

April 3, 2017

BENJAMIN HERMALIN
Vice Provost for the Faculty

Subject: Assessment of efforts to create inclusive classrooms

Dear Ben,

Divisional Council (DIVCO) discussed the proposal to assess efforts to create inclusive classrooms by incorporating a question to the effect on end-of-term student evaluations at its March 13, 2017 meeting. The discussion was informed by commentary of the committees on Budget and Interdepartmental Relations (BIR) and Diversity, Equity and Campus Climate (DECC), which is appended in its entirety.

DIVCO and the reporting committees laud the intent of the proposal and support its underlying goal. We agree with BIR that creating an inclusive classroom environment is an important criterion of teaching effectiveness. At the same time, we believe it is premature to incorporate it in this way into student evaluations.

A number of concerns and suggestions surfaced in DIVCO's discussion. Laying a solid foundation for the assessment is critically important. Toward that end, we believe it is essential to develop a shared understanding and definition of inclusivity across campus. We discussed leveraging initiatives already underway on campus, such as the Faculty Dialogue Series—Creating Inclusive Classrooms developed by the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Equity and Inclusion, as possible partners in engaging faculty in discussions about creating inclusive environments.


Further, there is a strong sense that the assessment should be qualitative in nature, rather than a strictly numerical rating. Our discussion echoed DECC's commentary: "Members felt that a question like this would warrant a more qualitative well-rounded answer than just a simple rating." A well-crafted, open-ended question may be more likely to provide insight into this complex matter.

We also noted that the assessment should be consistent with the norms of the different disciplines across campus. As BIR noted:

... in the area of research, we assess positively research whose content contributes to the University's goals for diversity and inclusion, but we do not assess negatively research, for example, on Number Theory or Cosmology, in which content is unrelated to those goals. Thus, in the area of teaching, an open-ended question may provide a more appropriate way to identify positive contributions (as well as problematic ones) given that the scope for contribution, whether positive or negative, is at least partially dependent on subject matter.

In sum, DIVCO strongly supports the aim of the proposal, and welcomes the opportunity to work with campus administration on this important campus goal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Powell', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robert Powell
Chair, Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate
Professor of Political Science

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Cc: Stuart Russell, Chair, Committee on Budget and Interdepartmental Relations
Donna Jones, Chair, Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Campus Climate
Aimee Larsen, Manager, Committee on Budget and Interdepartmental Relations
Linda Corley, Senate Analyst, Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Campus Climate

March 9, 2017

CHAIR ROBERT POWELL
BERKELEY DIVISION OF THE ACADEMIC SENATE

RE: Assessment of Efforts to Create Inclusive Classrooms

You have asked us to comment on the proposal to bring further attention to the important issue of maintaining inclusive classroom environments on the Berkeley campus. We are happy to provide our thoughts. Following standard practice, we limit our comments to issues that are within our purview; as course evaluations are an important form of input in the faculty review process, the focus on faculty's responsiveness to issues regarding inclusion in such evaluations is directly relevant to matters of concern to us.

Specifically, it is recommended that a question on inclusion be added to the end-of-term student evaluations. We have been asked to comment on the addition of the question itself, as well as to provide a recommendation regarding the most appropriate Academic Senate response.

In regards to the proposed evaluation question, we agree with Benjamin E. Hermalin, Vice Provost for the Faculty, that adding a question that provides an opportunity for students to assess Professors' effectiveness in creating and maintaining an inclusive classroom environment would signal that the development of "an inclusive classroom environment" is an important criterion of effective teaching. We note that there are other measures that could be taken, such as adding material on maintaining an inclusive classroom environment to the online training courses that faculty are required to take regularly, or adding an open-ended rather than numerical question to the teaching evaluation forms.

However, the introduction of the proposed question comes with a number of challenges. On the one hand, student responses could only serve as a reliable measure of the classroom climate if there is a shared understanding across the campus of what "inclusive" means, what "inclusiveness" entails, and what practices help advance the creation of an inclusive classroom. On the other hand, there will necessarily be different norms and practices in different disciplines. In addition, on the one hand, a certain number of features of inclusiveness most likely apply to all classrooms, such as encouraging questions and avoiding disparaging responses. On the other hand, however, the teaching of certain subject matters will inevitably create both opportunities and pitfalls with regard to inclusiveness because, for example, the course content relates to persona identity, while the content of other courses may have little or no connection to inclusiveness. We note that the idea of inclusion is very broad, and thus applies to a range of classroom dimensions, and that range may not be the same in every instance. Included might be curricula, assessment practices, pedagogy, participation structures, and questions of architecture

and spatial arrangements, for example. A definition of what constitutes an inclusive classroom will need to be both clear and supple, and there will also need to be clarity about what we are trying to measure by way of the proposed question to be asked of students.

Adding an open-ended question that asks students, “What recommendations would you give the Professor that could enhance an inclusive climate in this particular classroom?” might provide a more useful assessment, but this question, as well, requires attention to the issues raised above. We note that, in the area of research, we assess positively research whose content contributes to the University’s goals for diversity and inclusion, but we do not assess negatively research, for example, on Number Theory or Cosmology, in which content is unrelated to those goals. Thus, in the area of teaching, an open-ended question may provide a more appropriate way to identify positive contributions (as well as problematic ones) given that the scope for contribution, whether positive or negative, is at least partially dependent on subject matter.

Thus, we conclude that there is considerable groundwork to be done before a discipline-specific question or a question that details clear parameters about what inclusion means should be added. Moreover, it is not clear to us that a numerical question is preferable to an open-ended question.

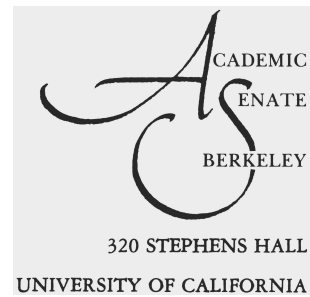
In response to the question of how the Academic Senate should respond regarding this issue, we believe that the campus must first build capacity in the faculty (and in departments) to achieve the goal of creating more inclusive classrooms. There are various forms of support that could be availed to faculty and departments as part of this effort. For example, the Faculty Dialogue Series—Creating Inclusive Classrooms developed by the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Equity and Inclusion engages colleagues in peer-led conversations on inclusive teaching and learning strategies. Coordination with this initiative is key. Further, as noted above, the campus could consider the development of a module similar to the required sexual-harassment component to build faculty understanding of how to create an inclusive classroom, as well as the range of challenges that may arise from such efforts.

Finally, we reiterate that we find merit in a campus-wide effort to develop more inclusive classroom environments and find it to be a laudable and important campus goal. However, given that the conduct of fair and robust assessments of effective teaching is an important component of faculty reviews, we encourage further consideration of the issues raised in our response before the proposed end-of-term question is added. Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on this important issue.



Stuart J. Russell
Chair

SJR/al



March 7, 2017

PROFESSOR ROBERT POWELL
Chair, 2016-2017 Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate

*Re: DECC's Comments on the Assessment of Efforts to Create Inclusive
Classrooms Proposal*

The Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Campus Climate (DECC) met on February 16, 2017 to discuss the Assessment of Efforts to Create Inclusive Classroom proposal. There was a discussion as to whether to mandate a follow up question for students to add an explanation to their score. Members felt that a question like this would warrant a more qualitative well-rounded answer than just a simple rating. By mandating the follow up question, students have to qualify their answers rather than simply rating the instructor. There were also concerns about what remedies the university might offer instructors who receive low scores and what resources might be available to them. A member mentioned that her graduate students are offered an inclusivity training and certificate program. It was suggested that if the campus does mandate the question for end-of-term evaluations, the campus should provide something similar to the graduate student inclusivity training as a resource for faculty.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Donna Jones'.

Donna Jones
Chair, Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Campus Climate

DJ/lc