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Texas's War on DEI

The Lone Star State takes aim at diversity programs at public universities, with varying success.

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States across the country are cracking down on diversity, equity, and inclusion policies in higher education. But even as some legislatures successfully ban DEI on public campuses, some schools have tried to skirt the rules.

Texas, for example, [banned](#) DEI offices and functions at public universities in 2023. To ensure compliance, the state requires public universities to submit annual reports to the legislature and makes similar demands of each school's governing board. Colleges or universities defying the ban must either correct their violations or face financial penalties.

Initially, many Texas universities recognized they were out of compliance and closed their DEI offices. As I document in [a report](#) for the Claremont Institute, Texas A&M, once [an outspoken](#) DEI proponent, dissolved its Office of Diversity, and removed its website's extensive list of diversity initiatives, directors, and committees. The school's former lead diversity officer now teaches business classes; her chief assistants have been relocated to academic departments. Former DEI deans in dentistry, education, law, and medicine now either teach or have retired. While the school has retained some deans with ambiguous titles such as "[associate dean for programmatic success](#)" and "[assistant dean for community wellness and engagement](#)," A&M president Mark Welsh deserves credit for broadly complying with the law.

The University of Texas, Austin, on the other hand, has responded to Texas's DEI ban with a mixture of paper compliance, strategic obfuscation, and open defiance. UT rebranded its "Division of Diversity and Community Engagement" as the [Division of Campus and Community Engagement](#) while keeping many of the same personnel. One of the division's programs is called the [Center for Access and Restorative Engagement](#), with "access" as the new word for "equity" and "restorative engagement" a euphemism for "inclusion."

The new division builds on UT's mission to promote DEI. The school's two diversity-related strategic plans—"The Strategic Plan for Faculty Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity" and "The Change Starts Here Strategic Plan"—remain active on the school's website. Each plan makes ideological hiring central to UT's mission. In particular, the Faculty plan promises to recruit, retain, and support diverse staff and to promote diversity scholarship.

UT's defiance extends beyond the Austin campus. In 2023, ten of UT's 15 affiliated colleges had publicly available DEI plans or included DEI in their strategic plans. All but two had a DEI committee listed on their websites, and all but two had at least one college-level DEI director or dean.

Texas's flagship public university has made some changes in response to the new legislation, but those changes have mostly constituted strategic obfuscation. The DEI committee in the Cockrell School of Engineering has amended its name from the "Standing Committee on Diversity and Inclusion" to "[Broadening Participation in Engineering](#)." The College of Pharmacy Diversity, Equity, Accessibility & Inclusion Committee has been rechristened the [Opportunity and Belonging Committee](#).

Similar paper changes are found among the titles of college-level administrators. Cockrell's DEI dean, Christine Julien, was associate dean for DEI but now is the [associate dean for Broadening Participation in Engineering](#). The College of Natural Sciences had an assistant dean for Strategy and Equity Initiatives who is now the [senior assistant dean for Strategic Initiatives and Partnerships](#). Five UT-affiliated colleges retain the functional equivalents of DEI deans; most have simply removed mention of the DEI committees from their websites.

Governing boards are tasked with discovering whether DEI activity has merely garbed itself in new robes. The University of Texas at Austin appears to be daring its coordinating board, the state legislature, and the relevant auditors to find it in violation.

The battle against top-down DEI administrative impositions is hardly through. Surveys of university websites are not enough to prove that DEI has been abolished at Texas universities. While governors and auditors focus on compliance, legislatures should turn their attention to initiatives such as [general education reform](#) and [program evaluations](#) to ensure that civic education is a reality on university campuses.

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