

In run-up to Trump's inauguration, University of Michigan ends major component of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion programs

Luke Galvin
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On December 5, the University of Michigan (UM) announced that its Board of Regents would no longer require diversity statements—personal narratives explaining how candidates will contribute to the university's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programs—for hiring and promotion purposes. The diversity statements have been a major component of the DEI policy.

Shortly after the announcement, UM summarily fired Rachel Dawson, a DEI administrator, after the Anti-Defamation League filed a complaint charging her with antisemitism based on a private, unrecorded conversation. Dawson has denied the charges and is planning to take legal action against the university.

With the abandonment of diversity statements and Dawson's firing, the Democratic Party-controlled Board of Regents is seeking to accommodate UM to the incoming fascistic Trump administration.

Trump and the Republican Party are spearheading a right-wing "America First" ideological offensive that falsely links identity politics and programs such as DEI, long the stock in trade of the Democratic Party, with Marxism. This, in turn, is bound up with a massive escalation of attacks on democratic rights and basic social programs, from public education to healthcare.

Trump has declared that his administration will clean up universities "taken over by Marxist maniacs," calling for the purging of DEI offices staffed with "Marxist bureaucrats."

Last April, in keeping with Florida Governor Ron DeSantis' "Stop Woke Law," the University of Florida (UF) defunded its entire DEI program. Texas state

universities have likewise shut down their DEI offices. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Harvard began rolling back DEI programs last spring.

The moves by UM to roll back DEI have sent shock waves across the country and around the world, due to the prominence of UM historically as a center for the promotion of politics and programs based on the elevation of race, gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation above social class. The British *Telegraph* newspaper posted as the lead article on its website an article headlined, "'America's wokest university' ditches diversity hiring rules."

In the 1960s, UM became the first major university in the US to establish a Black Studies Program, headed by Harold Cruse, the author of the 1967 book *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*.

This was a response by sections of the ruling class, largely associated with the Democratic Party, to the explosive intensification of the crisis of American capitalism under the administration of Lyndon Johnson. It occurred in the midst of the Vietnam War and a mass anti-war protest movement, a rising tide of militant labor struggles, and uprisings in the country's urban ghettos against poverty, racism and police repression—including the 1967 Detroit riot.

Under these conditions, the ruling class defined the social crisis as one of race rather than class. This was done to divert popular opposition away from a struggle against the capitalist system itself, the real source of inequality and oppression, and elevate a thin layer of blacks and other minorities into the establishment, while sowing divisions in the working class. This was

promoted by anti-Marxist pseudo-left organizations and academics.

Richard Nixon, who succeeded Johnson in the White House, was more blunt in pushing a racist agenda, calling for “Black capitalism.” The political establishment provided substantial funding for race-based programs and initiatives to cultivate an upper-middle class and bourgeois buffer between the ruling class and the masses of oppressed workers.

Racist constructs such as “Critical Race Theory” and “White Fragility” proliferated in academic and media circles. DEI is a product of this process. It ballooned into a multi-billion-dollar industry spanning academia, the military-intelligence apparatus, the trade union bureaucracy, electoral politics and government office, and the corporate world.

Chris Kolb, UM’s vice president for government relations, revealed the calculations involved in UM’s rollback of DEI. Speaking before the Board of Regents on December 5, Kolb stated:

I’ve been told pretty bluntly that Congress and this [Trump] administration will use whatever tools they can to have us yield to what they want us to do—and DEI is one of those things they think needs to be eliminated from higher ed.

UM is a major recipient of federal research grants, particularly from agencies like the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the National Science Foundation and the Department of Defense, which are primary sources for scientific research. Funding also comes from Title IV, which includes student financial aid programs. Total UM federal funding could exceed \$2 billion annually.

Hailing from top corporate positions, the Regents and UM’s multi-millionaire President Santa Ono embody the financialization of higher education under capitalism. UM, a public university, has an \$18 billion endowment.

What is the balance sheet of identity-based programs from the 1960s to the present? Social inequality has metastasized to record levels. Economic polarization within the African American population has grown to even greater levels than in the population as a whole.

The ranks of America’s billionaires grew to 800 under Biden and their collective wealth increased by 62 percent to more than \$6.2 trillion. Meanwhile, the number of homeless people in the United States rose to record levels. Poverty is increasing and life expectancy is declining.

The conditions of the broad mass of workers—of all races and ethnicities—have drastically declined, while Trump buddy Elon Musk’s wealth, at more than \$440 billion, increases by millions every day.

Workers and youth cannot achieve equality within the framework of capitalism and the domination of society by a parasitic oligarchy. Capitalism offers only war, dictatorship and ever increasing exploitation. There is, however, a social force that can end inequality and poverty by putting an end to capitalism and establishing socialism, based on social rather than private ownership of the means of production and production for social need, not private profit. That force is the working class, united across all national, racial, ethnic, gender and other identities.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and its youth section, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), oppose DEI and identity politics from this socialist perspective.

To oppose both the Republican fascist right and the Democratic Party purveyors of war and genocide, youth and students must turn to the working class and fight for a socialist and revolutionary strategy and leadership.



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