The UC Berkeley African American Initiative  
Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why are you doing this for African Americans?

The situation for African Americans is critical and well-documented: African Americans make up only 3 percent of the undergraduate student body, 4 percent of graduate students, and 2 percent of faculty, compared to a state population of 6 percent. Every metric in the 2013 Campus Climate Survey found that African American students feel the least respected among all groups on campus. The survey data also tell us that non-African Americans overestimate the climate for African Americans. For example, nearly 90 percent of whites and Asians say the climate for African Americans is respectful, while just under half of African Americans rate the climate as respectful.

We believe that this initiative will benefit the entire campus community. First, a critical mass of African Americans allows for our students to feel a greater sense of belonging, thus engaging in academic and campus activities that lead to higher graduation rates and satisfaction of the Berkeley experience. Second, we believe that diversity in the classroom leads to diverse perspectives that challenge all of us to think critically.

A diverse community allows all of our students, faculty and staff to explore and learn from each other; this best prepares all of us to engage in a global society. And third, Berkeley must compete with the country's top universities, many of which provide the kind of merit and need-based scholarships beyond the reach of Berkeley today. That's why we've called for the launch of a $20 million scholarship program to ensure Berkeley is a top choice for African American students.

Q: Why are you launching this initiative now? What took you so long?

The campus has been working on this issue continuously. But a confluence of recent events as well as empirical evidence have provided the conditions to take a hard look at what has been working and what has not, and step up the level of effort and commitment to these issues.

The campus climate survey – in combination with the advocacy of our faculty, students and staff — shone a bright light on the fact that the status quo simply isn’t working for the African American community at Berkeley in the ways we aspire to. Bolder steps need to be taken, and taken now. We heard that call and this is our response.

We are also launching this initiative in the context of the invigorated national debate on race relations. A New York Times/CBS News poll conducted in July 2015 found that “nearly six in 10 Americans, including heavy majorities of both whites and blacks, think race relations are generally bad, and that nearly four in 10 think the situation is getting worse.”

As the leading public university in our nation, Berkeley has the opportunity and responsibility
to serve as the model of the kind of society we wish to see in the world. That is, a society in which every member of our campus has an opportunity to thrive, to feel welcome, to be supported and respected for their differences and contributions to the pursuit of excellence. This initiative is one step in creating that model.

**Q: Doesn’t this initiative run afoul of State Proposition 209?**

No, the initiative is consistent with all relevant laws. Berkeley’s admissions policy is and will remain race-blind and financial aid and scholarships administered by Berkeley will be awarded consistent with all state and federal laws.

The scholarship initiative seeks to engage private organizations and resources to reduce the financial barriers that currently inhibit many admitted African American students from actually enrolling at Berkeley – many of whom receive merit- and need-based scholarships from competing institutions currently beyond Berkeley’s reach.

Working with black alumni clubs, Berkeley will support efforts of private, non-profit organizations to create a $20 million endowed scholarship fund for African American undergraduates. These will be privately administered – and awarded – scholarships for admitted African American undergraduates. These private organizations are not subject to Proposition 209 and have the legal right to target scholarships to populations they choose.

**Q: Is this going to be taking resources away from other groups?**

This initiative, while focused on African Americans, is not a zero-sum game. It will not take away resources from other groups or communities, but rather will benefit the entire campus community, which is currently not fully experiencing the benefits of true inclusiveness. Moreover, this initiative also has the potential to test strategies that, if successful, could be adapted for other communities and situations.

While the campus is devoting resources to the general effort to realize the goals of the UC Berkeley Strategic Plan for Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity, we continue to seek partnerships with and the support of alumni, philanthropists, foundations, corporations and agencies who share an interest in these goals.

**Q: Is this in response to the Black Student Union demands presented to the chancellor in February 2015?**

The Division of Equity and Inclusion had for the past two years been formulating new plans to address these issues. The campus administration was already working on a draft Initiative when the Black Student Union presented its demands in February 2015, but the student voices and advocacy further highlighted the urgency for a comprehensive and holistic approach. Early drafts of the initiative were shared and discussed with BSU leadership, whose
demands were given serious consideration. The students presented some excellent research and ideas that have been incorporated into this broader campus effort. Drafts were also shared and vetted with the ASUC and the Graduate Assembly, Council of Deans, Academic Senate committees, and chancellor’s cabinet. This initiative reflects the voices and input from faculty, students, staff and senior leadership.

Q: What are you doing for other groups, such as Latinos, Asians, LGBT, disabled and veterans?

In addition to our world---class teaching and research, Berkeley has an extensive system of services and programs to support students of all backgrounds and identities (http://diversity.berkeley.edu/campus-programs-and-services). In pursuing our strategic goals toward equity, inclusion and diversity, we will take ongoing action in all these areas. While recent evidence highlighted the African American population as a particularly urgent priority, we think that the initiative will benefit the broader population. Items that are specific to African Americans can — and should — be replicated or adapted to other populations, if proven successful.

Q: How do I get involved?

This initiative will take the combined efforts of faculty, students, staff, alumni and friends. Opportunities to get involved include volunteering for the campaign to raise scholarship funds, learning how to improve campus and classroom climate, and mentoring and supporting current African American students. To get involved, contact:

Office of the Vice Chancellor for Equity & Inclusion
510-642-7294
vcei@berkeley.edu
diversity.berkeley.edu