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# *University of Michigan Ends Required Diversity Statements*

The school, a bastion of D.E.I., will no longer require the statements in hiring decisions and is considering a broader shift in its policies.

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**By Nicholas Confessore**

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The University of Michigan will no longer require diversity statements as part of faculty hiring, promotion and tenure decisions, the school announced on Thursday, marking a major shift at one of the country's leading public research institutions.

The new policy, issued by Michigan's provost, comes as the university's regents weigh a broader overhaul of its sprawling diversity, equity and inclusion programs, among the most ambitious and well financed in the country. The policy effectively overrules a hodgepodge of practices at the university's varied undergraduate and graduate schools, most of which began using diversity statements in hiring in recent years.

“As we pursue this challenging and complex work, we will continuously refine our approach” to D.E.I., the provost, Laurie McCauley, said in a statement.

Michigan’s decision may add momentum to growing efforts to restrict the use of diversity statements, which have proliferated widely in academia in recent years. Schools that employ them typically ask job applicants to discuss how they would advance diversity and equity through their scholarship, teaching or community service. In states like Michigan and California, which ban direct racial preferences in hiring, diversity statements have been credited with helping public universities hire more diverse faculties.

Critics view them as a form of compelled political speech that are often used to evade legal restrictions on affirmative action. In at least some instances, job candidates have been eliminated from consideration based solely on their diversity statements.

Legislatures in at least nine states have banned them, according to The Chronicle of Higher Education. Last year, public university systems in Missouri, Ohio and Wisconsin all stopped requiring diversity statements. So have the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences. A 2022 survey by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, a

free-speech advocacy group that opposes diversity statements, found that professors at four-year colleges in the United States were evenly split on their use.

The University of Michigan has promoted diversity statements far beyond its own campuses. Colleges around the country use versions of a scoring rubric for diversity statements devised by the National Center for Institutional Diversity, part of Michigan's central D.E.I. office, or other hiring practices developed at the university.

John D. Sailer, a senior fellow at the conservative Manhattan Institute who has written widely about diversity statements, called Michigan's decision a "watershed moment" in higher education.

"The University of Michigan championed diversity statements, and universities around the country adopted its hiring practices, including its rubric for assessing D.E.I. contributions," Mr. Sailer said in an email. "Now, it will represent a milestone in the movement to roll back this misguided practice, a clear victory for academic freedom."

Some Michigan faculty members attacked the decision as an unwarranted interference in academic affairs. On the social media network Bluesky, Sean Johnson, an assistant professor of astronomy, called the new policy "a cowardly and unjustifiable

intrusion into hiring practices and rubrics that should be set by departments according to their needs and missions, not administrative fiat.”

The decision followed intense internal debates among professors and administrators. A faculty committee appointed by Dr. McCauley to consider diversity statements initially proposed that the university leave their use to the discretion of its colleges and schools, while providing more training.

“Outright elimination of diversity statements at U-M would send an inaccurate and discouraging signal regarding U-M’s commitment to DEI values,” the committee wrote in July.

But a survey conducted for the committee found that more than half of Michigan faculty members believed diversity statements placed pressure on professors to express specific moral, political and social views.

In late October, the committee came back with a revised report, this one proposing that Michigan cease using stand-alone diversity statements and instead incorporate diversity commitments into job candidates’ teaching and research statements.

Dr. McCauley accepted the first recommendation but rejected the second.

Rebekah Modrak, the chairwoman of the Faculty Senate, wrote in a comment on Michigan's public announcement of the new policy that the shift had come after intervention by the university's regents, who she said rejected the committee's original recommendations

“Sending a committee back to work to give a second report with preordained results is neither honest nor respectful of faculty expertise,” Ms. Modrak wrote.

The provost's announcement came hours before a scheduled monthly meeting of the regents, where faculty members and students who support Michigan's D.E.I. program have vowed to confront them over potential changes. The school's Black Student Union, which has criticized Michigan officials for not moving aggressively enough to diversify the campus, planned to protest outside the home of Michigan's president, Santa J. Ono.

Some regents have expressed support for shifting more of Michigan's existing D.E.I. budget into student-facing programs, such as the popular Go Blue Guarantee, which provides free tuition for lower-income Michigan residents. According to a review conducted last summer, more than half of the school's overall D.E.I. spending has gone to staff salaries and benefits.

“Diversity and inclusion are amongst our core values,” said Jordan Acker, a Democratic regent. “At the same time, we have to continue to reform programs and bureaucracies that are not

working, and it is our obligation as a board to make sure as much taxpayer and tuition dollars go into direct student support as possible.”

It is unclear how the new policy on diversity statements will ripple across campus and through Michigan’s diversity programs. Some of Michigan’s most high-profile D.E.I. initiatives rely on diversity statements, including the Collegiate Fellows program and a federally funded biosciences program called M-PACT, through which the university has hired dozens of new faculty in recent years.

The Collegiate Fellows program asks applicants to state how they would advance D.E.I. goals, whether through research into “race, gender, diversity, equity and inclusion,” “significant academic achievement in the face of barriers” or “commitment to allyhood through learning about structural inequities.”

Documents obtained by The New York Times Magazine this year showed that Michigan officials viewed the statements as an effective way to generate racial diversity in a state where affirmative action is banned. The Collegiate Fellows program, school officials attested on a federal funding request, showed “that a high percentage of fellows” with “demonstrated commitments to D.E.I. are likely to come from traditionally minoritized groups.”

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