

THE CAL POLY STATEMENT ON DIVERSITY*

At the heart of a university is the responsibility to provide its students with a well-rounded education, an education that fosters their intellectual, personal and social growth. For students preparing to embark upon work and life in the 21st century, a critical element of a well-rounded education is the ability to understand and to function effectively in a diverse and increasingly interdependent global society. As noted in a statement from the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), “the argument for the necessity of diversity is perhaps stronger in higher education than in any other context . . . The ultimate product of universities is education in the broadest sense, including preparation for life in the working world.” In this regard, it is in the compelling interest of Cal Poly, the State and the nation to provide our students with an education that is rich with a diversity of people, ideas, perspectives and experiences.

Thus, diversity serves as a fundamental means to enhance both the quality and value of education. It cannot be a mere adjunct to such an education, but must be an integral element of the educational experience, infused throughout the community (faculty, students, and staff), the curriculum and the co-curricular programs of the University. We must be dedicated to the principle of ensuring that all of our students routinely encounter diverse people, ideas, and experiences.

As a University whose motto is “to learn by doing,” Cal Poly explicitly understands the importance that experience brings to education. When students are exposed personally and directly to faculty, staff and other students from diverse backgrounds, their stereotypes about “the others” are challenged. Such personal interactions give students an understanding of the range of similarities and differences within and among groups that no textbook or computer can provide. For this reason, both the formal and informal classroom (i.e., the rich learning experiences that occur for our students during their co-curricular activities) must be constituted in a way that reinforces the value of encountering and considering diversity.

Moreover, diversity in the curriculum is a fundamental component of a well-rounded and beneficial education. The perspectives provided by the University are contingent upon the content and purpose of its courses. Since the curriculum is the principal expression of our educational goals and values, it should signal the importance of diversity to the Cal Poly mission, to the institutional culture and to our teaching and learning environment in clear and unambiguous terms.

Only through intellectual and first-hand personal exposure to diversity in its myriad forms-- racial, ethnic, cultural, gender, geographic, socio-economic, etc.--will students gain the understanding, empathy and social skills that they will require to be effective, engaged citizens in an increasingly crowded and interrelated global community. The benefit of diversity is universal. Cal Poly’s commitment to diversity signals an affirmation of the highest educational goals of this University, including mutual respect, civility, and engaged learning.

*The definition of diversity is specifically inclusive of, but not limited to, an individual’s race/ethnicity, sex/gender, socioeconomic status, cultural heritage, disability and sexual orientation.