

Texas A&M University bans “race and gender ideology”

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Last Thursday, the Texas A&M University System’s board of regents voted to ban “race and gender ideology” in the classroom across the system’s 12 campuses. As part of this process, the oversight body outlined revisions to A&M’s Civil Rights Protection and Compliance, and Academic Freedom, Responsibility and Tenure policies. The university’s move follows similar changes at both of the state’s larger higher education systems, Texas State University and University of Texas.

The anti-democratic measure was enabled by the recent adoption of Texas Senate Bill 37, which removed any previous authority over public institutions of higher learning enjoyed by faculty senates and student-led bodies in favor of direct state control. Another recent Texas bill, which was passed but struck down by a federal court, would have required the display of the Ten Commandments in public schools.

The fascistic administration of Governor Greg Abbott, at the behest of Trump, is seeking to ensure that the approximately 1.6 million students attending public universities in Texas only come into contact with instructional material acceptable to the far right.

As the WSWs has previously reported, the Texas maneuvers are part of an attempt to resurrect the Nazi campaign of *Gleichschaltung* in the modern era. Schools at all levels are to be turned into centers of political and religious indoctrination accompanied by an attack on science and the purging of all thought that does not serve the aims of US imperialism.

The changes at Texas A&M involve a perverse inversion of the university’s Civil Rights Protection and Compliance policy, which is now to be used to prohibit academic courses teaching race or gender ideology, “unless the course and the relevant course materials are approved in advance by the member CEO

or designee”—that is, the president of the college must now sign off ahead of time on any course content related to race or gender.

In respect to Academic Freedom, Responsibility and Tenure, the existing stipulation that professors “should not introduce a controversial matter that has no relation to the classroom subject” is tightened to “will not.” Nor shall instructors, “teach material that is inconsistent with the approved syllabus for the course,” the policy states.

The board passed the policy after tweaking the wording so that faculty are prohibited from “advocating,” rather than “teaching,” gender and race ideology. This has done little to allay anxiety among faculty, who remain unsure what constitutes “advocacy,” how it will be decided what qualifies as race or gender ideology, and what repercussions there will be for violations.

If a sociology professor explains, for instance, that gender norms shift across place, time and cultures, or a historian points out that racist tropes were used by the US government during the Spanish-American war, and these faculty then grade students on whether or not they understood this content, will they be accused of “advocacy” when they were simply teaching scientific facts and historical truths?

In a November 10 article, the *Texas Tribune* reported that faculty were not consulted on the new policy. The article quotes Robert Shilby, special counsel for campus advocacy at the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, who explained that the proposal would “invite unlawful censorship, chill academic freedom, and undermine the core purpose of a university. Hiring professors with PhDs is meaningless if administrators are the ones deciding what gets taught ... Faculty will start asking not, ‘Is this accurate?’ but

‘Will this get me in trouble?’”

The Texas A&M ban not only places course instructors in an impossible position as they try to avoid the “ideologically impure,” it also threatens entire areas of study, including subjects like Black history, Native American studies, and many other fields and sub-fields. The university’s gender studies minor was threatened with elimination last November.

The university’s attack on “racial and gender ideology” follows the firing of A&M professor Melissa McCoul for discussing gender in a class on children’s literature, precipitating the forced resignation of university president Mark A. Welsh III in September. Far-right Texas state legislators and Governor Gregg Abbot demanded that he go.

It also takes place little over a month after Texas State University upheld the firing of professor and labor historian Tom Alter over his participation in an online conference for socialism that bore no relation to his campus job responsibilities.

Texas is only the spearhead of a nationwide assault on academic freedom being carried out by the Trump administration in collaboration with state governments. The real target of all these efforts is the working class.

The Republican Party is currently taking aim at “racial and gender” ideology, advancing its assault on free speech by making use of the hostility many feel towards the toxic and dishonest claims of identity politics. For decades, academia, sections of the media and the Democratic Party have sought to recast American society and history as little more than an endless tale of racial, gender and sexual oppression, while obscuring the fundamental division: class.

This has rendered the universities vulnerable to the current right-wing assault, as people of all backgrounds become frustrated with conceptions that blame human suffering not on capitalist exploiters but, allegedly, universally privileged “whites,” “men,” “heterosexuals,” etc., no matter how poor and miserable they are. The quality of contemporary studies of race, gender, ethnicity and other dimensions of identity—legitimate areas of research—has for years declined dramatically as a result of this unscientific approach.

However, the intent of the far right’s attack on “racial and gender ideology” is to ban all critical speech, and even thought, about the class divide in

society. They seek to use the attack on “racial and gender” ideology as a springboard to strangle opposition to capitalism and class exploitation.

In October, Department of Education Secretary Linda McMahon and the White House sent a letter to nine universities, proposing a “compact” in which institutions of higher education are to exist for the sake of the “national interests and priorities of the U.S. government.”

Among the demands were prohibiting faculty from speaking about political and social issues; prohibiting transgender women from participating in women’s sports; reducing tuition for students in “hard science programs” which serve military research. It also included limits on the number of foreign students enrolled and a proposed further crackdown on opposition to the genocide in Gaza.

This was followed by the jailing of three Chinese researchers at the University of Michigan on trumped up charges of smuggling biological materials into the country.

The Democrats, far from being in any sense an opposition party, are in fact fully on board with the drive to war and the attack on academic freedom. It was the Biden administration which initiated mass suppression of anti-genocide protests on college campuses, creating a framework which was handed over to the Trump administration, which has in turn resumed and accelerated the process. Despite the massive attacks on schools across the state, the teacher and education worker union locals have proposed no actions whatsoever, mirroring their parent unions nationally.



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