

University of Florida eliminates all “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion” positions, Texas shuts DEI offices

Chase Lawrence, Tom Carter
2 April 2024

As part of an offensive in Republican-controlled states against the institution of “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion” (DEI), the University of Florida last month laid off all DEI administrators and contractors as well as the “chief diversity officer.”

The University of Florida, one of the largest and highest-rated universities in the state, announced that all affected employees would receive 12 weeks severance pay and would be considered for different jobs on campus, while all funds previously budgeted for DEI would be reallocated. This purge follows fascistic Florida Governor Ron DeSantis’ signing of the “Stop Woke Law” in 2023, which made Florida one of the first states to enact a law restricting DEI. The Florida law bans state universities from spending federal or state money on DEI programs, offices or administrators.

In Texas, DEI offices were eliminated at major state schools following the passage of a similar law. The Texas Senate’s Education Committee will meet in May with university leaders as part of an inquisitorial process to ensure that the universities have complied with the ban.

Since January 2023, at least 73 bills targeting DEI have been introduced in state legislatures. Of these, eight passed, 25 failed to pass, and the remainder are pending, with more expected to be introduced this year.

The Republican offensive against DEI pits the fascistic “America First” forces gathered around Trump against one of the key institutional bastions of identity politics, itself a reactionary ideology promoted by the Democratic Party.

With its roots in the policy of racial preferences known as “affirmative action,” DEI has ballooned into a multi-billion-dollar industry that spans academia, the military, the intelligence apparatus and the headquarters of America’s corporate and financial conglomerates.

In the university context, DEI is associated with practices such as requiring academics to submit mandatory “diversity statements” explaining how their work has contributed to DEI. The institution of DEI is also responsible for administering “diversity training,” as well as what amounts to racial, gender and other personal identity quotas, enforced in the name of “equity.”

Under the rubric of “diversity training,” participants are divided by race and confronted with concepts such as “white privilege” and “white fragility.” The mandatory “diversity statements” are often seen as exercises in cynicism and dishonesty, both for the author and the evaluator, especially where the course subject matter has no plausible connection to “diversity.”

“Equity,” as opposed to “equality,” has come to mean advancement based on considerations other than merit. It is no accident that the chosen middle term of DEI is a synonym for wealth in the form of stocks, bonds, property and other financial assets.

At New York University and other campuses, student groups have used the framework and outlook of DEI to demand racially segregated student housing. For their part, the “consultants” who administer and ensure “compliance” with DEI have given rise to a lucrative industry in its own right.

The Republican far right, which does, in fact, aim to incite racism, is seeking to capitalize on the resentments and divisions among working people and youth generated by the practices and methods of DEI.

A protest called to defend DEI on March 8 at the University of Florida drew a dozen students at most, underscoring the shallow support for DEI policies among students. This stands in the starkest contrast to the massive demonstrations of students of all races, genders and ethnicities across the US and around the world to

oppose the Gaza genocide.

At the University of Florida, the opposition to the abolition of DEI has been concentrated almost exclusively in student clubs that promote racial or identity politics. The presidents of these organizations signed a joint letter opposing the firing of Marsha McGriff, who had been receiving a \$300,000 salary for her role as chief diversity officer.

No doubt, for those being groomed for future positions within and around the Democratic Party, the abolition of DEI threatens personal career prospects.

The right-wing press has celebrated the end of DEI at the University of Florida and made clear that this is just the start. The *National Review* ran an article titled “Others Should Follow University of Florida’s Termination of DEI,” and the *Wall Street Journal* sent its “kudos to Florida’s government” on March 1.

As with Florida’s “Stop Woke Act,” the anti-DEI campaign has nothing to do with genuine demands for equality or academic freedom. The far-right campaign is aimed at transforming public schools and universities into centers for flag-waving, patriotic indoctrination. From the standpoint of Trump and the Republicans, it is one stepping stone in the campaign to suppress the teaching of any history, humanities or social science that does not conform with the nationalist mythology of the Republicans.

The anti-DEI purge is the leading edge of a broader far-right crusade against science and education, which has already included removing introductory sociology as a core course in the state’s public higher education curriculum.

As part of the same crusade, the Republican Party has carried out a historic wave of book bans. According to publisher Penguin Random House, there were 3,362 cases of banned books nationwide through June 2023, a 33 percent increase over the previous year. Of these, more than 1,400 took place in Florida, followed by 625 in Texas.

In opposition to DEI, the far right is seeking to impose its Christian-nationalist, fascist, social-Darwinist perspective. Above all, the campaign is aimed at heading off the growth of socialist consciousness and the influence of Marxism.

The Heritage Foundation, a prominent right-wing think tank, in its report *How Cultural Marxism Threatens the United States—and How Americans Can Fight It*, makes precisely this point. It states that “university officials most involved with enforcing the cultural Marxist ideology

generally fall under the heading of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).” DeSantis has claimed that “equity” was a Trojan horse for “cultural Marxism.”

Trump himself has vowed to reclaim university campuses “taken over by Marxist maniacs,” and welcomes a purge of DEI offices, which, he claims, are staffed with “Marxist bureaucrats.” This is part of a far-right effort to smear Marxism by associating it with the increasingly discredited postmodernist and racist ideologies promoted by the Democratic Party, such as “critical race theory,” with which genuine Marxism has nothing in common whatsoever.

Postmodern identity politics divides the population into arbitrary, subjective “identities” and pits them against each other, while at the same time functioning as a career vehicle for substantial sections in the upper-middle class who are seeking well-funded positions in academia and the corporate world, as well as in the state and intelligence apparatus.

Notwithstanding efforts to portray it as “left wing,” the institution of DEI is entirely compatible with capitalism, nationalism, imperialism and every form of reaction. This is perhaps best illustrated by the extent to which the Central Intelligence Agency has embraced these same methods and jargon.

According to a 2014 publication titled *Diversity and Inclusion at the CIA*, the CIA has a wide range of identity-based “employee support groups.” This includes the Agency Network of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Officers and Allies (ANGLE); Blacks in Government, UMOJA Chapter; Directorate of Intelligence African-American Careerists (DIAAC); Directorate of Intelligence Women’s Council; Hispanic Advisory Council (HAC), and numerous others.

Over the past six months, the far right has been legitimized and emboldened by the bipartisan witch-hunt, conducted by both parties of American imperialism, against opposition on university campuses to the Gaza genocide, carried out under the slanderous pretense of fighting antisemitism. DeSantis himself ordered the banning of Students for Justice in Palestine at all state universities in October.



To contact the WWSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact