

April 7, 2025

An open letter to President Gonzalez, Provost Leo, and other senior leadership of Ohio University,

We are calling on the leadership of Ohio University to be better advocates for both academic freedom and for the role of faculty, as disciplinary experts, in determining the role of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in university curriculum. This is not an official statement on behalf of the institution or any unit within OU, and only represents the views of its signatories.

Recently, senior leadership has suggested that some subjects and courses are separate from DEI or politics more broadly. We want to emphasize that no academic discipline is wholly apolitical, and that it is the purview of the faculty to determine if and how this should be highlighted in the curriculum.

Let us be clear about what we are and are not calling for. We are not arguing that every course, or even every program, must center issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. What we reject, however, is language from the leadership asserting an a priori determination that some classes or disciplines are free from these perspectives, as any such determination is fundamentally a matter of the curricular expertise of the faculty.

The following examples are not exhaustive, but give a sense of the breadth of the connections between DEI and academic disciplines. Recently, the university leadership has suggested that geometry has no connection to politics or DEI. In fact, geometry is central to understanding topics such as gerrymandering, spatial equity, and environmental racism. Business must contend with inequitable access to economic success, implicit bias, and the interaction between industry and commerce and broader societal concerns such as climate change. Engineering and the physical sciences help us develop renewable energy sources and design innovations to address social problems, such as homelessness and food insecurity. The arts and humanities are crucial to understanding the diversity of human experience and engaging in political expression. The social sciences, including education, explore questions of access/inclusion and power across a broad range of social contexts.

More broadly, all disciplines must grapple with representation and inclusion in their field and undergo regular debate and evolution around what is positioned as the foundations or canon of the discipline. All such debates inherently raise issues of DEI, as choices center some voices and silence others. We see time and again that all fields benefit when there is a diversity of voices and perspectives at the table.

We recognize the delicate position of senior leadership as it navigates the new and evolving political and regulatory landscape. As they move forward in this process, we ask that they refrain from making claims or determinations about curriculum because that is the purview of the faculty. Instead, we call on OU's senior leadership to clearly and consistently reiterate that faculty are responsible for determining the curriculum.

A failure to do so represents a fundamental threat to academic freedom and faculty expertise. While this is a perennial concern, it is of existential importance in the current political climate if the university is to continue in its role as a place of deep learning and knowledge generation.

Signed,

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6. Todd Eisworth, Professor of Mathematics
7. Anna Rachel Terman, Associate Professor of Sociology
8. Yeji Kim, Assistant Professor of Teacher Education
9. Courtney Koestler, Associate Professor of Teacher Education

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11. Joyce Thompson, Assistant Professor of Instruction
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14. Angela Hosek, Professor of Communication Studies
15. Andrew Szolosi, Associate Professor of Parks, Recreation, and Leisure Studies
16. Sarah Jones, Assistant Professor of Communication Studies
17. Roger Aden, Professor of Communication Studies
18. Lisa Wallace, Associate Professor of Communication Studies, Chillicothe campus
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25. Janet Duerr, Associate Professor of Biological Sciences
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27. Sandy C. Chen, Professor of Recreation, Sport Pedagogy, and Consumer Sciences
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73. Angela Hillman, Associate Professor of Exercise Physiology
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75. Brittany Peterson, Associate Professor, Communication Studies
76. Kelley Walton, Associate Professor of Instruction, Sports Administration
77. Judith Grant, Professor Emeritus, Political Science
78. Gordon Brooks, Professor of Educational Studies
79. Greg Kessler, Professor Educational Studies
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84. Sara Berens, Associate Professor of Instruction, Department of Social and Public Health
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95. Kate Hampel, Associate Professor of Instruction, Art
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