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Diversity and Division

University's crusade for the holy ethnic grail undermines search for truth
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A few recent stories from The UCSD Guardian show how the university's obsession with superficial "diversity" chills free speech, corrupts its academic mission, and undermines true diversity.

"Declaring UCSD a hostile environment for minorities," the Guardian reported in November, "Student Affirmative Action Committee Chairman Ernesto Martinez blasted the Koala and UCSD administration in a series of e-mails to campus officials, alleging harassment by members of the Koala and administration inaction."

The Koala, a student humor paper that hasn't been funny in almost 15 years, recently singled out for ridicule Martinez, the head of a prominent and powerful student organization. The Koala has gored a herd of racial oxen lately. Among its latest offenses, the Koala published photos of Martinez in its second fall issue with the caption "Ernesto Martinez's Ugly Mug" and called attention his poor command of English grammar and syntax.

So, does Mr. Martinez really have an "ugly mug"? Reasonable people will disagree. It's clear, however, that the SAAC chairman has terribly thin skin for a man in his position. He's also indisputably, breathtakingly, amazingly vain.

After all, "[w]hen you have diversity being attacked; when you have diversity being laughed at; when you have people taking advantage of the First Amendment; it goes to show how this university is," Martinez said. Understand, the Koala didn't merely make fun of Martinez; it degraded the very idea of racial and ethnic "diversity." They're the same thing, get it? To paraphrase another pompous ass, "diversite, c'est moi." About 10 years ago, the SAAC chairman at the time wrote an indignant letter to the Guardian in which he concluded, "I am 'We the People.'" Whatever happened to that old-fashioned brand of humility?

I do not want to defend the Koala, a publication I don't like very much. I do, however, wish to attack the Koala's attackers. Fact is, the Ernesto Martinezes of the world are a dime a dozen at UCSD and at colleges around the country. For Martinez and his compatriots, the object of a university education isn't knowledge for knowledge's

sake, but mastery of the arts of race-baiting, fearmongering, and moral blackmail. These are marketable skills to be listed on a resume somewhere below the dean's list but above how many words you can type per minute. Despicable, yes, but what can you do?

Well, if you are Chancellor Robert C. Dynes, you coddle him and pander to him. According to the Guardian story, Dynes apologized to Martinez "on behalf of the ' campus community,' and himself," and commended him for his display of "maturity and dignity." (Petulance is mature nowadays, is it?) The Chancellor also condemned the Koala, telling the Guardian: "The Koala's record of offensiveness toward women and underrepresented groups has sunk to a new low." Come now. Does anybody believe that Dynes actually reads the Koala? Shouldn't he be spending his time on more important things? Why not raise more money to expand the military-industrial-research complex, or for scholarships, or for scholarships to help build a better War Machine?

It would have been better if Dr. Dynes left it at that. But he continued: "While such hateful speech may be protected by the First Amendment, it is a clear violation of our UCSD Principles of Community and our goal of a hate-free campus."

This is arrant nonsense, of course, and irresponsible, at that. If I were Koala Editor George Liddle, and I wanted to ensure that I left UCSD with diploma in hand, I would think seriously about contacting one of those well-funded legal foundations that exist to vindicate the rights of hapless college kids like him. Surely the Chancellor, a holder of a doctorate in physics and man of some wit, knows the difference between "hateful" and "sophomoric" speech. The White Aryan Resistance, the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, and the Islamic Jihad deal in one. The Koala engages in the other. I offer the Chancellor three guesses about who is responsible for what. The first two guesses don't count.

If Chancellor Dynes isn't pulling our leg, and it's true that the Koala violated UCSD's Principles of Community, then maybe it's time to rethink those principles. Quite apart from the threat they pose to the satirical arts, they are a clear and present danger to free academic inquiry and the quest for truth—in other words, the very mission of the university. The motto of the University of California is "Let there be light." But on the subject of diversity, the university seems to say, "Turn that damn light off!"

When the university establishes, as a matter of principle, that "We celebrate ... diversity and support respect for all cultures, by both individuals and the university as a whole," that is the last word on the subject. Are all cultures worthy of respect? Of course not. But the principle renders the question moot. When the university establishes, as a matter of principle, that "We affirm the right to freedom of expression at UCSD," then that should be the last word on the subject. But it adds this crucial caveat: "We promote open expression of our individuality and our diversity within the bounds of courtesy, sensitivity, confidentiality and respect." Feel free to speak your mind, but please, take care not to offend any one of any number constituencies, with their sundry racial, ethnic, sexual, or ideological sensitivities.

In January, the Guardian tackled the diversity question with gusto in a three-part series called "Faces in the Crowd." It was a yeoman effort, replete with fascinating anecdotes and revealing comments from Dynes, Vice Chancellor Joe Watson, and others. But in the end, it fell short. In that respect, the Guardian had performed a great service. We should be grateful that the series turned out as well as it did. It could have been a 4,500-word propaganda orgy with a liberal dose of self-flagellation for various heresies, real and imagined. Well, there is quite a bit of flagellation, actually. But to her considerable credit, Features Editor Claire J. Vannette went out of her way to ensure the apostates a fair hearing before putting them to the torch. And in fairness to Vannette and her writers, it must have been a chore to find anyone—student, faculty member, or administrator—with even the slightest word of criticism of UCSD's diversity efforts.

The series falls short because, try as they might, the writers and the editor cannot get past their natural bias toward the prevailing doctrine of superficial diversity. They ask some good questions—"What does ' diversity'

really mean and why is it important? Are the changes being made to increase it actually working and are they even needed? Whose responsibility is it to address these questions?” —but they take for granted the basic assumption that, in the words of A.S President Jeff Dodge, “The lack of ethnic diversity impacts [our] education.”

Assuming Dodge meant to add, “for the worse,” one is compelled to ask: Says who? Where is the evidence? Where is the data? Edwina Welch, director of the Cross Cultural Center, takes the Marxian false-consciousness line that “Everybody is impacted [by lack of diversity] —some people know they are impacted and some people don’t. It just depends on where the lens is.” In other words, we don’t need evidence. We just know.

“We’re lacking in perspective of the world, America, culture and a sense of global identity,” Dodge says. “College is supposed to be a microcosm of society. It’s a time to be introduced to the basic ideas of other cultures.”

His first claim is plainly false: the trend in education over the last two or three decades has been to broaden students’ “perspective of the world” in extremis. The second claim is true as far as it goes, unless Dodge means to say college is supposed to represent the population proportionately. If so, he’s all wet. The third sentence is a bit silly —if a student hasn’t been “introduced to the basic ideas of other cultures” by the time he arrives at the university, chances are good he’s been living in a cave in Afghanistan for most of his life.

Chancellor Dynes’ own attempt at an answer is almost laughable. Diversity —“ethnic, racial, and otherwise,” in the Guardian’s words —is important because “it fosters the type of strength that he says comes ‘ from people that aren’t part the Establishment asking questions that the Establishment won’t ask,’ and from people ‘ bringing their own culture and their own wealth of ideas, wealth of perspectives together.’ “

If “diversity” is really about “asking questions the Establishment won’t ask,” then why does the Establishment —in this case, the campus administration and its vast Student Affirmative Action apparatus —denounce anyone who questions the faith as a heretic, or, rather, a racist? Real diversity —that is, the sort of diversity you get when individuals compete freely, exchange ideas without fear or favor, and seek truth where ever it may lead you —is exactly what the current administration and the student race hustlers seek to undermine. They do this under the guise of eliminating the supposed “hostile climate” that supposedly keeps underrepresented students from succeeding on campus.

What does that mean in practice? A 1999 report by the student subcommittee of the Chancellor’s Diversity Council offers a hint. The students recommended a series of policy changes, almost of which amount to spending more money, along with rationales for why the changes are needed. Included in the report is a series of “rationales.” Under the heading “Campus Climate and Retention of Underrepresented Students,” the committee writes: “Several elements contribute to perceptions of a ‘ hostile climate’ for underrepresented students at UCSD . . . These include . . . excessive individualism and competition that mark UCSD’s academic conditions.”

Excessive individualism. Too much competition. That 1999 report deserves a more extensive treatment — perhaps another column. But what all one really needs to know is that Chancellor Dynes, in his written response, does not challenge this rationale or any other. He agrees with virtually every policy recommendation, including the additional funding for AASU and MEChA, two leftist political organizations that somehow gained legitimacy over time as student “outreach” groups.

That’s a shame. It would have been nice if the Guardian had dug into this a little deeper. After all, when you have individualism and competition being attacked; when you have free inquiry being laughed at; when you have people taking advantage of the UCSD Principles of Community to assail the First Amendment; it goes to show how this university is.

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