

PHIL BOAS | **Opinion** *This piece expresses the views of its author(s), separate from those of this publication.*

Extreme racial politics of DEI are crumbling, and the fall began in Arizona

Opinion: MIT and now possibly Harvard will follow the lead of Arizona universities to stop requiring diversity, equity and inclusion statements.



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Arizona's three major universities probably didn't see themselves as trailblazers when they put a stop to the McCarthy-esque practice of diversity statements a year ago.

All three had made certain faculty applicants provide such statements when seeking employment at their institutions.

The statements were essentially loyalty oaths to an extreme brand of racial politics that had bubbled up in the moral panic of the summer of 2020.

MIT also will stop diversity statements

All of this is notable because last week, MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) became the first elite private university in the country to announce it would stop requesting diversity statements from faculty job applicants.

"We can build an inclusive environment in many ways, but compelled statements impinge on freedom of expression, and they don't work," MIT president Sally Kornbluth said.

Influential voices are also rising at another storied institution to end the practice.

Harvard Law School's Randall Kennedy, a liberal committed to the cause of social justice, said, "It would be hard to overstate the degree to which many academics at Harvard and beyond feel intense and growing resentment against the DEI enterprise because of features that are perhaps most evident in the demand for DEI statements."

Joining his voice was former Harvard President Lawrence H. Summers, who called diversity statements “an affront to almost every academic freedom value.”

Loyalty oaths caught fire after George Floyd

While diversity statements pre-date the police murder of George Floyd by many years, they really caught fire following the protests and riots that broke out after his death.

Universities across America aggressively started using the statements to enforce fealty to an extreme social-justice dogma of the political left that had long ago captured much of academia.

Following the death of Floyd, an African American man, it was no longer acceptable to gradually diversify the universities and other institutions. Diversity would be enforced with an iron fist.

And Arizona universities all went along, pushing out on many fronts — including hiring.

Arizona Regents were pushed to ban DEI

Then in August 2023, the Arizona Board of Regents announced the state’s three public universities would pull the plug on diversity statements.

It was not a celebratory moment. At least for the universities.

They were pushed to moderate by an old foe they had long viewed as extreme — the Goldwater Institute — a conservative think tank that had years ago begun imitating the political left with its use of lawyers and the courts to press for social change.

Our multiracial society: Has outgrown affirmative action

In January 2023, Goldwater, led by Victor Riches, former deputy chief of staff for policy and budget for then-Gov. Doug Ducey, announced it had teamed with another conservative think tank, the Manhattan Institute, to propose reforms “to help liberate colleges and universities from the radical leftwing takeover of DEI.”

Goldwater accused the Arizona universities of breaking federal and state law.

Jonathan Butcher, a senior fellow at the think tank, told the Arizona Capitol Times that requiring DEI statements likely violates the First Amendment and Arizona Constitution, which

states, “no religious or political test or qualification shall ever be required as a condition of admission into any public educational institution of the state, as teacher, student, or pupil.”

We're the vanguard of a growing movement

Through spokespeople, the Regents and Arizona State University said last year that diversity statements were never required.

But Arizona Republic reporter Ray Stern put the kibosh to that when he reported that ASU had job postings at that very moment that “required” faculty applicants to submit “a statement addressing how your past and/or present potential contributions to diversity and inclusion will advance ASU’s commitment to inclusive excellence.”

The Arizona schools were not the first to get rid of diversity statements. Texas and Florida state governments, encouraged by Goldwater and Manhattan Institute, had earlier ended the practice.

But they were part of the vanguard of reform.

Given what has now happened at MIT and is brewing at Harvard, that reform appears to have legs.

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