



OREGON ASSOCIATION OF SCHOLARS

The Imposition of Diversity Statements on Faculty Hiring and Promotion at Oregon Universities

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Oregon colleges and universities have begun to impose requirements for prospective and current faculty to show their commitment to the partisan ideology of “diversity, equity, and inclusion”. This is only one part of a bigger push to impose a partisan ideology onto higher education in the state, but its threat to academic freedom and research excellence is acute. While in theory, these terms can be defined in ways consistent with a variety of political perspectives, in practice Oregon universities have defined them in strongly partisan ways. As these new ideological litmus tests spread throughout the state, faculty will spend more time signaling their zealous support and making sure not to challenge students in ways that might be construed as a threat to this ideology. This report examines the spread of diversity statements for faculty hiring and promotion at the University of Oregon, Oregon Health & Science University, Oregon State University, and Portland State University. It considers the ways they have been imposed on faculty, the harms they will cause, and the ways they can be reversed.

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BACKGROUND ON DIVERSITY STATEMENTS

Both legal and academic principles have generally asserted that universities should not be partisan institutions, both because they receive public funds and because their mission requires extensive freedoms for a diversity of viewpoints. “To perform its mission in the society, a university must sustain an extraordinary environment of freedom of inquiry and maintain its independence from political fashions, passions, and pressures,” noted the University of Chicago’s seminal 1967 Kalven Committee on the role of the university in political issues. “[The University] cannot insist that all of its members favor a given view of social policy; if it takes collective action, therefore, it does so at the price of censoring any minority who does not agree with the view adopted.”¹

This non-partisan ideal was first challenged in the 1970s and 1980s with the widespread creation of academic units centered on racial, ethnic, or gender identities. While these new fields of inquiry were generally welcome, for the most part they evolved with explicit partisan agendas and very limited viewpoint pluralism. In the 1990s, the heavily ideological thrust of these “departments of difference” began to creep into the administration of universities as a whole with the creation of “diversity and inclusion” bureaucracies. This institutionalization of diversity ideologies then shifted to the hiring and promotion of faculty in the 2000s. Today, the mandatory “diversity statement” threatens to become a “fifth document” in faculty hiring and promotion at many universities (in addition to cover letter, curriculum vitae, research statement, and teaching statement).

Diversity statements are only a small part of the attempt to reconfigure higher education based on a partisan ideology of social engineering. Universities today, including all major colleges and universities in Oregon, are pouring millions of dollars each year into “diversity training”, “diversity action plans”, and “diversity councils” even as student tuition rises. Diversity statements are unique insofar as they represent a clear and imminent threat to academic freedom and research excellence, although the more corrosive and insidious effects of the broader diversity agenda should not be ignored.

An estimated 20 major universities or university systems in the U.S. now include mandatory diversity statements for faculty hiring and promotion.² In 2005, for instance, the University of California system introduced mandatory diversity statements for all new faculty hires. The criteria used to evaluate contributions to diversity in the UC system include whether a scholar's research addresses race, gender, "economic justice", or inequalities.³ At Carnegie Mellon University, where a similar requirement was introduced in 2008, candidates can also pass the litmus test if they "represent a historically underrepresented group in [their] field based on [their] race, ethnicity, or gender."⁴ In 2009, the National Association of Scholars drew attention to the diversity statements required of faculty being considered for promotion at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech).⁵ Not surprisingly, these expanding requirements have spawned a cottage industry. Faculty are being coached by paid "diversity consultants" on how to survive the ideological minefield of the diversity statement, learning how to signal their zealous support for this ideology and how to write hyperbolic "contribution to diversity statements."⁶

While in theory, the concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion could be interpreted in ways consistent with different political viewpoints, in practice they have been consistently and exclusively defined by university officials to emphasize the values and assumptions of left-wing viewpoints in society. These can be summarized as an emphasis on group identity; an assumption of group victimization; and a claim for group-based entitlements. Classical liberal approaches, that emphasize the pluralism of a free society, the universalism of human experiences, and the importance of equality before the law, have been regarded as invalid. So too have conservative approaches that focus on shared values and the sacredness of the private realm and individual morality. More broadly, the idea of a university as a place where leading scholars are protected from *any* ideological imposition is also rejected.

As such, diversity statements are a *de facto* tool to weed out non-left wing scholars. In an essay widely cited by university administrators as a model of good advice⁷, a former anthropology professor at the University of Oregon wrote that her diversity statement would include discussions of "how to keep the white students from dominating all classroom discussions", how not to "thoughtlessly reproduce the standard white and Western model of legitimate knowledge",

and how to “reflect a commitment to queer visibility.” A UC Davis workshop on diversity statements of 2012 advised how the statements can be used by hiring committees “to determine whether you are going to be the kind of colleague the department wants to have.”⁸ This partisan, litmus-test approach to diversity is also made plain by Dr. Tanya Golash-Boza, an associate professor of sociology at the University of California at Merced and during 2016-17 the Vice-Chair of the UC Systemwide Committee on Affirmative Action, Diversity, & Equity. In a June 10, 2016 article entitled “The Effective Diversity Statement” in *Inside Higher Ed*, Golash-Boza advises candidates to focus on “commonly accepted understandings of diversity and equity” such as “racial oppression, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism or some other commonly recognized form of oppression.” She suggests that candidates who do not agree with this approach should not bother to apply for jobs: “Note that if you do not care about diversity and equity and do not want to be in a department that does, don’t waste your time crafting a strong diversity statement -- and you need not read any farther in this essay.”⁹

The chilling effect of such ideological litmus tests on free speech and viewpoint diversity within the university would not be lessened by making them optional, or by allowing faculty to define diversity in their own way, or by allowing departments to weight them differently. Given the extreme skewedness of faculty viewpoints towards the left in contemporary academic institutions, this would only allow them to be used to weed out deviant thinking in other ways. Most measures suggest that on average there are 5 to 15 Democrats or left-liberals for every one Republican or classical liberal/conservative at U.S. universities and colleges, ratios which are much higher in humanities and social sciences departments.¹⁰ A conservative who wrote a diversity statement that rejected victimization and entitlement narratives would make it easy for a typically left-leaning department “to determine whether you are going to be the kind of colleague the department wants to have.”

Nor would the effect be lessened by adding a “sixth document” in the form of a “freedom statement” or “American values statement” as this too would simply be used as an ideological screening device. Universities and colleges must eschew diversity statements altogether, along with any other form of ideological signaling. Faculty should be evaluated strictly on their merits as researchers and teachers using well-known metrics of effectiveness.

The alarming shift of university faculties towards highly-skewed left-wing political viewpoints, where centrists and conservatives have become endangered species, has deleterious effects on educational quality, as a growing body of literature attests.¹¹ The imposition of “diversity statements” will make this situation worse not better. As the former Provost of Stanford University, John Etchemendy, told the university’s trustees in February 2017: “The university is not a megaphone to amplify this or that political view, and when it does it violates a core mission. Universities must remain open forums for contentious debate, and they cannot do so while officially espousing one side of that debate.”¹²

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

The University of Oregon’s mid-term review, tenure, and promotion guidelines contained in the collective bargaining agreement for 2015 through 2018 introduced a new requirement that personal statements “should include discussion of contributions to institutional equity and inclusion.” In tips for these statements, the university suggests addressing whether a faculty’s teaching “reflect[s] the diversity of the field, including the racial, ethnic, and gender diversity of its scholars and practitioners”¹³ Under January 28, 2016 post-tenure review guidelines, faculty are likewise required to include in their materials “contributions to institutional equity and inclusion.”

These diversity statements are now being extended to new faculty hires. The University has required its colleges and schools to submit “Diversity Action Plans” by March 17, 2017 for implementation in spring 2017 and continuing through 2020.¹⁴ Units have been told that they must incorporate “issues of equity, implicit bias, and cultural understanding in [new faculty] searches, onboarding, training, and exit interviews.” The draft plan of CAS Natural Sciences, for instance, contains a provision that will “require that candidates require [sic] a diversity statement for all faculty searches.”¹⁵ The CAS Natural Sciences plan more broadly proposes to “incorporate promising practices to increase equity, inclusion and inter-cultural understanding in onboarding, performance evaluations, tenure and promotion, and other unit processes and

policies.” The plans for “diversity statements” from new job applicants thus reinforces existing rules for current faculty.

In general, the University of Oregon has been coy about defining “equity and inclusion” in these faculty requirements. However, multiple university documents show a clear bias towards understandings based on partisan ideologies. For instance, the IDEAL Framework document¹⁶ of June 1, 2016 defines diversity so that 7 of the 9 dimensions relate to group identities, namely “race, ethnicity, disability, thought, culture, religion, sexual orientation, gender, and economics.”

Moreover, in practice, only race/ethnicity and gender have been priorities for the university, as evidenced in several “diversity” documents. For instance, the June 2016 report on “faculty diversity”¹⁷ focuses only on race/ethnicity and gender. Moreover, that document claims as a fact that the pluralism of the faculty is not a result of different cultural norms or individual behavior but is “due largely to the consequences of historical discrimination, including limited access to educational opportunities as well as contemporary implicit bias.” This approach leads it into logical tangles. For instance, it notes that females outnumber males by at least 2 to 1 in three units -- the College of Education, CAS Humanities and the Law School – but does not consider this a problem. Nor does it consider the over-representation of faculty of Asian heritage (6.4% of the faculty compared to 5.5% of the student body) or the huge over-representation of non-white faculty in area, ethnic, cultural, gender, and group studies (67% of faculty) to be concerns despite the potentially deleterious effect of such patent discrimination on research excellence.¹⁸

The University of Oregon even insists with Orwellian candor that campus thought-police should implement measures that “incentivize the desired behavior while also consistently interrupting behavior that is inconsistent with equity and inclusion” so defined.¹⁹ In its attempts to impose ideological criteria on faculty hiring and promotion, the University of Oregon reinforces a growing bureaucratic and regulatory climate on campus that threatens freedom of expression and the vigorous debates needed in the search for truth.

OREGON HEALTH & SCIENCE UNIVERSITY

Oregon Health & Science University has made “cultural competency” an across-the-board requirement for new faculty hires and existing faculty performance evaluations. In practice, this has been measured by the intensity of a candidate’s professed and demonstrated participation in “diversity and inclusion” activities rather than by evidence of effectiveness in pluralistic settings. Potential job candidates are to be asked: “How have diversity issues influenced and/or been a part of your teaching, research and outreach/service?” in addition to a battery of other similar questions.²⁰

More recently, OHSU’s Diversity Action Plan introduces Orwellian requirements for unit leaders to “track and report individual and group participation in diversity events” among their staff. In addition the plan requires unit leaders to “develop measurable ratings for diversity and inclusion in performance appraisals.” As elsewhere, the focus at OHSU is on “people who have been historically marginalized or excluded based on factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or disability.”²¹ The institution does not discuss or provide data on political, ideological, or religious diversity among its members. It also does not seem aware that the diversity agenda, so stated, is a partisan ideology against which reasonable alternative viewpoints exist.

More worrying, OHSU does not provide evidence that “participation in diversity events” has any scientifically valid relationship to cultural competence or to research and clinical effectiveness. Two studies²² in the medical literature cited by a 2016 meta-study²³ for the rigor of their research designs both found there was no impact on patient satisfaction of “cultural competence” training.

Thus, Oregon Health & Science University is slowly imposing a climate of politically-correct “diversity signaling” on its research and clinical staff. In addition to taking time from important health research and care, this signaling could have a perverse effect on institutional quality by directing resources to forms of training that have no measurable impact on patient outcomes or patient satisfaction.

OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

Despite its reputation for research excellence and scientific rigor, Oregon State University has probably gone the farthest to impose highly-skewed understandings of social questions onto its students and faculty. In the 2017-18 academic year, for instance, all undergraduates will be sent for mandatory classes on “social justice” prior to being allowed to proceed with their studies. The university’s Office of Institutional Diversity is a similarly partisan unit that advocates “political resistance” against conservative or centrist policies and politicians on its Twitter and Facebook pages. It espouses “the importance and impact of historical and institutionalized social categories including race, class, gender, ability and others” and “actively addresses dynamics of bias, oppression and privilege.”²⁴

Oregon State University has followed the University of Oregon in being pressured by some faculty to impose mandatory diversity statements on new faculty hires and existing faculty. In 2015, the university began including requirements for statements on “contributions to equity, inclusion, and diversity” in promotion and tenure dossiers when such contributions were already included in position descriptions. The university has been careful to impose these requirements on faculty retroactively, possibly because of discussions about whether such criteria could be challenged in internal university processes or in court. Nonetheless, its approach of allowing individual units to define and use such tests in their own ways is likely to have even more perverse consequences than university-wide approaches because of the ability of the most politically-biased units to construct more extreme tests.

Moreover, activist faculty groups continue to press for an expansion of this test to all existing faculty in light of a university-wide policy that all faculty have a responsibility to “ensure” the diversity agenda is promoted. In presenting the new “contributions to equity, inclusion, and diversity” change to the university’s Faculty Senate in June 2015, OSU Physics Professor Henri Jansen noted that the new criteria would give the university and academic units a means to discipline dissenting faculty: “If anyone is obstructive then this flags it,” he said in recorded testimony. In response to faculty questions about making such contributions a mandatory part of all academic position descriptions retroactively, Jansen noted “this is a first step only” and “we might want to go there at some point.”²⁵

In addition, the university has created a separate faculty hiring initiative that makes the diversity ideology the main criterion of selection. The “Tenured Faculty Diversity Initiative”²⁶ hires faculty based on “their ability to positively impact the hiring unit’s (and/or the university’s) organizational culture” in favor of the diversity ideology and on their plans to spend time “advocating for normative and policy changes” rather than engaging in valuable teaching and research. Again, given the ways that “inclusive” and “diverse” have been defined by the institution in strictly partisan terms, this amounts to a *de facto* political litmus test for faculty hiring. It would install political commissars in every department whose task was to ensure ideological conformity. It should be renamed the “Tenured Faculty Commissar Initiative”.

As such, Oregon State University is moving with little resistance or debate towards the imposition of ideological litmus tests on its faculty. For a university that prides itself on its scientific excellence and rigor, this new threat to faculty research will grow larger unless it is reversed.

PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY

Portland State University, like others in Oregon, has seized the diversity agenda as a central focus of its institutional mission and defined it in ways that subscribe to a highly-partisan interpretation of American pluralism. “Our aim is to address the roots of inequities, including but not limited to racism, homophobia, sexism, ableism, classism, and the intersections of these inequalities,” the university’s strategic plan for 2016 to 2010 states.²⁷ The university has formally committed to nothing less than an upending of the idea of higher education in which, for instance, undergraduate curricula will be revolutionized to focus on “issues/challenges related to class, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender expression, language, race, ability, and sexual orientation”²⁸ At the university’s Winter Symposium of 2017 sponsored by the Office of Academic Affairs, faculty were taught that “academia has been a tool of imperialism” as well as “complicit in capitalism” and that higher education “requires radical interruptions with [sic] normalized ways of knowing and being.”²⁹

This highly-ideological approach to diversity and equity is now being extended quietly to faculty hiring and promotion decisions. The 2016-2020 strategic plan includes undertakings to “consider acknowledging equity efforts in promotion and tenure guidelines, performance evaluations and similar assessments” while the university’s Diversity Action Plan asked academic units to “supplement promotion and tenure standards to include diversity efforts as a measure to achieve promotion and tenure status.”³⁰

Like Oregon State University, Portland State University has taken a more decentralized approach to the imposition of the diversity agenda on faculty hiring and evaluation. Like OSU, therefore, the diversity agenda can be more or less intrusive depending on the particular make-up of the academic unit concerned. At the highest level, the PSU Diversity Action Council, lodged in the Office of the President, distributes a list of 44 questions for “measuring cultural key competencies during the interview process”. As at other institutions, these questions replicate highly ideological understandings of social pluralism and prompt the interviewee to signal their impassioned agreement with those premises in order to “demonstrate” their suitability for employment. This includes describing “how you have been educated to understand the history of African Americans, Latinos, Asians, Native Americans and other historically marginalized communities”, expatiating on the role of “diversity...in shaping your social style”, and showing how you would combat “a pervasive belief that diversity and excellence are somehow in conflict.”

PSU’s Office of Global Diversity and Inclusion, like its counterparts at other Oregon universities, goes well beyond any reasonable interpretation of its institutional role in combatting illegal discrimination by playing an active part in radical political activism on and off campus. For instance, in November 2016, it co-organized a “Standing Rock Teach-In” with the university’s School of Gender, Race, and Nations to oppose the Dakota Access Pipeline that had been approved under the Obama Administration. Given that the Office of Global Diversity and Inclusion is simultaneously being given authority to generate questions to be used to evaluate faculty candidates and the measures of “diversity efforts” to achieve hiring or promotion, this implies that a person who held the view that the pipeline was beneficial and just would fail the

university's ideological litmus test. More likely, such candidates would not bother applying to the university in the first place.

While it has been slower to impose the diversity agenda on its faculty, PSU is arguably most at risk for an ideological makeover given the radical tilt of many of its faculty and the openness with which university diversocrats advocate a coercive agenda against dissenting faculty. "I'm one of those that deeply believe that compliance work is an important engine to the bigger diversity bus," the university's Chief Diversity Officer Carmen Suarez told the online site DiverseEducation.com, "because if you can't change their hearts and their minds, you will govern their behavior and hold them accountable."³¹ This unvarnished appeal for the forcible imposition of a partisan ideology on faculty has met with little complaint, opening the door to serious threats to academic freedom and educational quality at the university.

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

To summarize, the imposition of diversity statements at Oregon universities will cast a thick pall over the very idea of a university as a pluralistic site of truth-seeking and debate. The expansion of diversity statements in faculty hiring and promotion will:

- Violate the fundamental mission of a university to be a place of freedom and multiple political viewpoints
- Introduce an explicit bias into university operations
- Deter leading scholars from coming to Oregon
- Deny meritorious scholars their due promotion
- Absorb precious research and teaching time from faculty
- Worsen already grossly skewed political bias in academic units
- Serve as an ideological cudgel against dissenting faculty
- Redefine research and teaching excellence as nothing more than political activism

In response, the Oregon Association of Scholars calls for:

- Mandatory diversity statements to be prohibited in all faculty hiring, evaluation, and promotion and tenure decisions
- Faculty to be made aware of the dangers of ideological bias in the governance of a university
- University administrators to be made aware of the potential legal challenges to diversity statements
- Federal and state legislators, alumni donors, grant-making foundations, and contracting agencies to withhold funds from Oregon universities that continue to impose ideological litmus tests on faculty
- Student groups to mobilize along with concerned faculty to defend the ideal of the university as a pluralistic institution

NOTES

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³ Evaluating Contributions to Diversity for Appointment and Promotion (APM 210), Guidelines for all Academic Disciplines, UCOP Academic Advancement, Sheila O'Rourke, January 7, 2008,

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⁶ Peter Schmidt, "Demand Surges for Diversity Consultants: But what do colleges get from them?", *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 15, 2016

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¹² 21 February 2017, “The threat from within”, Stanford News, <http://news.stanford.edu/2017/02/21/the-threat-from-within/>

¹³ <https://academicaffairs.uoregon.edu/tips-faculty-self-presentation-evaluations-teaching>

¹⁴ “Diversity Action Plans”, <https://provost.uoregon.edu/diversity-action-plans>

¹⁵ “Diversity Action Plan CAS Natural Sciences, 2017-2020”, Draft 19 January 2017.

¹⁶ IDEAL Framework: A Commitment to Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity; https://inclusion.uoregon.edu/sites/inclusion2.uoregon.edu/files/ideal_framework_-_final_may_31_2016.pdf

¹⁷ “Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Diversity Among Faculty and Academic Leadership Ranks at the University of Oregon” Division of Equity and Inclusion, Office of the Vice President for Equity and Inclusion, https://inclusion.uoregon.edu/sites/inclusion2.uoregon.edu/files/facultydiversityreport_august2016_final_002.pdf

¹⁸ For instance, 13 of the most 14 influential books ever written on Southeast Asia were by white male authors, according to the Singapore-based academic journal *Sojourn*. See Hui Yew-Foong, “The Most Influential Books of Southeast Asian Studies”, *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, Volume 24, Number 1, April 2009.

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