

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Black Emergency Response Team
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Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) departments, programs, and entities play a pivotal role in providing a safe and inclusive space for minority and marginalized communities on higher education campuses. These initiatives offer students a platform to voice their concerns, establish a home away from home, and foster unity within the student life community. Any attempt to remove personnel, funding, and programming jeopardizes the very existence of these essential spaces.

Governor Stitt's recent call for the review of DEI programs at the University of Oklahoma, extending to higher education across the state, raises significant concerns. The governor asserts this initiative aims to "put students first while taking steps to remove politics from institutes of higher learning." However, it is apparent that Oklahoma political officials, spearheaded by Stitt, fail to comprehend the vital need for funding higher education DEI programs. Stitt's approach seems to target students from marginalized communities, hiding behind a deceptive narrative that merit-based success and hard work alone suffice for advancement.

This stance becomes particularly problematic considering Oklahoma's ranking as the 50th state in the nation for education, indicating a critical need for systemic change rather than a simplistic merit-based approach. Governor Stitt's apparent disregard for deep-seated systemic issues within Oklahoma's education system is further highlighted by House Bill 1775, which directly impacts higher education. This bill aims to remove racial sensitivity training, posing a significant threat to the accurate representation and teaching of the histories of marginalized communities, emphasizing the vital role of DEI programs.

In the face of ongoing reforms impacting DEI programs within higher education, civic engagement becomes paramount. Voting emerges as a powerful tool to shape the future of our university. We urge every member of our community to be proactive, well-informed, and participate in the democratic process as these transformative processes unfold. BERT stands as a staunch advocate for preserving the values that make the University of Oklahoma a welcoming and supportive home for all its students.

Together, let us stand against the detriment of our student body and work towards a future where our university thrives as a model of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

For any further comments or questions please contact BERT's University and Local Grievances Ecclesiastes Shoulders, at ecclesiastes.e.shoulders@ou.edu or Director Amari Williams at amari.a.williams-1@ou.edu.

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As the Black Emergency Response Team (BERT), our purpose is to empower and uplift Black students at the University of Oklahoma by providing immediate, effective, and compassionate responses to crises, systemic injustices, and emergencies. We are committed to fostering resilience, advocating for social equity, and driving positive change through activism, education, and community engagement. BERT stands as a united force, dedicated to dismantling racial disparities and building a more just and equitable society for all.

<https://universitybusiness.com/oklahoma-is-the-latest-state-to-wage-war-on-dei/>

<https://ocpathink.org/post/independent-journalism/drag-queens-white-supremacy-biased-police-oklahoma-colleges-spent-83-4-million-on-diversity-programs>

<https://oklahoma.gov/governor/newsroom/newsroom/2023/december2023/governor-stitt-signs-anti-discrimination-executive-order--takes-.html#:~:text=The%20order%20requires%20state%20agencies.and%20dismiss%20non%2Dcritical%20personnel.>