

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

LEGISLATIVE 'REVERBERATIONS'

3 Ways That Anti-DEI Efforts Are Changing How Colleges Operate

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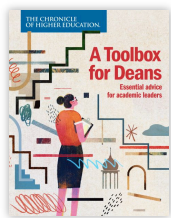


Some public colleges are not only settling into a new semester; they're also settling into new names and protocols in response to restrictions on diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

Last year, Republican state lawmakers [proposed dozens of bills](#) taking aim at colleges' efforts to create more welcoming campuses, and they've already [proposed more for 2024](#). As these critics see it, diversity-related offices, centers, and programs, often described as DEI, are ineffective and discriminatory. Colleges defend these initiatives as essential support systems for students from marginalized backgrounds.

So far, restrictions on DEI efforts have taken effect in five states; several governors have also issued executive orders that direct colleges to review or reshape diversity efforts. Some institutions have acted without official state directives.

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This week highlighted one way that these changes are affecting how campuses operate: On Wednesday, Florida's Board of Education, which oversees the state's 28 two-year public colleges, voted to remove a sociology course from its slate of options for fulfilling general-education requirements.

Florida's education commissioner, Manny Díaz Jr., [derided sociology](#) as “woke ideology” and asserted that the discipline had been “hijacked by left-wing activists” in a post on X last month. Students enrolled in the system are required to take at least five social-science courses on a core list; sociology has now been replaced with

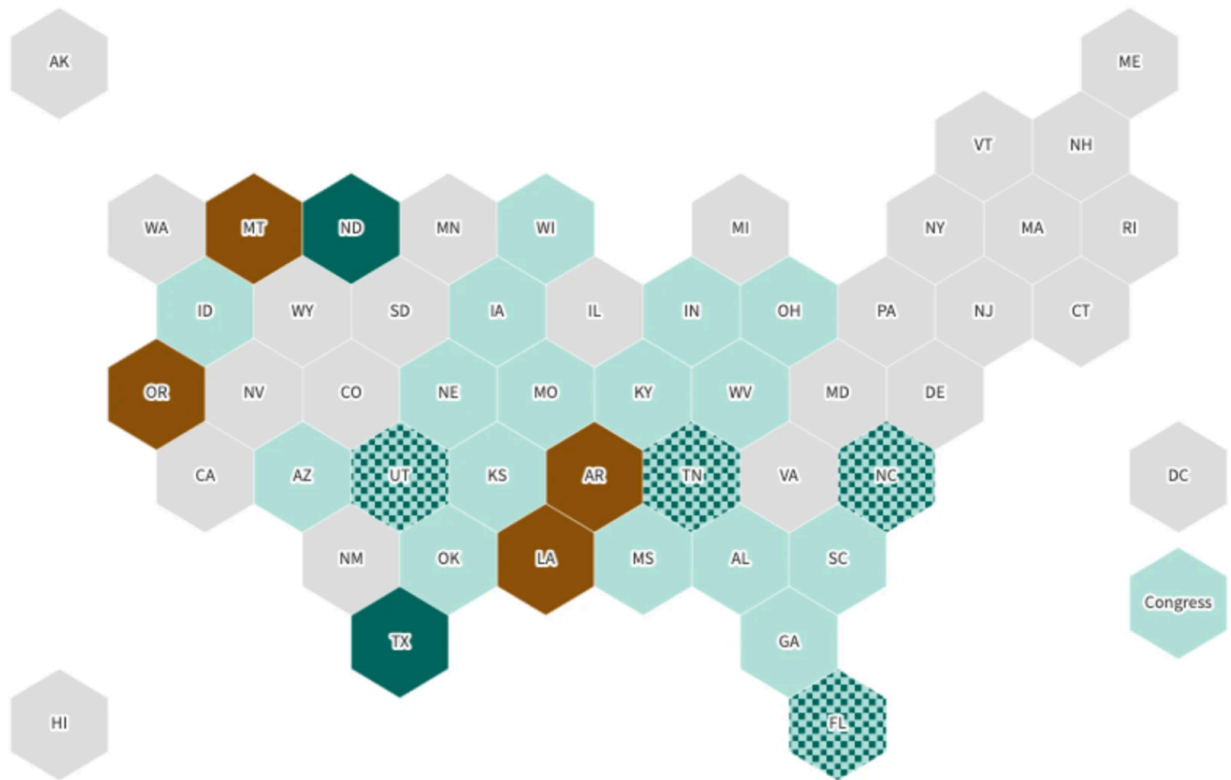
American history. The Board of Education also voted Wednesday to approve regulations banning DEI spending at the system’s colleges, codifying a state law passed last year.

Here are three areas of higher education that have recently been influenced by the campaign against DEI.

Physical Space

Some colleges have taken “diversity” out of the names of offices and job titles. The University of South Carolina [changed](#) its Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to be the Division of Access, Civil Rights, and Community Engagement.

DEI legislation tracker



Explore [maps and read descriptions and status of bills](#) in states where lawmakers are seeking to restrict colleges' DEI efforts.

Visit [The Assault on DEI](#) for related stories.

In November, the University of Tennessee system's Division of Diversity and Engagement became the Division of Access and Engagement, according to [The Daily Beacon](#), the student newspaper at Tennessee's Knoxville flagship. The newspaper reported that UT-Knoxville's diversity-related offices and committees would also adopt that shift.

But at least one college abandoned plans to rename its diversity office. The University of Texas at San Antonio had announced last month that its Office of Inclusive Excellence [would close](#) and be replaced by a new Office of Campus and Community Belonging, focusing on three pillars: ADA and accessibility, campus climate, and "community partnership bridges." But the president then [said](#) on January 2 that the university wouldn't replace the office after all, citing "voluntary changes in staffing" and an "evolved understanding" of Texas's new law banning DEI spending.

Some colleges have also altered or shuttered spaces for students based on identity.

The University of Houston closed its LGBTQ+ Resource Center in August. The university's [website](#) now refers students seeking support to other resources, such as the counseling center.

Texas A&M University's Pride Center [has been rebranded](#) as the Student Life Center, according to *The Battalion*, the campus newspaper.

Roger L. Worthington, executive director of the Center for Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education at the University of Maryland at College Park, said he believes states' DEI restrictions will mostly have administrative effects related to how colleges

spend money. Staff members will continue doing the work of supporting marginalized students, he said.

Policy

Some colleges have retooled or discontinued diversity training, or stopped asking faculty and staff members for [statements](#) explaining their commitment to diversity and inclusion as part of hiring and promotion processes.

Public colleges in North Dakota are subject [to a law](#) preventing public colleges from requiring employees to complete diversity training, except for training on federal and state nondiscrimination laws.

David Dodds, a spokesperson for the University of North Dakota, said the university reviewed its existing training videos and decided it didn't need to make changes.

An optional course on implicit bias and awareness of microaggressions — available to employees through a training library — was removed due to concerns that its language could violate the law, Dodds said.

[The North Dakota law](#) also barred institutions from asking current or prospective employees about any “ideological or political viewpoint,” effectively ending the use of diversity statements.

Tennessee's public colleges must abide by similar restrictions on training and statements.

A North Carolina law [bars institutions](#) from asking prospective faculty or staff members about their beliefs on “matters of contemporary political debate or social action.”

The Classroom

[The classroom has been affected](#) by the DEI changes, too, even if state bills mostly target diversity offices and policies. The sociology course in Florida that was just removed as a general-education option is one example.

At New College of Florida, the Board of Trustees [voted](#) last year to begin shutting down the college's gender-studies program. New College has experienced an institutional overhaul since Gov. Ron DeSantis, also a Republican presidential hopeful, appointed five conservative trustees to the board a year ago.

An earlier version of Florida's anti-DEI bill would have [banned majors and minors](#) in gender studies, "intersectionality," and "critical race theory." That language didn't appear in the final legislation, however.

The law [does state](#) that general-education courses at Florida's public colleges can't "distort significant historical events or include a curriculum that teaches identity politics."

While Republican state lawmakers continue to take aim at diversity efforts this year, Worthington believes more liberal states and colleges will feel a trickle-down effect.

"There are reverberations throughout the country and in a variety of different ways," Worthington said. Even in places where politicians aren't criticizing DEI efforts, he said, there could be "hesitancy" among college administrators "to either fund DEI or to pursue aggressively the concerns that we have about educational disparities."

Read other items in this [The Assault on DEI](#) package.

We welcome your thoughts and questions about this article. Please [email the editors](#) or [submit a letter](#) for publication.