

MINNEAPOLIS

University of Minnesota law school is halting search for new DEI leader in response to Trump's ban

The university also is requiring all communications related to diversity, equity and inclusion be reviewed by attorneys.

By Sarah Ritter and Maya Rao
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The University of Minnesota is tightening up its messaging about diversity work, by implementing a new systemwide policy requiring legal counsel to review all internal and external communications related to DEI. (Angelina Katsanis/The Minnesota Star Tribune)

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The University of Minnesota law school is pausing the search for its next assistant dean of diversity, equity, and inclusion as administrators navigate President Donald Trump's ban of DEI programs in the federal government.

The university also is tightening up its messaging about diversity work, by implementing a new systemwide policy requiring legal counsel to review all internal and external communications related to DEI.

Spokesman Jake Ricker said the university is not rolling back diversity, equity and inclusion or making preemptive changes to existing programs. But he said the university is moving forward cautiously, including by freezing the new hire, while administrators seek clarity on the White House directives.

President Trump has aggressively moved to abolish diversity and inclusion offices and programs across the U.S. government by leveraging federal money. Higher education relies on federal dollars for many programs, research projects and contract work.

Trump has called for investigations into whether [some schools with endowments over \\$1 billion](#) are complying with his orders.

[Universities are scrambling](#) in response to the edicts, with some colleges renaming programs, assessing titles, suspending research projects and canceling events related to diversity. Others are remaining quiet or vowing to continue DEI initiatives.

At the University of Minnesota, law school Dean William McGeveran said in a Friday email, provided to the Star Tribune, that as the university reassesses its programs related to diversity, it became "clear that we have no choice" but to halt the search for a new assistant dean of diversity, equity and inclusion.

He said scheduled visits with finalists were canceled.

“This is a disappointing development for many, and I know it brings questions and uncertainty for our community,” McGeveran said in the email. “My commitment to supporting all of our students, faculty, and staff remains unchanged, as does the Law School’s mission of building a legal profession representative of the people it serves.”

McGeveran added that many “important programs will continue, both at the Law School and across the university.”

In addition, the university will conduct legal reviews of all external and internal communications related to DEI, according to an email recently sent by marketing staff in the school of social work and shared with the Star Tribune.

The Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost has requested all schools and colleges within the U system to follow the new policy.

“This approach is in place to ensure that when the university communicates about this important topic we are considering the latest information from federal agencies to meet both our legal obligations and fulfill our strong commitment to our people and our public land-grant mission,” Ricker said in a statement.

The school of social work’s internal email said the team was working “to understand what communications related to DEI means.”

Word of the U’s policy emerged during an unrelated event in St. Paul on Saturday during which local and state representatives addressed Trump’s crackdown on undocumented immigrants.

Kelley Leaf, practicum coordinator and teaching specialist at the school of social work, told the group that the new policy “is absolutely horrifying. ... I wanted to make sure that our state leadership understands that the University of Minnesota preemptively crumbled like a cookie.”

Afterward, Leaf told the Star Tribune that the school of social work has a committee for equity, justice and inclusion and that they wouldn’t be able to send out emails about the committee’s work under the new policy.

“They are quelling any internal conversation – that is so broad,” said Leaf of the policy, stressing that she was not speaking on behalf of the school. “It has an effect of chilling any kind of organization or work around DEI.”

At the event, Regent Robyn Gully responded to Leaf that she hadn’t seen the email but “that’s not anything that we should be doing, and that’s not the direction that I’ve been giving to the University of Minnesota.”

Ricker said in a statement, “We want to assure everyone in our community that we value the activities that support diversity of thought and inclusion, which strengthen our teaching and research.”

Erin Adler of the Minnesota Star Tribune and The Associated Press contributed to this story.

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