

The Diversity Problem on Campus | Opinion

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American universities are undergoing a profound transformation that threatens to derail their primary mission: the production and dissemination of knowledge. The new regime is titled "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" or DEI, and is enforced by a large bureaucracy of administrators. Nearly every decision taken on campus, from admissions, to faculty hiring, to course content, to teaching methods, is made through the lens of DEI. This regime was imposed from the top and has never been adequately debated. In the current climate it cannot be openly debated: the emotions around DEI are so strong that self-censorship among dissenting faculty is nearly universal.

The words "diversity, equity and inclusion" sound just, and are often supported by well-intentioned people, but their effects are the opposite of noble sentiments. Most importantly, "equity" does not mean fair and equal treatment. DEI seeks to increase the representation of some groups through discrimination against members of other groups. The underlying premise of DEI is that any statistical difference between group representation on campus and national averages reflects systemic injustice and discrimination by the university itself. The magnitude of the distortions is significant: for some job searches discrimination rises to the level of implicitly or explicitly excluding applicants from certain groups.

DEI violates the ethical and legal principle of equal treatment. It entails treating people as members of a group rather than as individuals, repeating the mistake that made possible the atrocities of the 20th century. It requires being willing to tell an applicant "I will ignore your merits and qualifications and deny you admission because you belong to the wrong group, and I have defined a more important social objective that justifies doing so." It treats persons as merely means to an end, giving primacy to a statistic over the individuality of a human being.

DEI compromises the university's mission. The core business of the university is the search for truth. A university's intellectual environment depends fundamentally on its commitment to hiring the most talented and best trained minds: any

departure from this commitment must come at the expense of academic excellence, and ultimately will compromise the university's contribution to society. This point is particularly urgent given that DEI considerations often reduce the pool of truly eligible candidates by a factor of two or more.

DEI undermines the public's trust in universities and their graduates. Some on campus might be surprised to learn that, according to a recent Pew poll, 74 percent of Americans think only qualifications should be taken into account in hiring and promotion, even if this results in less diversity. If current trends continue, employers and consumers will quickly adjust their perception of the value of a university degree.

We propose an alternative framework called Merit, Fairness, and Equality (MFE) whereby university applicants are treated as individuals and evaluated through a rigorous and unbiased process based on their merit and qualifications alone. Crucially, this would mean an end to legacy and athletic admission advantages, which significantly favor white applicants, in addition to those based on group membership. Simultaneously, MFE would involve universities investing in education projects in neighborhoods where public education is failing to help children from those areas compete. These projects would be evidence-based and non-ideological, testing a variety of different options such as increased public school funding, charter schools and voucher programs.

Viewed objectively, American universities already are incredibly diverse. They feature people from all countries, races and ethnicities (for example, one of us was born and raised in Chile, and is classified as Hispanic by his university). This is in stark contrast with most universities in Europe, Asia and South America. American universities are diverse not because of DEI, but because they have been extremely competitive at attracting talent from all over the world. Ninety years ago Germany had the best universities in the world. Then an ideological regime obsessed with race came to power and drove many of the best scholars out, gutting the faculties and leading to sustained decay that German universities never fully recovered from. We should view this as a warning of the consequences of viewing group membership as more important than merit, and correct our course before it is too late.

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