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EDITORIAL

**Diversity programs and diverse ideas**

***Our view:** The community college has a new hiring policy that requires applicants to recite their commitment to diversity. We wouldn't call it a "loyalty oath," as one critic has, but share concern about its impact.*

"Diversity," like its older sibling "Affirmative Action," has caused its share of anguish for American society. It's likely that most of us are affiliated with or know of a work place, institution or other organization that has struggled to add to its ranks minorities, women or members of other underrepresented groups. Sometimes that struggle is internal.

That's the case at the community college - at least for one faculty member. But that one member has threatened to sue and already has drawn the involvement of a group dedicated to individual rights, so the issue has captured attention.

Sociology professor Myles J. Kelleher has likened a hiring policy at the school to a "loyalty oath." It is a troubling comparison that dredges up frightening images of the days of the Red Scare, when citizens' patriotism was questioned by virtue of their relationship with anybody or anything even remotely connected to the Communist Party. It was a sad chapter in American history marked by busted careers and damaged reputations. Some of the accused took their own lives.

Nothing so dramatic or frightening is happening here. Which is why we find Prof. Kelleher's comparison itself troubling. Still he raises an issue worthy of discussion by college administrators: Is it appropriate to ask applicants for management, administrative and faculty positions to provide "a brief statement of your commitment to diversity and how this commitment is demonstrated in your work."

Kelleher sees it as "a litmus test to see what your political and social attitudes are... As a public institution," he rightly points out, "[the college] is not permitted to restrict hiring on the [basis of] the political and social views of applicants."

For the record, college president James Linksiz insisted the question is "not a code for hiring a person of some particular persuasion."

If not, why ask the question?

That's not a criticism of the college's commitment to diversity. Of all places, we think colleges

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and universities should strive to present students with a diversity of ideas from a faculty and administration that strongly reflects our diverse culture and community. It's the best way we know of eliminating fear and hatred of other groups and of instilling respect and understanding for beliefs and lifestyles dissimilar to our own.

But as Kelleher points out, not everybody subscribes to this "fashionable intellectual agenda." And that doesn't make non-believers poor teachers or bad managers. Worse than painting non-believers as somehow inferior, Kelleher argues that asking them to recite the diversity pledge - loyalty oath? - amounts to "coercion of both conscience and mind."

We think the professor is being a bit melodramatic. But we do agree that a college should be a "marketplace of ideas" that compete and conflict. We don't think it adds to the intellectual experience to staff classrooms with people of diverse backgrounds and cultures but whose philosophies all spring from the same mold.

**Tuesday, February 13, 2001**

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