

March 30, 2017 by Peter Schmidt

Faculty 'Diversity Statements' Are Called Threats to Academic Freedom

The “diversity statements” that many colleges now require of applicants for faculty positions are coming under attack by traditionalists and conservatives as threats to academic freedom.

The Oregon affiliate of the National Association of Scholars has issued a report accusing colleges in that state and elsewhere of creating “ideological litmus tests” for faculty hiring and promotion by asking candidates for statements discussing their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

“The statements will deter leading scholars from coming to the state, cause a deleterious effect on research productivity, and serve as an ideological cudgel against scholars with alternative views,” the Oregon Association of Scholars said in issuing the report. It called the statements “a direct threat to academic freedom and research excellence.”

George Leef, director of research at the James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal, a conservative nonprofit group in North Carolina, this week drew national attention to the Oregon report with columns in *National Review* and on his center’s website. The columns likened the diversity statements to the national loyalty oaths demanded of faculty members during the McCarthy era. He urged Congress and the Education Department to take steps to withhold federal funds from any college that requires current or prospective faculty members to state their positions on political or social issues.

Steve Clark, a spokesman for Oregon State University, one of the public colleges named in the report, issued a statement that called the report biased and noted that Oregon State’s use of diversity statements drew overwhelming support in a vote by its Faculty Senate.

Tobin Klinger, a spokesman for the University of Oregon, also named in the report, issued a statement that said: “We understand that free speech and diversity essentially go hand in hand, as we strive to create an environment where all voices are respected and empowered to carry out their academic pursuits.”

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