

Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
Restoring Merit and Excellence in American Higher Education
Testimony of Michael Shires, Ph.D.
America First Policy Institute
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Chairman Gill, Ranking Member Simon, and members of the task force, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. It is a privilege to be here and I am grateful for your leadership and service to our nation.

I am honored to speak to you today on the subject of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policies (DEI) and their devastating impact on one of our most important national treasures—America’s universities and colleges.

I am testifying today in my capacity as the Vice Chair of Education Opportunity and Senior Policy Officer at the America First Policy Institute (AFPI)—a nonpartisan, nonprofit research institute whose work focuses on putting the interests of the American people at the forefront of American public policy. I lead our extensive work in higher education, including research on how DEI undermines the core quality of the educations provided to millions of Americans each year.

I also speak as someone who has spent nearly 40 years in higher education policy and leadership, including 25 years as a professor and administrator at the Pepperdine School of Public Policy and, most recently, a three-years stint as the founding Chief of Staff of one of America’s most innovative new universities, the University of Austin.

In a few days, we celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the proclamation that launched America on a path to freedom, opportunity, and prosperity unrivaled in human history. The central premise of that Declaration is the notion that “all men are created equal” and, even though we have not always lived up to that ideal, its pursuit has fueled 250 years of American success.

Yet our universities and colleges have set aside this principle, instead advancing a virulent DEI ideology rooted in the belief that the United States is a systemically racist, white supremacist project. DEI argues that certain disfavored groups (including whites, men, heterosexuals, even political conservatives) are “oppressors” who must give up their “privilege” in favor of those who are not. Today, this insidious ideology infects nearly every dimension of university practice and governance including hiring, promotions, tenure, admissions, and even academic publishing.

Over the last four decades, I have seen this contagion metastasize. I have sat in university committee meetings where I was personally lectured by peers because of the color of my skin. I have been asked to draft loyalty statements to this ideology to be considered for hire and explicitly told to hire candidates because of their race or gender rather than their ability to do the job. I have seen it devastate careers and close the door of opportunity to some of our best and brightest students.

This leftist monoculture undermines the very purpose of the American investment in higher education: to equip the next generation of Americans to think, debate, and make the best choices for our future based on evidence. The left only allows one perspective on campus—theirs.

On campus after campus, the conversation includes only the left, undermining the very intellectual diversity needed for higher education to fulfill its primary mission. Speakers are cancelled. Students are failed. Shoutdowns, heckler's vetoes, violence and even murder are used to silence dissenting voices.

The American people collectively rejected this un-American divisiveness when they elected President Trump to restore the public interest to higher education.

And he has responded, taking bold steps to roll back the left's DEI stranglehold on higher education by revoking previous executive orders that mandated it, aggressively enforcing existing laws that ban discrimination in all forms—including those called for by DEI, reforming accreditation to increase accountability, limiting the use of the disparate impact doctrine in civil rights law, and demanding institutions be transparent and accountable to the American public.

As a result, DEI forces today appear to be in a state of apparent retreat. Do not be deceived. Many of these discriminatory processes are still at work, just reformulated or hidden for the moment.

AFPI supports and applauds the Administration's actions to reinstitute merit and to restore opportunity for all Americans in higher education.

We also welcome the chance to work with Congress and the Administration to codify these changes through legislation and rulemaking to ensure equal treatment for all Americans of every background in our colleges and universities, much as our founders would have envisioned 250 years ago.

Thank you for this opportunity. I look forward to your questions.