

# Capitulating to Trump's demands, University of Michigan ends DEI programs

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On Thursday, University of Michigan (U-M) President Santa Ono announced the immediate ending of all facets of its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) program. U-M's DEI program has served as a national model since its inception in 2016 and is one of the highest-funded such programs in the country.

The sudden elimination of the \$236 million program marks a complete capitulation by the university to the fascist Trump administration. It will serve as the basis for further cuts and attacks on the democratic rights of students and workers across the country. It follows on the heels of Columbia University's acceptance of Trump's demands for a further crackdown on pro-Palestinian speech and the imposition of an "America First" agenda on college campuses, including a whitewash of the crimes of American imperialism both around the world and domestically.

Columbia capitulated to avert a cutoff of \$400 million in government funds to the university. U-M preemptively wound up its DEI program in part for similar monetary reasons.

In an email sent to all U-M students, staff and faculty, and to U-M-owned Michigan Medicine medical system staff, Ono announced the elimination of all DEI-related initiatives. The cuts include:

- The closure of the university's two main DEI offices—the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ODEI), and the Office for Health Equity and Inclusion (OHEI).
- The discontinuation of its "DEI 2.0 Strategic Plan," which was aimed at ensuring that all schools, departments and clinical units incorporate DEI-related goals and policies into their charters, constitutions, hiring initiatives, and administrative functions.
- The elimination of all "DEI 2.0" courses, related programming, progress reporting, training and funding.
- Review of all U-M web references to DEI-initiatives in online class descriptions and other related information, to ensure "compliance with federal executive orders and guidance."

In addition to these actions, U-M is extending its December 5 decision to end the use of diversity statements in faculty hiring, meaning it will no longer solicit "statements related to a person's commitment to DEI" in "admissions, hiring, promotion, awards, annual reviews or other assessments for faculty and staff."

Writing on that decision last December, the WSWs warned: "With the abandonment of diversity statements ... the Democratic Party-controlled Board of Regents is seeking to accommodate U-M to the incoming fascist Trump administration." This warning has been fully confirmed.

In his March 27 email, Ono cited three of Trump's executive orders as well as a February "Dear Colleague" letter from the Department of Education that threaten to cut off funding for failing to root out anything DEI-related.

Vast sums of money, including the university's \$19.2 billion endowment, and hundreds of highly paid administrative positions are to be preserved, while reactionary attacks on students and free speech will now deepen across U-M and other campuses that will follow its lead. Already, university administrations at Columbia, Cornell and elsewhere are collaborating in the persecution and possible deportation of non-citizen students such as Mahmoud Khalil and Momodou Taal.

U-M's preemptive scrapping of its DEI program reflects the policies and political position of the Democratic Party in Michigan and nationally, which is accommodating the fascist Trump regime at every turn.

The same administration that is seeking to ingratiate itself with Trump to maintain its billions in government funding implemented the bipartisan crackdown on anti-Gaza genocide protesters under the Democratic Biden administration and is intensifying it under Trump, using the slanderous charge that opposition to US-Israeli genocide in Gaza is "antisemitism."

In October of last year, leaked audio revealed Ono saying, "The government could call me tomorrow and say, in a very unbalanced way, that the university is not doing enough to combat antisemitism." He added that the government could

“say something like, well, we will withhold two billion dollars in funding if you don’t address antisemitism.”

In January of this year, U-M banned Students Allied for Freedom and Equality (SAFE), the local chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), for holding peaceful protests against the Gaza genocide throughout 2024. The ban on SAFE, which deprived the group of formal club status, access to university facilities and the right to promote its views on campus, was the first-ever suspension of a legacy student organization in the university’s history.

The U-M Board of Regents has worked with Michigan’s Democratic Attorney General Dana Nessel to prosecute nine U-M students and community members on felony charges for peacefully protesting the Gaza genocide.

Earlier this month, Ono, who pulls in an annual seven-figure salary, was a featured panelist at the Zionist Anti-Defamation League (ADL) “Never Is Now” Summit in Washington D.C. There he boasted of personally intervening to suppress a Central Student Government (CSG) referendum that included a popular resolution urging the university to acknowledge the genocidal character of the Israeli war and divest from pro-Israel companies.

Ono also told the ADL audience that the campus protests against the university’s financial involvement with Israeli-funded companies had only “doubled” his resolve to strengthen ties with Israel. He said, “My response and the [Board of Regents] response to this call to divest and to cut those relationships was to actually invest even more.”

The very speed with which the University of Michigan capitulated to the demands of the neo-Nazis who run the Trump administration shows that the vast DEI apparatus and the racist and identity politics on which it is based have nothing to do with a genuine defense of democratic rights.

DEI has, from its origins, reflected the interests of sections of the ruling class that seek to cover up the fundamental class divisions under capitalism. Closely aligned with the Democratic Party, its aim is to prioritize race and other forms of personal identity over class, the better to divide the working class. It overwhelmingly serves those who seek to use race or gender to secure privileges and lucrative positions within the existing social order and the political system dominated by two parties of inequality, war and austerity.

The DEI programs have, in fact, benefited only a thin layer of blacks, women, gays, and others who have secured positions within the political system, the trade union bureaucracy, the media and academia based on preferential hiring and promotion programs such as affirmative action. Meanwhile, the oligarchic domination of American politics and economic life has reached unprecedented levels, and the impoverishment of the majority of workers of all races has

continued, while US imperialism has carried out more than three decades of non-stop wars of aggression all over the world. Rising tuition at U-M and other universities has forced youth to take on a lifetime of student loan debt in order to pay for college.

The attack on DEI from the fascistic right has taken advantage of the hypocrisy of its democratic and “progressive” pretensions and the frustration and resentment of workers and low-income middle-class layers of all races to falsely equate identity and “woke” politics with “cultural Marxism” and socialism. The aim of Trump and company is to roll back the real social and democratic gains of the Civil Rights Movement and the struggles of the working class over more than a century and fuel racist, segregationist and antisemitic forces.

This can be opposed and defeated not by upholding the racist and reformist politics of DEI and the false claim that the source of oppression of blacks and other minorities is “white racism,” and, by implication, the supposedly reactionary character of white workers. Rather, these attacks can only be opposed through the fight of Marxism and socialism to unite all sections of workers and youth within the US and internationally on the basis of a struggle to put an end to capitalist exploitation and imperialist war through socialist revolution.

This means appealing to the democratic sentiments deeply ingrained in the consciousness of the American working class and fighting for complete legal and social equality, to be achieved through the expropriation of the billionaire oligarchs who exercise a de facto dictatorship through the two-party system that upholds capitalism.

To oppose these attacks at U-M and around the country, students and youth must join and build the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at the University of Michigan. The IYSSE at U-M, as across the country and internationally, fights to turn students to the working class—the mass social and international force that can stop fascism and the attack on democratic rights.

Appeals to the Democratic Party and university administrations, which are fully complicit in Trump’s fascist rampage, are futile and a dead end. Students must turn to autoworkers, nurses, teachers, immigrant workers, service workers and other sections of the working class to unite the working class in a counteroffensive for democracy, equality, an end to war and for socialism.



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