

# UCLA faculty approves diversity class requirement



UCLA chancellor Gene Block was a proponent of requiring a course on diversity. (Katie Falkenberg / Los Angeles Times)

By **LARRY GORDON**

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**T**he faculty of UCLA's largest academic unit voted by a narrow margin to require future undergraduates to take a course on ethnic, cultural, religious or gender diversity. The move came after three previous efforts had failed.

Officials announced Friday that the faculty of the UCLA College of Letters and Science voted 332 to 303, with 24 blank ballots, to start the requirement for incoming freshmen in fall 2015 and new transfer students in 2017.

Two other faculty and administrative review panels still must approve the requirement before it can go into effect, but the recent college-wide vote was considered the most important step in a much-debated matter on the Westwood campus.

UCLA Chancellor Gene Block was a strong proponent of such diversity classes, saying they would help prepare students to live and work in a multi-cultural society. Most other UC campuses and the UCLA School of the Arts and Architecture already require such courses. The College of Letters and Science enrolls about 85% of UCLA's undergraduates.

Opponents said students were overburdened with other requirements, particularly in the sciences, and said the budget-strapped university could not afford extra classes. Additional questions were raised about whether these classes improve ethnic relations and whether they typically skew left politically.

Similar proposals were rejected by the faculty three times in the last two decades. In 2012, the measure lost 224-175 in a vote that attracted only about 30% of potential ballots. More than 46% of the college faculty cast the online ballots in the current weeklong vote after much lobbying and student activism, officials said.

In a statement released Friday, Block said he was pleased by the faculty approval.

"A diversity-related course requirement for UCLA College undergraduates is an important component of our commitment to expose students to beliefs and backgrounds other than their own," he said.

The courses are expected to be offered by many academic departments, ranging from sociology to statistics, and students will be required to choose one for an academic quarter.

M. Belinda Tucker, UCLA psychiatry and biobehavioral professor who was a co-chair of the diversity initiative, said the requirement will be more broadly defined than at some other campuses because it will include courses on international topics, not just U.S. issues.

She noted that the courses will not make it harder to graduate since students can devote one of their electives to it and fulfill it with courses that also meet other requirements for their major or degree.

"I think it's going to benefit the students and benefit the campus as a whole," Tucker said.

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