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April 30, 2021

Dr. Charles Van Loan  
Joseph C. Ford Professor of Engineering  
Department of Computer Science  
423 Gates Hall  
Cornell University  
Ithaca, New York 14853

Dear Charlie,

Thank you once again for your thoughtful response to my letter to the Cornell Faculty Senate and for your collegial invitation to offer further insights in answer to your comments.

Responding by way of marginal comments in track changes proved unwieldy, so I offer this cut-and-paste of your comments and my responses. I encourage you to share these with the Faculty Senate, in hopes that these thoughts will help in its deliberations.

You have my highest regards,

As ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael".

Enclosures

PROMOTING ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND EXCELLENCE

1730 M Street NW, Suite 600 Washington, DC 20036

T (202) 467-6787; (888) ALUMNI-8 F (202) 467-6784 info@GoACTA.org www.GoACTA.org

- “I respectfully offer a different synopsis based on our most recent thinking:

The Faculty Educational Requirement for racially just and equitable futures envisions the creation of an expanded library (a.k.a. menu) of resources to help faculty be more effective in their various roles. The requirement is (roughly) that the faculty member engage with one of those resources (with others) each semester choosing from the menu in a way that takes into account their current responsibilities and experience. We are talking about a two hour commitment.”

- *My concern is coercion: See WGF, section 6: “Incentives need to be put in place to ensure full participation...if faculty wish to (a) hire students or staff for research in their labs and field offices (b)teach (c) supervise Teaching Assistants (d)advise and mentor students...”*

*Faculty should be terrified by this authoritarian proposal.*

- “You seem to be saying that there is no need to do anything until after the damage has been done.

What is ACTA’s stance on prevention through education? Some individuals define accountability in terms of coercion and punishment. Others see careful accountability as a mechanism for learning and improvement. Where does ACTA stand on this?”

- *Please see above. Coercion and punishment are writ large in WGF.*
- *We quote Yale’s C Vann Woodward Report of 1974: “For if a university is a place for knowledge, it is also a special kind of small society. Yet it is not primarily a fellowship, a club, a circle of friends, a replica of the civil society outside it. Without sacrificing its central purpose, it cannot make its primary and dominant value the fostering of friendship, solidarity, harmony, civility, or mutual respect. To be sure, these are important values; other institutions may properly assign them the highest, and not merely a subordinate priority; and a good university will seek and may in some significant measure attain these ends. But it will never let these values, important as they are, override its central purpose.”*

- “This [sc. UC’s diversity screening] is something of an exaggeration as can be discovered by looking at their website:

[Support for Faculty Search Committees | Office for Faculty Equity & Welfare \(berkeley.edu\)](https://www.berkeley.edu/office-for-faculty-equity-welfare/support-for-faculty-search-committees)

However, there are parts of their methodology that are bit formulaic. It is important to take into consideration what our peers are doing so thanks for the reference.”

- *ACTA earnestly hopes that Cornell will not consider following the model of the*

*University of California. I have not exaggerated the inappropriate practices used in the pilot projects at UCB and UCD, which make screening of the diversity statements a gateway for consideration of the applicant's academic qualifications.*

[https://651d7eef-05d1-4785-8f04-93b49cc8d71f.filesusr.com/ugd/257e28\\_618324895312440380a1c51d9f168a9c.pdf](https://651d7eef-05d1-4785-8f04-93b49cc8d71f.filesusr.com/ugd/257e28_618324895312440380a1c51d9f168a9c.pdf)

*This search was unique, both in scale and in intent, and it presented several novel problems for the LSI Committee, as detailed in the LSI Committee Search Process (Appendix A). This led to an unexpected and impactful intervention; in the first review, the Committee evaluated redacted statements on contributions to diversity, equity and inclusion. **Limiting the first review to contributions in DE&I is itself a dramatic change of emphasis in the typical evaluation process which generally focuses on primarily on research accomplishments.** Furthermore, we believe that the redaction of candidate names from these statements reduced unconscious bias in the evaluation processes. Without presumptions regarding a candidate's gender, national origin or ethnicity, reviewers evaluated candidates solely on their statements on accomplishments, depth of understanding, and future plans.*

<https://academicaffairs.ucdavis.edu/uc-davis-pilot-study-prioritize-academic-excellence-research-and-contributions-diversity-equity-and>

- Requiring that recruitment committees only read the Contributions to DEI Statements and Statements of Research first (or, if the academic units request, Statements of Teaching), and then score them using rubrics of the recruitment committee's choice. These statements will be anonymized and redacted. Only candidates scoring above a threshold determined by the recruitment committee will be further considered.

*What UC has showcased is assuredly not benign. The Cornell Faculty Senate should worry about the slippery slope on which it now stands.*

- “I think it is fine to link the ideas behind WG-S and WG-F with the ideas voiced in the petition [sc.”Faculty, Graduate Students and Staff for an Anti-Racist Cornell, 2020 Demands] that you reference. But ACTA seems more intent on cross checking lists of names and warning us about working group members who signed the petition. This sentence points to the possibility that ACTA has an enemies list mentality. Please explain why this isn't the case.”

- *ACTA does not have an “enemies list mentality.” It does have a commitment to intellectual diversity, so we respectfully ask: to balance the representation from the signatories of the “Anti-Racist Cornell, 2020 Demands,” how many members of the working group identify as Classical Liberals or conservatives? Did the Working Groups have adequate viewpoint diversity? If not, the process needs to start over, in our opinion.*
- “If they wrote this 40 years ago there would probably be no reference to teaching/communication. It would be research, research, research. But over the past few decades the role of teaching has been elevated in the research universities. This was done by creating strong expectations and holding faculty accountable.”
  - *Actually, the Shils Report was published not 40 years ago, but 51 years ago. <https://provost.uchicago.edu/handbook/clause/shils-report-criteria-academic-appointments> . No argument whatsoever at ACTA about the importance of teaching, nor would you have found such an argument in AAUP’s 1915 Principles. Teaching is a core mission. Telling faculty what to teach is another matter and a matter calling for the greatest caution of the Faculty Senate.*

“Does ACTA see required course evaluations and a requirement that there be a teaching statement in a tenure dossier as a coercive distraction from the “main business” of the research university? If not, then why not admit that a careful implementation of the WG-F recommendations harmonizes with the functions of a research university?”

- *ACTA sees nothing unwholesome about asking students, for example, if they are all treated fairly. The wording of such questions needs to be quite careful. In Berkeley’s diversity rubric, “I always invite and welcome students from all backgrounds to participate in my research lab, and in fact have mentored several women” is held up as a disqualifying answer. For this reason, we agree with your phrase “careful implementation” and underline “careful.” We would also recommend that future iterations of student evaluation forms include a question (where appropriate) about the instructor’s cultivation of relevant viewpoint diversity.*
- “As noted above, this kind of flattery works against your case. Nothing is gained by suggesting that we are in such great shape. Just like nothing is gained by insinuations that we have done little or nothing to address racial issues. In the middle is the place to be if you want to make progress.”
  - *Please be assured, there is no intent to flatter. But our review of campus news does not suggest a campus that is near crisis. That faculty and students show and voice their concern for national issues of policing and race relations is what should happen in all sectors of American society. But you have not provided evidence of a campus situation that justifies the coercive approach to faculty nor a new student requirement to address race, indigeneity, ethnicity, and bias,*

*especially in the absence of a foundational core course on American history and government.*

- “I think that what WG-S is calling the “literacy component” of the proposed requirement totally squares with your “civic liberty” thing.”
  - *Please see last point, below. But I would prefer not to dismiss it as a “civic liberty thing.”*
- “A subset of our STEM faculty can be criticized because they articulate a narrow view of their subject in the classroom. A subset of our humanities and social science faculty can be criticized because they too articulate a narrow view of their subject in the classroom. Why is it that we only tag the latter as ‘indoctrinators’?”
  - *I agree with you completely that indoctrination is a bad practice that crosses disciplinary lines. Natural science has a long history of damage from dogmatism. I believe that the eminent authors of the AAUP 1915 Principles would have agreed.*
- “The goal of the WG-S recommendation is to produce critical thinkers and lifelong learners in all matters that concern race and indigeneity. I don’t see a conflict with this long U Chicago passage that you are quoting.”
  - *Race and indigeneity are very important parts of the American story. So are the Founding, the Civil War, Reconstruction, the Gilded Age, the First and Second World Wars, the New Deal, the Civil Rights Movement. Are you certain that Cornell students have the level of civic and historical literacy that prepares them for engaged, informed citizenship? If there is to be a new Cornell requirement, ACTA suggests the hard work of a comprehensive, foundational course in United States history and government that includes, as any such course should, race, indigeneity and the challenges the nation has faced and continues to face in living up to its promise.*