

Texas A&M censors Plato in massive course purge

Josh Andrews
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With the spring semester beginning at universities across the United States, faculty members at Texas A&M have revealed that more than 200 courses in the College of Arts and Sciences have been flagged or canceled for including material on race and gender. One of the courses was flagged for including a passage from Plato. The instructor, Martin Peterson, was given an ultimatum to remove the content or be assigned to a different course.

Plato is a foundational figure in Western philosophy whose writings have shaped political thought, ethics and conceptions of justice for more than two millennia. That even his work is now deemed unacceptable exposes the fraud of a government that claims to defend “free speech” while enforcing ideological conformity.

Texas A&M administrators are also resorting to false and retaliatory claims to justify canceling courses. Dr. Leonard Bright, a professor in the Bush School of Government and Public Service, reported that the university publicly canceled his graduate-level Ethics course and falsely stated that he had refused to provide information required to seek an exemption.

In fact, Bright had formally documented that his course examined race, gender, sexuality, religion, and other social identities strictly within the framework of administrative ethics and public service, explicitly stating that students were not required to adopt any political viewpoint and that critical disagreement was welcomed. Despite this, the university moved to cancel the course, demonstrating that the purge is being carried out through misrepresentation and administrative coercion rather than any legitimate academic review.

Introduction to Race and Ethnicity was canceled entirely, and students enrolled in the course were informed that there was no way to bring it into compliance with the new policy.

This is the first semester since amendments to A&M’s Civil Rights Protection and Compliance and Academic Freedom, Responsibility and Tenure policies were approved by the university system board in the fall. The anti-democratic measures, aimed at prohibiting the “advocation”

of “race and gender ideology,” mandate per-semester reviews of syllabi for core courses and have reportedly relied on AI to flag material for noncompliance.

The policy changes at Texas A&M are rooted in the passage of Texas Senate Bill 37, adopted last year as part of a sweeping restructuring of higher education governance in the state. The law strips faculty of meaningful control over curriculum, centralizes authority in politically appointed boards and administrators, and explicitly empowers them to police classroom content, providing the legal framework now being used to flag and cancel courses deemed politically unacceptable by the state.

The process has generated widespread confusion among faculty and it remains unclear who reviews their syllabi. Departments are also interpreting the directives differently, leading to uneven enforcement. Together with the rollout of the EthicsPoint reporting application, which allows students to report instructors for mentioning banned topics in class, these measures amount to a concerted effort to intimidate professors into silence.

While courses that include discussions of race or gender may still be taught as electives, this functions as a form of indirect censorship, since reclassifying a course often leads to underenrollment and eventual cancellation. As *Inside Higher Ed* reported, “One professor, who wished to remain anonymous, was asked in the fall to remove content related to feminism and queer cinema from their History of Film class. The professor refused, and the dean resubmitted the syllabus as a noncore ‘special topics’ class, which enrolled students were notified of Wednesday.” The professor reported a large drop in enrollment. Underenrollment was also cited as the pretext for “inactivating” the LGBT minor in fall 2024.

English faculty members told *Inside Higher Ed* that they “received an email Tuesday from senior executive associate dean Cynthia Werner stating that literature with major plot lines concerning gay, lesbian, or transgender identities should not be taught in core-curriculum classes.” The review of syllabi continues, and the fate of some courses will not be

decided until after classes have begun.

Advocacy groups that have opposed the ban, including the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), have pointed to the illegal and unconstitutional character of the new policies. The publication reported that, in addition to violating the First Amendment, Texas A&M's censorship may also run afoul of "a rule from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board that requires institutions to seek its approval before revising its core curriculum and 'deleting courses.'"

The actions at Texas A&M are part of a much broader political offensive. In the opening days of his second term, President Donald Trump signed a raft of executive orders targeting higher education under the pretext of eliminating diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. Among them was *Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government*, which codified the antiscientific claim that only two genders exist as official policy. The order was later cited in the firing of Melissa McCoul at A&M for discussing gender in a children's literature course.

Trump has repeatedly threatened to withhold federal funding from universities that do not enforce ideological conformity or that fail to repress student protest with sufficient brutality. Immigration agents have also been deployed to harass and intimidate international students and foreign researchers. At the state level, Texas Governor Greg Abbott, a loyal ally of Trump, has advanced the same anti-intellectual agenda. Senate Bill 10 mandates the display of the Ten Commandments in every K–12 classroom in the state and is currently being challenged in the courts. State legislators have also ordered the firing of academics who step out of line, including McCoul.

The crackdown on so-called "race and gender ideology" is, in reality, an assault on all critical thought. Texas has served as a spearhead for a broader nationwide, and increasingly global, offensive by capitalist governments against academic freedom. On September 10 last year, labor historian Tom Altar was fired from Texas State University for participating, in a private capacity, in an online socialist conference. In the aftermath of the killing of Charlie Kirk later that month, teachers and academics across Texas and the country were threatened with termination for social-media posts critical of the dead fascist.

When the Nazis seized power in Germany, they imposed *Gleichschaltung*, a policy of "synchronization" aimed at bringing all aspects of social and intellectual life into line with the needs of the regime as it prepared the population for war. The process entailed the mass firing of academics and the enforcement of ideological conformity across the

universities.

The Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service sought to purge public institutions of political dissidents and racial minorities. Article 4 ordered the dismissal of "civil servants who, after their previous political activities, cannot be relied upon by the Party to execute its wishes."

The humanities are not only useless to the depraved, bloodthirsty criminals running the U.S. government, they are dangerous. In this context, the assault on academic freedom is aimed at chilling opposition within the working class, "the enemy within," in Trump's words, and strangling any oppositional sentiment.

As the WSWS wrote when Harvard and other Ivy League universities caved to Trump's demands to crack down on dissident students, "Without even the threat of SS troops, university administrations are facilitating Trump's demands and functioning as junior partners."

The Democrats are doing nothing to oppose the assault on freedom of speech by the Trump administration and in fact laid the groundwork for it through the Biden administration's brutal repression of protests against the genocide in Gaza. They represent the same financial oligarchy as Trump and are far more afraid of opposition from below than of the threat of fascism. Meanwhile, the nationalist and militarist union apparatus, including the UAW, which represents teachers and academics, issues empty and belated statements while refusing to mobilize opposition within the working class, functioning instead as an arm of the corporations and the capitalist state.

The orientation of students and all progressive elements in society must be toward the independent political mobilization of the international working class. Rank-and-file committees must be formed in every workplace and school to unify struggles across sectors, regions, and national boundaries and prepare for a general strike to disrupt the war machine. Only in this way can the democratic rights and social needs of the working class and all of society be defended against the imperialist drive to subjugate the world.



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