

On University Excellence: Reflections from Berkeley

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THE INTELLECTUAL UNREST sweeping through American universities largely reflects a liberal ideology purporting to embody all the correct attitudes towards contemporary issues now needed by our institutions of higher learning. In California a rapidly changing population resulting from new patterns of immigration has exacerbated liberal demands for sweeping changes in racial attitudes towards non-Caucasian academics. Much turmoil over affirmative action, faculty hiring, curricular changes, and other multicultural problems has taken place in Berkeley at the University of California, where campus protests, including the disruption of classes, have attempted to assert the infallibility of liberal positions on all ethnic issues.

In this troubling situation the continued overall functioning of the University presents increasing challenges for the administration. It must take into account the demands of a predominantly left-wing student body and a large number of like-minded faculty members intent upon securing ever more racial diversity, together with a state legislative concern, shared by the Regents, that the University adopt policies reflecting the increasingly diversified population of the state. At the same time the administration is

aware that for more than a hundred years traditional attitudes towards education gave little consideration to ethnic issues yet brought the University of California so much honor and esteem that it has long been ranked as one of the foremost universities in the world.

But, as is everywhere stressed, times are swiftly changing and higher education must accommodate itself to this fact. Already some years ago the University of California decided that augmenting the diversity of students, faculty, and fields of study would insure continued excellence and placate liberal voices. At present, however, the faculty at Berkeley is still about 90% Caucasian and that, Chancellor Chang-Lin Tien bluntly states, has to be changed.¹ Hiring of faculty members is to depend to an even greater degree not only upon race but also upon feminist demands for more women faculty members. Obviously, many excellent scholars, research workers, teachers, and other staff members at Berkeley who are best qualified for the positions they hold are members of ethnic minorities and/or women. In most fields of study, however, the qualities of academic excellence are independent of race and gender, and in insisting upon such irrelevancies to replace or supplement the