

Higher Ed Accreditor Moves to Drop DEI Language From Standards

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges wants to swap DEI standards for colleges and universities with emphasis on institutional excellence, success.

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A student sits in a lecture hall while class is being dismissed at the University of Texas in Austin on Feb. 22, 2024. Brandon Bell/Getty Image



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12/10/2024

Updated: 12/10/2024

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A higher education accreditor is looking to remove references to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) from its accreditation standards, opting instead to emphasize institutional excellence and student success.

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges' Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC), which serves schools in the Western

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United States and elsewhere—including all campuses of the California state university system—has proposed to remove language requiring schools to explicitly commit to DEI in order to receive accreditation.



The proposed changes, published on the WSCUC website last week, include side-by-side comparisons showing how DEI phrasing could be excised from four current standards.



For example, one current standard states that an institution must



promote “the success of all students and [make] explicit its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.” A revised version instead simply calls for promoting “institutional excellence and success for all students,” entirely omitting DEI references.

Another standard, which currently requires the institution to realize “its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion,” would instead require the institution to achieve “its objectives for educational excellence and success for all students.”

The commission will be voting on the revisions on Dec. 17.

According to WSCUC officials, the proposed changes to its standards are based on feedback that showed an interest in standards that are “easy to understand and apply in practice,” prompting the accreditor to refine its language to better emphasize student outcomes, in the

process dropping the DEI concept, which has become too broad and distracting.

“The refined language enhances the Standards’ clarity and focus while retaining their original intent and foundational principles,” the accreditor said on its website.

Some critics see the move as preemptively accommodating the incoming Trump administration, which has been openly critical of DEI initiatives. During his campaign, President-elect Donald Trump [vowed](#) to “fire the radical left accreditors that have allowed our colleges to become dominated by Marxist maniacs and lunatics.”

PEN America, a literary and free speech organization, wrote to the WSCUC on Dec. 6 that it is concerned about removing or altering language “in the face of an incoming president who has threatened to ‘fire the accreditors.’”

“We are concerned that the proposed changes to the Standards may be doing just that: complying with ideological restrictions before the government actually imposes them,” PEN America’s [letter](#) read, warning that these changes are “likely to inspire similar standards changes” at other accreditation bodies, even when there are no laws or rules mandating them to do so.

“This sends a message that universities will voluntarily alter their values or adapt and contort themselves to suit the ideological whims of politicians,” the organization said.

WSCUC is one of seven nonprofit bodies currently accrediting institutions of higher education in the United States.

DEI initiatives have gained a great deal of traction in corporations and academia since 2020, following the death of George Floyd and subsequent protests and national debate on race and racism. At their height, DEI-related goals were incorporated into the missions and operation of major companies, universities, and accrediting agencies alike.

However, recent months have seen a retreat, with large corporations such as [Walmart](#) and institutions like the [University of Michigan](#)—which once hosted the nation’s largest and most expensive DEI program—scaling back their focus on such initiatives.

There have also been legislative efforts at the federal level to ban college accreditors from imposing DEI standards on colleges as part of the evaluation process. One such bill was introduced last June by Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) and backed by Sens. Rick Scott (R-Fla.), Mike Lee (R-Utah), and James Lankford (R-Okla.).

The imposition of ideological standards like DEI as part of the accreditation process is unfair for colleges, which feel the need to “comply with woke standards or risk reputational and financial ruin,” Rubio said at that time. The bill never made it out of the committee, but the push continued.

More recently, in September, the House passed the “End Woke Higher Education Act,” a Republican-led bill that includes provisions to block accreditors from imposing DEI standards on colleges as a condition of accreditation.

Those portions of the bill had the endorsement of Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-N.C.), who chairs the House’s education committee.

“Accreditation bodies and universities have increasingly promoted DEI initiatives that risk undermining intellectual diversity and free expression,” she said.

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