

Campus Wide Listening Session

“What does the ‘attack on DEI’ mean for me? An open conversation to understand how local and national legislative trends are impacting campus communities”

Oct. 30, 2024

What we heard

CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

How have you been impacted by the ‘attack on DEI’?

Uncomfortable / Disheartened / Demoralized

- I’ve been disheartened by UK’s approach – I lead anti-racist trainings and I’ve seen big organizations just ghost me when these topics go up. Sadly, I won’t hear back from white executives, and I will hear back from leaders of color.
- It’s uncomfortable that we feel like we need to change language. It sends a dangerous message maybe that “they were right” instead of supporting our programs.
- It also leaves those of us who remain committed to the hard work of truth-telling feeling even more isolated, targeted, and demoralized.
- Many of us experience the emotional and mental stress that comes with holding marginalized identities in addition to already doing much of the heavy lifting for this type of work. I’ve had to step away from many things I once enjoyed because I need respite and sometimes, I feel guilty because now who will help?

Hard to Chart

- It is hard to chart what has / hasn’t happened – if you think of recruiting, students may not come. We must allot extra time to reassure students and families that DEI won’t be a factor – it’s added stress that we can’t also measure
- I think it will keep bright and promising diverse students from choosing any college in Kentucky. Why would they want to come here?

Retaliation

- Are you ready to “risk it all”. I’ve been outspoken about the diversity of leadership in my department – I knew when I started speaking out, that someday there’d be consequences. This year, I’ve seen those consequences – in my department, “you’re no longer responsible for X...” “you will not be invited to meet with X ...” “you will not be...”. In some respects, you’re putting your life / your health on the line.
 - It’s disappointing and frustrating to hear that people are treated 180 degrees away from the university’s vision and mission.
 - Retaliation is real and many who are courageous enough to speak up are being "told on", isolated, and targeted.
 - Being excluded and not invited to opportunities- ignored-devaluated because you speak out is real. It hurts institutional trust too.

- I am a student leader continuing to understand the climate here at UofL, I have seen a lot of students who are hesitant to speak-up regarding DEI or racism issues in the classroom for fear of retaliation if they speak-up.

I Can't Teach Without Talking About DEI

- I teach child development & early childhood education courses. I cannot teach these things in a meaningful way without including the development of gender identity, bias in education, trauma informed care, neurodiversity...etc., etc. Many of my students are interested in the pay gap for early educators. That can't be addressed without talking about the history of race and gender roles in this country.
- I know many faculty who are concerned about being competitive for grants when we might be directed by the state not to use/discuss/examine/work with specific terms that are central concepts within our disciplines
 - Wait and see what happens and "wait and follow the law" would harm the community, students, and university.
- I feel like if we don't plant our feet firmly, we'll eventually not be able to even teach history accurately. 1994 me never imagined that 2024 me would be having this conversation. Need to stop it now so 2034 me will still be able to teach history accurately.

I Feel Like My Job Is At Risk

- When my title/position have been targeted and released to the KY legislature my job is at risk, based on the legislative requests going into the anti-DEI bill Jan 2025.
- I've felt nervous about teaching about social inequities and anti-oppressive practices feels almost risqué and although I think it's the right thing to do, I'm worried if it'll be impacted in the future.
- Just because we're within these four walls – doesn't mean we're all on the same level

RECOMMENDATIONS

What are potential strategies

Need to stick to our guns and support our programs

- We are told that this is the most diverse student population we've ever had statistically – most international students, especially from Asia, Middle East, Africa, South and Latin America
 - Rather than reduce DEI efforts, I feel like our university space is becoming increasingly diverse, and we need to invest *more* in our cultural centers, our DEI spaces etc. as these are the spaces that help our students.
- Supporting one another, because once one person takes the risk to stand up for our programs/centers it becomes easier to take collective action

Proactive Communications or Strategies

- President and leadership should be out in the community and in Frankfort speaking against the attacks on DEI.
- Plain, clear statement like “We’re going to talk about X because it’s important to us”.
- Share the science – students benefit from being in classrooms with diverse learners. This cannot truly happen if we suppress our differences.
- In Florida, when we were able to provide data to the bottom-line impact to some of their policies, legislators were willing to walk them back. Example: a University that lost a contract, could not recruit students, if athletic teams are having trouble recruiting their top prospects. Those anecdotes have an impact.
- The idea of jawboning has been evidence in KY where there has not been any proactive communications or strategies. Rather senior leaders have been more reactive after the fact than proactive.
- Working “behind the scenes” has not worked in other states. Standing up to legislative attacks to protect the groups being targeted working in equity positions.

Consistent messaging

- Consistent messaging with actions supporting it. Instead of “the language of this workshop/office/program needs to change” etc.

What We Can Do as a Campus Community

- The main thing I really appreciated about today's session was the emphasis on what we can do as a campus community and as private citizens. So much focus is on what “they” should do, and I believe there is power in the voices of many and not just a few. Would love to have more sessions about individual action - Amy's advice was amazingly powerful.
- I’m a bit of a stubborn rebel and use my old white guy privilege to say what I think needs to be said to the other white people in the moment without checking into the repercussions because I don’t care what they are.
- Reach out to your legislators and let them know how you feel! Encourage them to vote against anti-DEI legislation, let your voice be heard

RESOURCES:

Pen America

[America's Censored Classrooms 2024](#)

Campus Free Speech Guide – [Diversity & Inclusion](#), [Issues](#)

Legislative Advocacy Tools:

While today's session is primarily for listening, I believe it's important to equip participants with tools for advocacy if they choose to pursue that route.

- A tool for finding one's state legislators: [Find Your Legislator](#)
- Options for contacting legislators: [Legislative Research Commission Contact Page](#)
- A video guide on calling legislators, which walks through the process: [How to Call Legislators](#)

United Campus Workers (UCW) of Kentucky <https://ucwkentucky.org/>

Human Resources

- Discrimination and Harassment [webpage](#)
- Duty to Report and Non-Retaliation [Policy Statement](#)
- [Complaint Form](#) For Discrimination/Harassment

[Chatham House Rules](#) - The Chatham House Rule helps create a trusted environment to understand and resolve complex problems. Its guiding spirit is: share the information you receive, but do not reveal the identity of who said it.

- The Rule reads as follows: When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.
- LINK: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/chatham-house-rule>

Thank You CODRE

- I especially appreciate today's session for the ideas of what we can all do as individuals, not just feeling helpless in waiting and feeling that our fates are solely determined by others
- Thank you for having this discussion. There is no one, that I am aware of, having this conversation about the disappearance of DEI/anti-racism policies
- For me, attending these sessions provides not just guidance on things that may directly impact me, but to get a better understanding of issues I am not as aware of for faculty, staff, and students. Just being more aware really.
- I came to learn whatever I can. DEI is supported in my department, but I don't know what is going on across the university or higher up the chain.
- None of us knows everything, but we all know something so this has all been very informative and affirming.
- I believe these listening sessions are informative and that many people from the university community like me appreciate the opportunity to attend them. Thanks for the important work that you do!