

[← Back to Original Article](#)

Los Angeles

UCLA Officials Seek Boost for Ethnic Studies

In jostling for funds amid state budget crisis, heads of four centers make public plea to raise diversity in faculty hiring.

February 19, 2003 | Stuart Silverstein | Times Staff Writer

UCLA's four ethnic studies centers made an unusual public plea Tuesday to boost faculty diversity and expand courses and research.

At a news conference and town hall meeting at UCLA, the directors of the research centers said their hiring proposal and related campus diversity initiatives are crucial because of California's changing demographics.

But the move was also an example of the early political jostling on state campuses as departments compete for dollars amid an enrollment boom and a state budget crisis.

The directors proposed doubling their own faculty overall to 48 full-time professors who would work in the research centers and in academic departments around campus. They also urged the expansion of an existing campuswide minority faculty hiring initiative and other ways to beef up UCLA's ethnic studies degree programs.

"When you've got scarce resources and everyone on campus is scrambling for them, there's obviously going to be a competition to fill those positions," said Darnell M. Hunt, a sociology professor and head of the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies. "We wanted to open early with our proposal to show how it really could be a win-win for not only the centers but for the departments that participate with us to bring the faculty in."

The center directors began putting their proposal together after rumors briefly circulated last summer that their research units, which were hit by spending reductions last year and face further cuts this year, might be consolidated. Although there are other ethnic studies research units scattered around the University of California, no other campus in the state system has such a large a cluster of ethnic studies centers.

Along with the Bunche Center, the other research units are the Chicano Studies Research Center, the American Indian Studies Center and the Asian American Studies Center.

While conceding the state budget crisis, the directors are seeking a share of UC's expected increase in faculty hiring in coming years to handle growth in student enrollment.

"The number of faculty in the University of California system is going to grow.... There's a tremendous opportunity there to begin thinking about changing the structure of the institution," said Chon Noriega of the Chicano Studies Research Center.

Overall, UCLA is expected to receive funding for 200 new faculty positions over the coming decade to accommodate a rise in enrollment from 34,310 last year to 36,445 by the 2010-11 school year.

Some higher education policy experts noted that it is unusual for academics to take their case to the public rather than to first go through channels on campus. They said that in addition to the ailing economy, the recent challenges to affirmative action and diversity efforts in higher education may be inspiring more aggressive tactics.

William G. Tierney, director of USC's Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, praised UCLA's proposal. "Those of us faculty who are concerned about equity and change are becoming slightly more media savvy. We need to take these discussions outside of the rarefied air of campus and make a case to the public about why this is critically important," he said.

Tierney and other analysts cited concerns raised by a case before the Supreme Court challenging affirmative action at the University of Michigan.

In California, affirmative action in school admissions and in state hiring was outlawed by passage of Proposition 209 in 1996.

The ethnic studies center directors have been in touch with UCLA Chancellor Albert Carnesale about their ideas since September, and they delivered their faculty hiring proposal to him Thursday.

UCLA spokesman Lawrence H. Lokman said: "The chancellor as well as the directors are mutually committed to diversity. The chancellor will consider the recommendations very seriously as a way of achieving diversity goals."

Of the 1,845 tenured or tenure-track professors at UCLA, 79.1% are white; 12.5% are Asian American; 5.1% are Chicano or Latino; and 2.8% are African American, campus records show.

The push for more minority faculty hiring at UCLA's ethnic studies centers and elsewhere on campus comes as some higher education researchers are questioning whether enough qualified minority candidates are available to fill tenured or tenure-track positions at top universities, particularly in the natural sciences and in some professions.

Tierney agreed that in some areas, minority faculty are in short supply. "But frankly," he added, "we're talking about Los Angeles, the most diverse city in the world, so I am less comfortable with individuals making excuses saying we can't faculty of color."