Legislative interference in college curricula and diversity efforts is bad for South Carolina.

Why?

Freedom to learn

- Curriculum censorship imposes limits on students’ abilities, curiosity, and ambition. Students do not need – or want – their legislators to protect them from hard facts, difficult pasts, new ideas, or people unlike themselves.
- Students value a diverse academic environment. In a Niche survey of 21,866 students graduating high school in 2022, “diversity was the top thing that students want in a campus community.” Over ¾ of respondents said that diverse student bodies and faculty were “appealing” or a “must-have.” If students do not find the environment they are looking for in South Carolina, many will go elsewhere.

Free speech

- Students and their professors enjoy the First Amendment right to speak freely. Legislation like Florida’s “Stop Woke” act have already been enjoined by courts, and the likelihood that these bills will survive court challenge is slim.

Workforce development

- South Carolina needs more college graduates. Diversity, equity, and inclusion offices work to make college more welcoming to all kinds of students, including:
  - First-generation students whose parents didn’t go to college
  - Students from racial and ethnic minority groups, including students from the growing Latino population
  - Students whose first destination after high school was the armed services.
  - Students from low-income and minority communities that currently send few high school graduates to college.
- USC's new program to cover tuition and fees for top students from low-income families across the state is a DEI initiative.
- The business community wants to work with colleges and universities to train students prepared for an increasingly global workforce. Milliken & Company supported the now-discontinued undergraduate DEI certificate at USC Upstate because it aligned with the company’s endorsement of the CEO Action Pledge for Diversity and Inclusion.
- Workforce development certificates in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion like that offered by Winthrop University are increasingly common in business schools across the US.
They offer students training that reflects the values of South Carolina’s major employers and an advantage in competitive job markets across the country.

**Brain Drain**

- In a recent AAUP survey of faculty in Florida, Texas, Georgia, and North Carolina, over two-thirds of respondents said that they would not recommend their states as a desirable place to work. Already, 1 in 5 respondents have interviewed for jobs in other states.
- University recruitment is a competitive environment: talented individuals will not accept endowed chairs, deanships, or ordinary faculty positions if they believe that their teaching or their research might be subject to political censure.

**Accreditation**

- Curriculum censorship and defunding DEI programs may have negative effects on accreditation of units across campuses, especially in professional schools like Nursing and Education.
- Individual academic programs, especially professional programs, rely on accreditation from a variety of professional bodies which establish standards, most of which call on educational institutions to train a diverse group of future faculty. The Arnold School of Public Health at USC Columbia, for instance, answers to five different accrediting bodies, all of which expect faculty experts to determine the curriculum and to train a diverse student body.
- NCAA by-laws require Division 1 member schools to conduct a review of diversity, equity, and inclusion policies every four years.

**Grant money**

- Grant agencies, especially federal agencies like the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health, seek to ensure that research money goes to teams that are training diverse groups of future scientists.
- The NIH “Notice of Interest in Diversity,” for instance, reads: “Research shows that diverse teams working together outperform homogenous teams. Scientists and trainees from diverse backgrounds and with different life experiences bring different perspectives, creativity, and individual enterprise to address complex scientific problems. . . . It is expected that the research program will include a diverse group of scientists, including individuals from underrepresented backgrounds.”
- DEI considerations are central to SC Nexus for Advanced Resilient Energy, whose core partners include South Carolina State, USC, and Clemson and that was just designated a Regional Technology and Innovation Hub. More than 40% of the long-term jobs created by SC Nexus will be sourced from underserved and rural communities — one of the reasons why the SC Nexus application was successful.
- In fiscal year 2023, USC earned $181 million in federal research grants and the trend line is moving upward. De-funding DEI offices puts an extra hurdle in front of South Carolina researchers.

Carol E. Harrison  
President, SC Conference of the AAUP  
CarolHarrison1870@gmail.com

Joseph Fitsanakis  
President, AAUP at Coastal Carolina  
jfitsanak@coastal.edu