of the health sciences in this day and age. We cannot teach students or conduct research in a vacuum. And the only way we can learn how to do work that is acceptable to our communities is to involve all of the disciplines at UCLA. Without the American Indian Studies Center, I would never know any of the other faculty here on this side of campus, and for me, that has become critical, to collaborate with faculty from other disciplines. So we really need these centers and we need to have more faculty to contact through the centers. It's also important for students to have more native faculty, more minority faculty, in their schools, because that's who students turn to when they need support, both socially and emotionally. I never would have gotten through dental school without that kind of support from my faculty, and I think it's critical for all of our

graduate students. So I really support this initiative, and I think it will benefit the schools and the community.

Dr. Paul Ong, UCLA School of Public Policy, Urban Planning and Social Welfare

What I want to say is more personal than speaking as the chairperson of the Asian American Studies Center faculty committee. I have to start by saying that, maybe I'm biased, but I am a proud product of that first wave of institutional appointments to ethnic studies, and I am thankful every day that I have had that opportunity to be on this campus to pursue the type of work I have pursued. I am very thankful to the campus and I am very committed that we go down the same path into the future.

I also want to say something about seeing beyond today's pain. Those of us who are administrators as well as faculty and have to run programs and have to face the problem of who do you cut? Or, do you try to save the money which you have left over to keep your staff at the expense of cutting fellowships or support for students? And if you cut students in favor of staff, these are not comfortable things to do, they are painful things to do. It's painful to look into people's eyes and say that, I can't control the budget right now. This is a reality. These are hard things to do, these are hard things for me to do. At the same time, it's clear to me that there is a bigger issue at hand. And that is the heart and soul of the university. And my colleagues have talked about that.

One of the things about the budget crisis is that everything is up in the air. People make extreme statements, our leaders and regents make extreme statements, precisely because of the crisis and precisely because where the university is headed is up for grabs. And we have to recognize that. And we have to decide how we will lay the foundations for ten years from now, how to see beyond today's pain. And there's a number of major principles that my colleagues have talked about in laying that foundation and I agree with them all. I just want to add my own favorite and then I'll leave it at that. One of the legacies of ethnic studies, a legacy that is one of the best and most noble goals that come out of the struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, is being relevant by being close to communities. I know of no other programs that have been able to achieve that. We have led the way for the university, quite often having to fight the university, to make sure we honor that goal. And I truly believe that by maintaining the ethnic faculty, by adding to it, by continuing to hire people such as the colleagues I have had the luck to work with, I think we can make the university relevant to the future. If we don't do that, we all lose. If we don't do that, ten years from now, fifteen years from now, we will truly be isolated, much more than we are today. So I think we need that vision of laying the foundation for the future that Claudia Mitchell-Kernan was talking about, and laying that foundation despite the pains that we have to deal with today.