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OPINION, OPINION COLUMNS

Opinion: UCLA provides opportunities for students to learn how to push for change



By [Sabrina Huang](#)

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This isn't a normal time to start at UCLA – and we shouldn't convince ourselves that it is.

While August typically brings back-to-school jitters and the excitement of new possibilities, most of us are stuck at home, watching the world fall apart as our former realities slip further away.

It's easy to feel hopeless. I would be lying if I said I haven't had at least five existential crises since summer began.

But life continues. Though this next school year won't look like any we've been through before, it doesn't mean we won't grow and struggle together. A new beginning, although difficult, is a new opportunity.

And for all of us, the next year is an opportunity to explore how we can contribute to meaningful change in a world of devastating inequity. It's a chance to learn about the experiences of marginalized communities – even if we may not belong to one. It's an opportunity to push past the limits of traditionally whitewashed curricula.

UCLA certainly helps to facilitate such an undertaking. In the past year alone, I've taken classes on environmental racism and Black transnationalism. I've read papers about the prison-to-homelessness pipeline and attended lectures on intersectionality – the [brainchild](#) of UCLA law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw.

It may seem easy to continue down the paths we've forged for ourselves, but our education shouldn't be limited to the subjects we know or think we'll excel at. College is a place to ask difficult questions – and to actively listen. "It's crucial for us to be able to connect social justice and education because social justice is education," said Maxine Dimalanta, a third-year education and social transformation and political science student. "You may think that these systems of oppression we're talking about don't affect you, but in reality, they affect everyone."

After all, it was student activists in the '60s who pushed for the creation of four on-campus centers dedicated to the study and advancement of racial minorities. The American Indian Studies Center, Asian American Studies Center, Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies and Chicano Studies Research Center have since funded countless initiatives aimed at empowering communities of color.

As a Bruin, you now have unlimited access to these resources.

But learning about systemic injustice also means recognizing that UCLA is by no means perfect.

It took national protests during a public health crisis for administrators to commit to funding a Black Resource Center. The proportions of African American, Chicano/Latino and American Indian students admitted to UCLA have remained stagnant since at least 2018. Housing-insecure students still don't have a permanent space on campus to sleep.

UCLA has one foot in the past and another in the future. It's up to us to push it in the right direction.

Take classes that expand your intellectual horizon. Join organizations that strive to improve the community. Attend virtual forums to explore topics outside your wheelhouse.

Use your time at the nation's premier public university to challenge the status quo.

After all, it's what Bruins have been doing for the last 100 years.

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