

Endangered Scholars Worldwide

Attacks on higher education communities are occurring at an alarming rate worldwide, threatening the safety and well-being of scholars, students, and academic staff, as well as the autonomy of higher education institutions. While we continue to publish regular updates in *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, in response to a global increase in threats to academic freedom, Endangered Scholars Worldwide (ESW) has expanded its presence as an online publication under the auspices of the New University in Exile Consortium (www.newuniversityinexileconsortium.org), sharing frequent updates on new and developing cases in contribution to the Consortium's efforts to create a supportive intellectual community for threatened, exiled scholars.



For the most current information and ways in which you can be involved in our efforts to defend academic freedom and free expression, we invite you to visit our website www.endangeredscholarsworldwide.net or follow us at <https://twitter.com/ESWNEWSCHOOL>.

If you are aware of a scholar or student whose case you believe we should investigate, please get in touch with us at esw@newschool.edu.

Thank you for your unwavering support.

SPECIAL DELIVERY

As the global escalation of violent, antidemocratic political tendencies has continued to target and harm scholars, researchers, and students

across the world, from Ukraine to Afghanistan, from Iran to China, democratic regress and its impact on academic freedom and autonomy of higher education have become observable in the United States. The number of legislations, executive orders, state attorney general letters, and statements by governors and local school boards targeting academic freedom and autonomy of higher education have skyrocketed in the past few years, especially after President Trump's controversial September 2020 executive order, which intended to ban the teaching of "divisive concepts" in diversity trainings for federal employees and which was revoked by President Biden in 2021. According to PEN America's Index of Educational Gag Orders, a regularly updated nationwide database, the number of legislative proposals targeting the education system and academic freedom increased 250 percent between 2021 and 2022; some of these bills address not only public education but also private colleges and universities.

According to a recent UCLA study, in the aftermath of the revoked September 2020 executive order, legislative efforts to revise the public education curricula and limit freedom of speech and academic freedom have drastically escalated. State laws and school boards in conservative states have become instruments of the war against critical race theory (CRT), gender and sexuality studies, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs. From January 2021 to December 2022, 563 anti-CRT measures were introduced at federal, state, and local levels, and 241 were enacted or adopted. Since January 2022, at least one anti-CRT measure has been introduced in every state, except Delaware. The suspension of a sociology course on race and ethnicity at Oklahoma City Community College in light of a new Oklahoma law, the circulation of written guidelines to the faculty at Iowa State University on how to avoid controversial topics and "drawing scrutiny" to their courses under Iowa's new legislation, and the legislative proposal in Texas to dissolve tenure positions in higher education are but few examples of this dangerous and widespread trend.

Not surprisingly, the UCLA researchers found different trends in red (Republican) and blue (Democratic) states. In red states, the anti-CRT efforts mostly take place at the state level, whereas in blue states, the efforts remain at the local level (school boards, local governments, etc.). Wyoming is the only red state that has not adopted a statewide anti-CRT measurement so far.

Florida and Texas have been leading efforts to reform the public education curriculum for both K–12 and higher education. Most of the bills target the topics of race, gender and sexuality, national or religious identity, and matters of diversity and equity. Florida conservative political circles, led by Governor Ron DeSantis, consider universities as domains of indoctrination, which should be freed from so-called radical left-wing orthodoxy. The government’s plan was inspired by a model legislation to bypass or completely end DEI programs at public universities, which was devised by the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, a conservative American think tank focused on domestic policy. The model legislation proposes “to abolish DEI bureaucracies; to end mandatory diversity training; to curtail ‘political coercion’”; and to eliminate identity-based preferences. DEI regulations are considered by conservatives as an instrument of “racialist ideology, bureaucratic capture, and the destruction of their public academies.”

In response to Governor DeSantis’s legislative war against “woke indoctrination,” in March 2023 college students in Florida organized numerous walkouts to protest a series of state legislations including, but not limited to, HB 7, also known as Stop Wrongs to Our Kids and Employees Act (Stop WOKE Act), which was enacted in 2022 with the intention of limiting and criminalizing the teaching of CRT at public schools and universities. Moreover, on May 20, 2023, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) issued a travel advisory for Florida, putting particular emphasis on the recently ratified SB 266, which prohibits higher education institutions from spending state funds on DEI initiatives. This law builds on SB 7044,



which requires periodic reviews of tenured faculty and compels professors to post their syllabi online 45 days before the first day of classes.

The state efforts reached beyond the curriculum design and censorship of certain subjects and started to threaten job security and intellectual independence of scholars and researchers in public universities, by revising the definition of tenured faculty. On May 29, 2023, the Texas State Senate and House passed legislative proposals to revise the conditions of tenure and end DEI offices in public universities. The acceptable reasons to grant and revoke tenure are vague in the bill, and they could be easily instrumentalized to fire faculty whose opinions are not in line with the university administration or state government.

Endangered Scholars Worldwide condemns the state and local government measures that attack diversity, equity, inclusion, and freedom of speech in education. Academic freedom is a specific form of freedom of speech, which is protected by the First Amendment of the US Constitution. We at the ESW believe these anti-CRT and anti-DEI legislations and related institutional changes that reappropriate public schools and universities as ideological state apparatuses not only pose a great danger to the future of democratic, equitable, and inclusionary education in individual states, but also threaten the future of constitutionally protected freedom of speech nationwide. Without freedom of speech, institutional autonomy, and job security, higher education institutions are not able to conduct rigorous research, produce and transmit scholarly knowledge, or provide objective, scientific, critically constructive input to public debates.

Visit www.endangeredscholarsworldwide.net for more information.

—By Dolunay Bulut