

# [***Texas ban on university diversity efforts provides a glimpse of the future across GOP-led states***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BBV-02X1-JC5B-G38C-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

AUSTIN, Texas — The dim lighting and vacant offices were the first clues.

Other changes struck Nina Washington, a senior at the University of Texas, when she returned to her favorite study spot from winter break. The words “Multicultural Center” had been taken off the wall, erasing an effort begun in the late 1980s to serve historically marginalized communities on campus. The center's staff members were gone, its student groups dissolved.

“***Politics***, behaviors and emotions are returning to the old ways,” said Washington, who as a Black woman found a sense of community at the center.

The void in the heart of the nearly 52,000-student campus is one of many changes rippling across college campuses in Texas, where one of the nation's most sweeping bans on diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives took effect Jan. 1.

At least five other states have passed their own bans and [*Republican lawmakers in at least 19 states*](https://apnews.com/article/dei-state-legislation-diversity-4d80ec7e9d372e74b129efc402ac0b76) are pursuing various restrictions on diversity initiatives, an issue they hope will mobilize their voters this election year.

With over 600,000 students enrolled at more than 30 public universities across the state, the rollout in Texas offers a large-scale glimpse of what lies ahead for public higher education without the initiatives designed to make minorities feel less isolated and white students more prepared for careers that require working effectively with people of different backgrounds.

At the University of Texas' flagship campus in Austin, the state's second most populous public university, only 4.5% of the student population is Black and 25.2% is Hispanic, numbers some students fear will drop as they struggle to adjust in an atmosphere of fear about what they can say and do.

[*The law*](https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/88R/billtext/pdf/SB00017F.pdf#navpanes=0) signed by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott bans public higher education institutions from influencing hiring practices with respect to race, sex, color or ethnicity, and prohibits promoting “differential” or “preferential” treatment or “special” benefits for people based on these categories. Also forbidden are training and activities conducted “in reference to race, color, ethnicity, gender identity, or sexual orientation."

Republican state Sen. Brandon Creighton, who authored the bill, said in an emailed comment Tuesday that DEI efforts claim they are meant to increase diversity, “but after close examination, they are an effort to inject ***politics*** and promote cancel-culture into our colleges and universities.”

Time will tell. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, whose nine members are appointed by the governor, is required to inform lawmakers every two years about the ban’s impact on admissions, academic progress and graduation rates of students by race, sex and ethnicity.

To comply with the law, the cultural identity centers that admissions offices promoted to attract minorities are now closed. University websites have scrubbed out references to “diversity” and “inclusion,” replacing them with “access” and “community engagement.” Staff have been reassigned to new roles.

“People want to keep their jobs, but many of us were trained to do this work around diversity, inclusion and equity and were hired specifically to do that,” said Patrick Smith, vice president of the Texas Faculty Association.

Professors are fearful, editing their syllabi and watching their speech, as they navigate the boundaries of compliance, Smith said.

As for the multicultural center in the student union on the Austin campus, the university announced it will consider how best to use the space "to continue building community for all Longhorns.”

Meanwhile, although [*the law explicitly exempts academics*](https://apnews.com/article/texas-am-kathleen-mcelroy-diversity-ban-5ba0f54b0aadb7030c745c43fb560995), uncertainty over its scope also has professors and students wondering how to comply.

“To know that your speech is monitored and basically censored if you do the kind of work that I do, that is a strange feeling,” said Karma Chavez, a professor of Mexican American and Latino/a Studies at the university.

The Hispanic Faculty Association, of which Chavez is the co-president, has been prohibited from meeting during working hours or using campus spaces without paying a fee. They can't even communicate through university email, and groups affiliated with the university cannot co-sponsor events with them.

The limits have Chavez catching herself in meetings or when mentoring a student before she speaks on race or ethnicity, because she is unsure of what she can say and when.

“I don’t think I am self-censoring, I think I have been censored by the state legislature,” Chavez said.

University officials shuttered a group aimed at providing resources for students who qualified for the federal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. Chavez said the DACA group wasn't specifically helping any of the classifications of people, so “it tells you how widely, how extensively they are interpreting the law.”

Some student groups whose university funding has been prohibited are struggling with the financial burden of maintaining their identity communities and continuing cultural traditions.

University of Texas senior Christian Mira, financial officer for the Queer Trans Black Indigenous People Of Color Agency, said the group lost its space in the multicultural center and has been [*aggressively fundraising*](https://apnews.com/article/dei-nonprofits-affirmative-action-freedom-fund-a5d3928a2c9bc8b85e844314664ec275) through alumni, local supporters and community outreach. They hope to keep supporting a lively community of students with signature events including a block party, leadership institutes and a ball, although they're not sure where.

“College is already a difficult experience, so having people around you who you depend on to have that kind of community — it made students feel safe, it made students feel like they could succeed on campus,” Mira said.

Alexander De Jesus, who attends UT-Dallas and is an advocate with Texas Students for DEI, said they prepared for months in ways big and small, such as more clearly advertising that anyone can use a closet of clothes frequented by students who are transitioning.

“It has also been stressful telling other students, ‘Hey, keep your head up,’” De Jesus said. “It is difficult to say that when you see a climate of fear developing and when you see people who are justifiably angered about traditional pathways or ***politics*** or people not listening to them."

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