

Letters to the Editor: UC Davis Defends Its ‘Diversity Statements’

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Prof. Abigail Thompson, chair of the mathematics department at the University of California, Davis, compares the use of diversity statements in faculty hiring to political tests, noting that “mandatory diversity statements can too easily become a test of political ideology and conformity” (“The University’s New Loyalty Oath,” op-ed, Dec. 20). We disagree strongly with this premise. It is inaccurate, at once illogical and rhetorically inflammatory, and reminiscent of historical attempts to blunt substantive actions aimed at desegregation and broadening participation.

The tripartite mission of the University of California is research, teaching and public service. Given the totality of our mission, serving our student body is a top priority, and contributions to diversity are as important to that end as research and teaching. Indeed, not asking questions about a candidate’s readiness to serve the diverse population of students in California, the most diverse state in the nation, would be negligent.

Respecting and understanding students and colleagues from all backgrounds may come naturally to many. But engaging colleagues and having the ability to recognize and correct inequities is a skill. Actively using inclusionary practices to engage students from different backgrounds is part of the skill set we expect from faculty.

University of California policy states that diversity is “integral to the University’s achievement of excellence,” and enhances “the ability of the University to accomplish its academic mission.” True commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion is active, not passive.

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