OAS Calls on Oregon Public Universities to Prohibit Compelled Speech of Diversity Statements

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Oregon public universities have a constitutional and educational responsibility to prohibit compelled speech at the state’s public universities. They should immediately ban mandatory “diversity statements” for faculty hiring and promotion, as well as for other university operations, the Oregon Association of Scholars said today.

Following actions by state legislatures and university boards of trustees in North Carolina, Wyoming, Texas, and Florida to ban such compelled speech, colleges and universities across the country are re-thinking the merits of forcing faculty, as well as students, to assert their adherence to particular viewpoints on contentious social and political issues. Groups including the National Association of Scholars and the Academic Freedom Alliance have called for such political litmus tests to be prohibited in higher education.

“It’s not just a constitutional and legal problem when public universities violate the free speech rights of their employees and students with forced ‘diversity statements’,“ said Dr. Bruce Gilley, president of the Oregon Association of Scholars. “It is also an intellectual and educational failure, showing that the universities have been captured by illiberal ideologues who no longer believe in the exchange of ideas and the conscience of the individual.”

A 2017 report by the Oregon Association of Scholars entitled The Imposition of Diversity Statements on Faculty Hiring and Promotion at Oregon Universities showed how Oregon public universities had begun to demand statements in support of “diversity, equity, and inclusion” (DEI) ideology, which acts as a signaling device to weed out candidates with political views opposed to that ideology. It called for the prohibition of such statements as well as the withholding of public, alumni, and foundation monies from institutions that continue to apply them informally.

The amendment adopted by the Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina System on February 23, 2023 reads:
The University shall neither solicit nor require an employee or applicant for academic admission or employment to affirmatively ascribe to or opine about beliefs, affiliations, ideals, or principles regarding matters of contemporary political debate or social action as a condition to admission, employment, or professional advancement. Nor shall any employee or applicant be solicited or required to describe his or her actions in support of, or in opposition to, such beliefs, affiliations, ideals, or principles.

“Whatever your political or social views, you should agree that in a democracy people are allowed to make up their own minds,” said Dr. Gilley. “That is especially the case in an educational setting, where students need to be exposed to a variety of viewpoints.”

He called on the boards of trustees at all Oregon public universities to convene special sessions where prohibitions on compelled speech are adopted, along with implementation rules to ensure that faculty and administrators do not seek to maintain them by other means.

“The DEI industry that distorts and disfigures the cause of higher education in Oregon has been given free rein for too long,” Dr. Gilley added. “Most citizens disagree with the coercive implementation of any ideology. The place to restore the freedom to think for oneself is in our places of learning.”

About
The Oregon Association of Scholars is the Oregon affiliate of the National Association of Scholars. Visit NAS at www.nas.org, and OAS at www.oregonscholars.org. Contact: Dr. Bruce Gilley, OAS President, info@oregonscholars.org