

Chancellor Gene Block

Excerpts from Keynote Address at
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In a keynote address, UCLA Chancellor Gene Block reflected on his own experience at the University of Virginia and opportunities at UCLA to advance excellence through diversity. Chancellor Block cited the Regents' recently adopted Diversity Statement which said in part, because the core mission of the University of California is to serve the interest of the state of California, it must seek to achieve diversity among its student bodies and among its employees. The following sections provide excerpts from Chancellor Block's remarks.

We as employees of the University, but more importantly as academics, as believers in diversity, have to find the appropriate methods to be successful in diversifying our student body and diversifying our faculty. We have to find ways for talented people of all backgrounds to be included...Chairs are the pivotal point actually in the university in making diversity a reality, certainly with faculty. And deans play important roles, but you are there in the trenches, you are dealing with faculty members, you are overseeing the formation of search committees, and in that sense, I think you're playing absolutely the central role regarding whether we're going to be successful or not. You know, you set the tone and you drive the agenda for your departments. ...I believe you're committed to incorporate diversity planning in all your departmental activities...I think you, as chairs, can inspire and sustain policies that promote diversity and recruitment processes. You can reward department members who actively promote diversity, and you can outline concrete plans involved in recruitment



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and retention. So I really say it is in your hands in a lot of ways, whether we're successful [at UC] or not.


[It's] a bandwidth problem. I've always viewed it that way. Departments at universities often have to hire people in very specialized areas to put together critical groups for grants, to put together a critical base for doing great things, for achieving great advances in knowledge. And

that often means recruitment in pretty specialized areas and that means you may be dealing with not a very diverse pool because you have such a restricted number of people who fit the description. And I would say it is OK for departments to make some very specialized hires to help develop the academic quality of the department as long as there's some balance that there are other searches that have much wider bandwidth, where the chance of diversity is much greater. And I really see that this is a portfolio and you always have to be alert to the fact that if you hire highly specialized individuals it's very difficult to get the type of pool you'd like to

get to be diverse, but you can have other searches that are much broader. So ... if you're in a neuroscience department you may be hiring someone pretty specialized in dealing with neurochemistry ...and that may be a very restricted pool and not very

diverse. On the other hand, if you have other searches that open up to animal behavior and broader areas, you can find a more diverse pool. *I think that the problem is that many departments overspecialize in every one of their hires.* Every

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hire is so over-specified that you never see the kinds of pools that you need (to become diverse). ...If you can broaden the bandwidth of your searches, you can often bring in a much more diverse pool of candidates, so I think that's an important issue one has to deal with, and I think there's a balance there. There's a balance that can be achieved.

...it's not true in every search but in many searches, we do have 3 or 4 people where the distinctions are pretty fine. And the one thing that I have learned, and I learned it in an interesting way from a close colleague of mine, is that you can't always tell 5 years out who's going to be the most successful.

(Speaking of experiences at the University of Virginia)... We also created a mentoring program...These were really for young faculty, incoming faculty. It was open to everybody but it was really primarily focused on women faculty and on minority faculty from underrepresented groups...a number [of the mentees] were in the sciences. It was a home to sort of get together to talk about experiences, but it was a place where you could get access to information about stopping the clock, and whether that was a good or bad thing and what it meant. You could get access to information about the whole tenure process, and you got a lot of people talking to you plus you have a mentor assigned to you....The reviews of the fac-

ulty that were involved were just spectacular. It was high touch and labor intensive. The faculty who were mentors spent a lot of time. Everyone thought it was worthwhile and extremely valuable activity so I think that mentoring plus the training of search committees were two of the important elements [in diversifying the faculty at University of Virginia].

I noticed at least with the University of Virginia, when we grew the opportunities in biomedical engineering, we dramatically grew the number of women engineers entering the Engineering School. They were interested in just different engineering than men were interested in, and there were a disproportionate number of women...in biomedical engineering, biological engineering fields, so something about the choice of the fields that you decide to invest in will affect your diversity.

I think we can make progress...[On our campuses] there's economic diversity [of the student body]. We're starting at such a great base, at a place that is really the school of dreams for most students. I couldn't imagine a better place to be doing this work. You're here because you're committed, I'm committed, and we'll work together and we'll look back in ten years and say, "Wow. You know we've actually begun and we're actually succeeding in solving this still very serious challenge."

