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## 2 States Restricted DEI. Here's How Colleges Revised Their Websites.

8–10 minutes



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When legislatures in Florida and Texas adopted laws this year to all but eliminate diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts at public colleges and universities, it was unknown what the impact might be on the ground.

A few institutions, including [Texas State University](#) and the

[University of North Texas](#), have since announced that administrative units related to diversity would be dissolved, yet many colleges have remained largely quiet about how they plan to comply. [The University of Texas at Dallas](#) announced this week that while it would abide by the new law, it would not lay off employees in its DEI office, *The Dallas Morning News* reported.

A *Chronicle* analysis of websites at two institutions, the University of Texas at Austin and Florida State University, in May and June, offers some clues. The analysis focused on websites controlled by university administrations rather than individual departments.

Neither university responded to requests for comment. As a result, it is unclear whether the website changes reflect shifts to university programs and structures, or if some programs were removed from websites but still exist, and whether the changes were in response to the new laws.

The revisions include removing the word “equity” from a web address, cutting a statement about the commitment to diversity, and deleting a page for a diversity institute that had been described as a learning resource for business and community leaders, faculty, staff, and underrepresented students.

Jay Hartzell, president of the University of Texas at Austin, sent a

[message](#) to faculty and staff on June 6 that said: “We are actively working to understand and assess the rest of our landscape, the contours of the new legal framework, and how the UT System will implement its oversight under the new legislation. While I can imagine there is uncertainty and anxiety regarding the future, I ask for your patience as we begin this work and await further guidance based on UT System policy later this summer.”

Florida’s [Senate Bill 266](#), which prohibits public colleges from spending state or federal funds “to promote, support, or maintain any programs or campus activities that … advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion, or promote or engage in political or social activism” took effect July 1 but leaves it to state regulators to define those terms, which they have yet to do. Texas’ [Senate Bill 17](#) will ban public colleges from having DEI offices or staff, requiring diversity statements, and requiring diversity training, among other measures. That law takes effect January 1, 2024.

Both states’ laws provide for significant exemptions. In Florida, those include complying with federal laws and accreditation directives with approval from the state, as well as programs benefiting veterans, Pell Grant recipients, first-generation college students, nontraditional students, certain transfer students from the state college system, students from low-income families, and students with “unique abilities.” The Texas law exempts classroom instruction, research or creative work, and student recruitment, among other areas.

The lack of clarity about what changes have or haven’t been made has led some [conservative critics](#) to ask if colleges are merely changing words here and there but keeping the substance of their DEI programs.

Sherry Sylvester, a senior fellow at the Texas Public Policy Foundation who has written about faculty and staff [resisting](#) efforts to shutter diversity programs, said DEI is a worldview that divides people into oppressors and the oppressed.

“I am hoping that our flagships do not think that they can solve this problem ... by changing their websites,” Sylvester said. The law, she added, requires public colleges to close all offices that operate DEI programs.

Soni Shukla, a sophomore at the University of Texas at Austin studying government and public policy, said that while DEI practices there may change, she feels confident the university will remain committed to helping all kinds of students succeed. “I think it’s just going to be reimagined and it’s going to look very different,” Shukla said. “But I’m not worried about the future of DEI here.”

Paulette Granberry Russell, president of the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education, said she had heard anecdotal evidence of diversity officers being reassigned to other divisions, but few details. “There’s a certain amount of anxiety that is being generated as a result of the lack of guidance,” Russell said.

In Florida, Andrew Gothard, president of the United Faculty of Florida union, said the lack of guidance from the state has contributed to a chilling effect, instilling fear in faculty members that they might unknowingly violate the law because it’s unclear what the law means. Colleges are also left scrambling to interpret whether specific programs may continue or not, he said. “Does that mean we just have to take ... the word, the letters ‘DEI’ out of the program and then it’s fine? I mean, nobody really knows what

to do.”

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## Sample website changes

### University of Texas at Austin

- A “[Glossary of Terms](#)” listed under the university’s Financial and Administrative Services’ Diversity Commitment previously offered definitions of various terms associated with diversity including “cisgender,” “ethnocentrism,” and “mansplain.” After being spotlighted by the conservative writer and activist [Christopher F. Rufo](#) on Twitter on May 2, the glossary no longer appears on the [website](#).
- Last September, the university’s Division of Diversity and Community Engagement had a website for a “[Diversity Institute](#),” described as “a learning resource for diversity and inclusion.” The institute offered diversity certificates for business and community leaders, faculty, and staff, and leadership-development programs for underrepresented students. The entire [vertical](#) for the website has been archived or suspended.
- The Office for Inclusion and Equity transitioned at some point into the [Center for Equity and Inclusion](#). The Texas law specifically prohibits colleges from establishing or maintaining a diversity, equity, and inclusion “office.”
- The webpage for [Community Driven Initiatives](#), part of the Center for Community Engagement, part of the Division of Community Engagement, removed the word “equity” from the [web address](#).
- The Geosciences School’s webpage for Diversity and Inclusion previously included a three-paragraph statement about the

school's [commitment](#) to diversity. The school's [current](#) diversity and inclusion page does not include the statement. In addition, the school's webpage for "[Diversity and Inclusion Resources and Organizations](#)" is [no longer available](#) at that address.

## **Florida State University**

- The website for the university's Center for Leadership and Social Change previously had a tab for [diversity](#) that was later [removed](#). Webpages for various [diversity-related programs](#) are no longer linked to the center's landing page, including one for a [Hispanic/Latinx Cultural Celebration](#), a program developed with members of the Seminole Tribe of Florida to [welcome students](#) back to campus, and a webpage commemorating [Women's History Month](#). A program called "commUNITY Dialogue Series" that was previously listed as a "[Diversity](#)" program has been moved to the "[Leadership](#)" tab list.
- More recently, the center dropped "Social Change" from its name and is now the [Center for Leadership and Service](#). Its website no longer has any menu tabs.
- The [website](#) for the university's Office of Human Resources previously had a page for [equity, diversity and inclusion](#). That [page](#) no longer exists.