

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES
DAILY BRUIN

Diversity proposal neglected

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By Charlotte Hsu

An effort to diversify UCLA's faculty entered its third year this week, with supporters saying that talking to university administrators is like communicating with a stone wall.

Among other recommendations, an initiative presented to Chancellor Albert Carnesale in February 2003 calls for the opening of six new faculty positions for each of the campus's four ethnic studies centers.

The proposal came amid concern that the UC's plan to expand its faculty body would ignore the dismal percentage of minority instructors within the system.

The percentage of tenured and tenure-track UC minority professors rose from 19.6 in 1996 to 20.5 in 2002, according to a California Research Bureau report released last year.

But despite the stagnation, UCLA's administration seems to have put the issue on the backburner, the initiative's supporters said.

"We have not had any kind of indication ... about what the chancellor, the administration, really thinks about this proposal," said Hanay Geiogamah, interim director of the UCLA American Indian Studies Center, which sponsored the initiative with UCLA's other three ethnic studies centers.

"We haven't gotten anything other than a polite sort of stonewall. ... We seem to be, I think, knocking on a stone door." □

Though the administration has not passed the proposal, it actively promotes diversity, wrote UCLA spokeswoman Letisia Marquez in an e-mail quoting UCLA spokesman Lawrence Lokman. According to the e-mail, Lokman pointed to the establishment of the Asian American studies and Chicana/o studies departments as evidence of Carnesale's commitment to the cause.

"Our campus is committed to seeking a diverse campus community that reflects the society in which we live. ... In spite of substantial budget cuts, the chancellor recently committed additional new resources, including new full-time positions," □ Lokman said.

According to the Web site for the Office of Faculty Diversity, a new agency under Carnesale, 80 percent of tenured UCLA faculty are white. But statistics there also show that the percentage of the tenure-track faculty who are Asian climbed from below 10 percent in 1990 to between 10 and 15 percent in 2002.

Still, the administration's response to the proposed initiative mirrors the unwillingness in academia today to look at racial issues with a critical eye, said Darnell Hunt, director of the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies. While the atmosphere three decades ago was one of concern about racial equality, many people act as if all obstacles have been overcome, he said.

Several students and professors called for protests to move the initiative forward after two years of unfruitful work that included getting letters of support from faculty and community leaders.

Hunt said while he prefers using "carrot-and-stick" □ tactics to bargain, it is healthy for a movement to mix negotiation with direct action.

Alex Tucker, the Bunche Center's special project and development coordinator, said he plans to unite members of the campus and wider community in a committee to push the proposal forward.

"This is the third year. ... I hope we don't do this the fourth or the fifth year," Tucker said, referring to a

Thursday townhall meeting initiative, which supporters hosted in part as an annual update on progress.

The state's political climate in recent years has added to disinterest, eroding any momentum the initiative had, said Chon Noriega, Chicano Studies Research Center director. With the recall and budget crisis consuming Sacramento, diversity at the UC has not been a priority, he said.

Graduate students are California's future professors, and attending an institution whose faculty do not represent the community can be discouraging, Noriega said.

"They're essentially facing a highly exclusionary institution that is not prepared to retain them," he said.

While UCLA administrators have strong arguments for not prioritizing faculty diversity, the university cannot wait any longer, Noriega added.

"Times are tough. ... But if something is important, you make it a reality," he said.

"If we don't do something, we're going to wake up back in the 1950s." □