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DIVERSITY AND POLITICS

Here Are 3 Ways That Republicans See Campus DEI Efforts as Harmful

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Rep. Burgess Owens, the panel's Republican chair, called diversity, equity, and inclusion "a long-growing cancer that resides in the hearts of American academic institutions."

Republicans made the case in a congressional hearing on Thursday that campus diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts promote discrimination, echoing lawmakers at the state level who are working to restrict such practices.

Republican politicians and other critics increasingly argue that DEI can be racist and sexist because its model sorts identity groups based on physical characteristics and historical privilege, creating a system that pits the "oppressors" against the "oppressed." Thursday's hearing, held by the U.S. House Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development, continued that line of attack — with discussion dominated by conservative voices opposed to DEI.

On one side, lawmakers and witnesses argued that diversity efforts are not only exclusionary but also helped trigger a rise in campus antisemitism related to the Israel-Hamas war. But supporters of DEI said at the hearing that colleges have a responsibility to create welcoming environments as more students from underrepresented backgrounds enroll and that diversity offices and programs are crucial aspects of that work.

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The hearing occurred as lawmakers have [introduced over 80 bills](#) to restrict campus DEI activities in the past 15 months, often with the goal of dismantling diversity-related centers, training, and hiring practices. Of the four witnesses testifying,

including two researchers, one medical professional, and an education-reform advocate, only one supported diversity efforts.

Three themes dominated the hearing:

Republican lawmakers and witnesses argued that campus DEI professionals had failed to support Jewish students.

“My Jewish friends, if you wonder about the surprising outgrowth of antisemitism now raging on our college campuses, this is the genesis,” said Rep. Burgess Owens, a Utah Republican and chair of the subcommittee. “DEI teaches that at the very top of the oppressor pyramid is the Jewish race. There is no empathy in the DEI space once identified as an oppressor, only disdain.”

Jay Greene, a witness and senior research fellow at the conservative Heritage Foundation, said Jewish students’ high enrollment rates have led colleges to identify them as privileged and dismiss their concerns about their campus experiences.

Greene cited [his own finding](#) that hundreds of DEI staff members were largely critical of Israel, based on a review of their posts on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Rep. Suzanne Bonamici of Oregon was one of the few Democrats to speak at the hearing. She acknowledged that the subcommittee had previously discussed the problem of campus antisemitism but urged critics not to dismiss diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts entirely. Instead of dismantling DEI spaces, Bonamici urged her colleagues to consider constructive ways to protect students — and to allow colleges to design programs that fulfill their specific needs.

Witnesses disagreed on whether DEI efforts are a waste of time and money.

The cost of campus diversity offices and staff has [drawn increasing](#) scrutiny from critics on the right over the past few years. Lawmakers and witnesses on Thursday pointed to a series of articles in *The College Fix*, a right-wing publication, that highlighted how institutions like Ohio State University and the University of Michigan had spent tens of millions of dollars on DEI.

Colleges have previously emphasized that diversity funding represents a fraction of institutional spending. At the hearing, Representative Bonamici criticized Republican state lawmakers for condemning DEI programs as “too costly” even though they “barely affect university budgets.”

Stanley Goldfarb, board chair of Do No Harm, a medical group that says it’s fighting against “woke” activists in health care, said DEI has perpetuated discrimination in medicine.

“Every minute students spend on colonialism is one they don’t spend on cancer. When they study global warming, they don’t study geriatric care,” Goldfarb said. He said he’s heard from medical students who say they know more about pronouns than they do about the functions of the kidney.

James S. Murphy, director of career pathways and postsecondary policy for the advocacy group Education Reform Now, said that DEI programs serve different purposes on each campus and provide value to all students.

At some institutions, DEI offices focus primarily on community engagement and dialogue, Murphy said. Elsewhere, diversity staff members aim to ensure fairness in admissions, instruction, recruitment, and hiring, or they focus on compliance with civil-rights statutes like Title IX, the gender-equity law. What such employees don’t typically do, he said, is “provide direct instruction to students, let alone indoctrinate them into any set of beliefs.”

Debate ensued over whether DEI efforts had helped or harmed Black students.

Representative Owens, who is Black, said he believes that DEI teaches Black Americans that they are incapable of succeeding independently — by engaging in “the soft bigotry of low expectations.” The subcommittee chair said the DEI model suggests that Black people “must wait for the success wand to be waved over us by white Americans.”

Erec Smith, a research fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute, is also Black. “This ideology is infantilizing,” he testified.

Owens argued that diversity offices are not inclusive but instead exclude white straight male Christians and Black conservatives. He called DEI “a long-growing cancer that resides in the hearts of American academic institutions.”

Representative Bonamici said drawing such a comparison was “baffling” and “pretty offensive.” (Owens later responded that he is a cancer survivor.)

DEI offices exist, Bonamici said, to support faculty and staff in “meeting the needs of increasingly diverse populations, many of whom are first-generation college students.”

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DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION

POLITICAL INFLUENCE & ACTIVISM

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