

July 21, 2020

Dear Dr. Soon-Shiong, Norm, and other members of the L.A. Times leadership team,

As a California State University faculty member and former L.A. Times engagement editor, I am writing on behalf of Journalism colleagues who share deep concern regarding the lack of representation of our graduates in internships and fellowships in your newsroom -- and to suggest concrete steps you can take to remedy the problem.

The Cal State system, consisting of 23 campuses, is the largest in the country, conferring more than [60% of the bachelor's degrees California's Latino students receive and nearly half of those that Black students receive](#). Yet, the Latino Caucus figures reveal only **4% of Metpro fellows and interns at the L.A. Times over the past decade have been Cal State students or graduates**. As programs created to broaden opportunities and create a more representative newsroom, this disconnect indicates to us a mission failure.

We are frustrated with writing recommendation letter after letter, and then seeing our extraordinary students passed over for those from better-resourced institutions and backgrounds. Or, just as heartbreaking, witnessing the few that do make it to the L.A. Times, often through contract jobs rather than internships or as fellows, being worn down by lack of steady employment or respect.

Our graduates reflect the present, and future, of California. The student population on my campus, California State University, Northridge, is [50% Latino](#), matching the county's demographic breakdown. In contrast, the journalists at the L.A. Times are 13% Latino. Our students, many if not most of whom are bilingual, know intimately the Southern California that the L.A. Times purports to cover, but too often fails to do so.

Based on conversations with CSU graduates who have worked at The Times and Journalism faculty, we have created a series of recommendations to build a pipeline between the Cal State University network and The Los Angeles Times.

- **Dedicate Spots in Metpro for CSU Graduates:** It is imperative that the Metpro program, if it is going to continue to fulfill its mission to train "aspiring journalists with diverse backgrounds or life experiences" to cover Los Angeles, do a better job including CSU graduates. We recommend at least 20% of spots be reserved for CSU graduates.
- **Ensure Metpro Director Can Effectively Develop the Program:** We applaud that Steve Padilla was selected to run Metpro, but want to emphasize the need for authority, time and resources to do so effectively. We support the Black Caucus recommendation that "this should be a masthead-level position with a budget large enough to bring in coaches (for writing, copy editing, graphics, etc.) and other resources to invest in young journalists."

- **Create Inclusive Internships:** The Los Angeles Times this summer [offered 26 internships and fellowships to students from CUNY, Duke, Yale, Notre Dame, Stanford, University of Missouri, UNR, and USC](#). The lack of a public California state university is a painful omission and needs to be fixed. Tracy Boucher, L.A. Times' director of news development, previously said an applicant's [previous experience is what she looks for](#), while acknowledging students at elite programs may have an advantage. Most of our students are the first in their families to attend college, and are working their way through college. They will not have comparable clips until provided with the opportunity for a paid internship.
- **Provide Recruitment, Training, and Field Trips:** A recruiter or journalist from the Times should be on campus each fall and spring to explain their internships and the Metro program so our students can know about them well in advance. We also recommend hosting additional on-site interview workshops and in-person field trips. (Here are [15 Journalism professors who will help orient you](#) on their campuses.)
- **Create College Insider:** Create a journalism training and collaborative reporting program specifically targeting Southern California college students, with a particular focus on CSUs. This can build on the model of LA Times' High School Insider and support some of the holes in L.A. community and higher education coverage, while forging connections between the newsroom and CSU students.

We hope you see this as an opportunity to grow the L.A. Times to better engage with and reflect its community. As journalism educators, we are deeply invested in the mission of the L.A. Times, just as we are in ensuring that our students have successful careers in the field. We hope that in the future we can work together to find synergy so that both are able to thrive.

Sincerely,

Daniela Gerson, assistant professor, Journalism Department, California State University, Northridge

Co-signed

Linda Bowen, professor and chair, Journalism Department, California State University, Northridge

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Added after initial letter sent→

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