

## 302. Swear Allegiance to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion or Don't Get Hired

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A hiring committee for a professorship at Saint Mary's University asked hopeful scholars to include in their dossiers "a description of how the applicant has advanced equity, diversity, and inclusion at their previous institution." At Dalhousie University, a job ad read, "The candidate must demonstrate a commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility" and must submit "a diversity and inclusion statement."

Saint Mary's and Dalhousie are far from the only universities that seek to discriminate against academics who do not share Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) values or goals. From my quick survey of job advertisements in *University Affairs*, I suspect that half the hiring committees currently at work in Canada propose to take commitment to EDI into consideration when hiring.

The first objection to a university requiring an EDI statement is, of course, that its doing so is tantamount to its imposing a political or ideological condition on employment. Public universities are supported by citizens through tax dollars and, for that reason, shouldn't be asking people about anything unrelated to the job. Indeed, not too long ago it would have been recognized as a scandal had a public institution excluded or even marked down applicants for being of the wrong religion or supporting a despised political party.

A response to this objection is that a commitment to EDI is neither an ideological commitment nor unrelated to a professor's job. But it is ideological, in that asking for a commitment to EDI isn't simply to ask for a commitment to treating people well. EDI involves a very specific way of treating people well, a way that, in fact, isn't at all a way of treating people well (we critics of EDI maintain). EDI enjoins people to treat others as representatives of groups, not as individuals. That makes it ideological (as well as repugnant).

Certainly, part of a professor's job is to treat the people with whom he interacts with civility and respect, but the sort of respect EDI demands is solicitude for and deference to feelings and identities, not respect for intellectual or moral autonomy. Asking for commitment to EDI, then, is to ask for a professor to behave contrary to the standards of academic life.

The second objection is that asking for EDI statements is detrimental to a university's academic mission. It is this objection that I will explain and defend.

EDI is itself fundamentally anti-academic. A university loses its character as an academic institution in proportion to the degree it serves equity, diversity and inclusion in its structures, practices, incentives and curricula. EDI is fundamentally anti-academic for it turns a university away from intellectual community and dispassionate investigation and toward the values and goals of contemporary social justice movements. At an EDI university, when academic values or the academic mission puts social-justice goals at risk, it is the academic that must give. And the

brutality of EDI means (cancelling, shaming, disciplining, punishing, firing) is destructive of collegiality, of respect for intellectual and moral autonomy, and of all other academic values and traditions. Candour, for instance, doesn't stand a chance against an administrator with a safe-and-respectful-campus policy in his or her pocket.

One way, then, in which asking for EDI statements could be detrimental to the academic mission is that it might have the effect of bringing more people with EDI commitments into universities. The more EDI supporters in a university, the greater the risk to independent thought and freedom of inquiry, and the greater the risk to friendly and respectful relations among professors and between professors and students. EDI supporters think research important primarily for its consequences for people they hold to be marginalized or disadvantaged, and not for its intrinsic interest; but only if one is engaged in research ultimately for its own sake will one be committed to following the argument even when it reaches conclusions one doesn't like. A university whose administrators enforce EDI will drive away honest scholars and scholarship.

I wrote in the previous paragraph that asking for EDI statements *might* have the effect of selecting for EDI supporters and against conscientious academics. In fact, I'm sure it will have this effect, but I wanted to leave room for the possibility that applicants for professorships prevaricate or misrepresent their commitments. Many scholars committed to academic values and goals rather than to EDI will give the hiring committee just what the committee asked for. They'd be foolish not to. Even as we speak, online services are preparing excellent EDI statements for such scholars to include in their dossiers. Perhaps because enough of them are willing to pad their statements, if not to lie, the practice of asking for EDI statements won't select against conscientious academics.

Since I doubt that applicants who prefer academic values to EDI values will be able to pull off the deception (given that clues to their real preferences will be scattered throughout their dossiers), I think that asking for EDI statements will indeed bring more EDI supporters into the professoriate, just as it is meant to do, and that this will damage universities academically. But let's suppose quite a few committed academics do manage to win professorships by submitting passable EDI statements. Well, they've engaged in deception, and that's bad enough, but they will have also to maintain that deception at least until they've gained tenure. They will have to shy away from controversial areas and from contributing controversial ideas to discussions. If they are not to be found out, they will have to go against their grounded inclinations and treat students and others according to group stereotypes instead of as members of a community of intellectuals. They will have to treat silly ideas with esteem when they come from members of equity-deserving groups. (They will have to learn to say "equity-deserving groups" without gagging.) The easiest way to succeed at these things, and the one that's the least troubling psychologically, is to engage in self-deception. Come to believe that you believe in EDI—and falling in line with EDI initiatives, practices and standards won't be so difficult.

My point is that the very best for which we can hope when universities ask applicants to swear fealty to EDI is that applicants speak insincerely, and that committee members are happy they do. The best, then, is both unlikely to happen and not something to admire when it does.

To summarize: EDI is anti-academic and the practice of asking job applicants for EDI statements will increase the proportion of EDI supporters in universities. Thus, asking job applicants for EDI

statements will lower the commitment of universities to academic values and to their academic mission, or so my argument has it.

One response is that EDI initiatives and practices are *not* inherently anti-academic. This is the position taken by those given to say that EDI fosters “Inclusive Excellence.” According to Inclusive Excellence, equity, diversity and inclusion are compatible with dispassionate inquiry, freedom of expression on campus, and friendly interpersonal relations untainted by worries about giving offence. Professors committed to EDI are as willing and able to teach students how to think rather than what to think as anyone is. Gauging a prospective professor’s commitment to EDI is merely a way of selecting against bigots and the mean-spirited and selecting for professors likely to understand their students and colleagues in their rich diversity and to care about the wellbeing of everyone.

Suppose, then, that an applicant were to write that they are committed to helping all their students to become independent thinkers, ones neither afraid to discuss controversial matters candidly nor inclined to take offense at the words of others. The applicant writes, as well, that they will inspire a love of learning in their students by inviting them to participate in intellectual endeavours just for the sake of the endeavour. Finally, the applicant writes that they will, out of respect for the intellectual and moral autonomy of their students and colleagues, hold everyone equally to high academic standards.

From an academic perspective, this applicant’s statement reads very well. It’s the sort of thing one would hope to find in a teaching statement. But there’s not a chance that it would impress a partisan of EDI. It says nothing about identifying and treating students from marginalized groups differently than other students or about acknowledging and sympathizing with their plight. It says nothing about respecting feelings or identities. Indeed, in its implicit colour-blindness, it would offend champions of EDI.

Perhaps this applicant goes on to propose that treating all people with respect for their intellectual and moral autonomy and holding everyone equally to high academic standards is a sound way to build an equitable, diverse and inclusive university community. The applicant, that is, includes in their statement an argument that their commitments, strictly academic though they are, serve EDI goals. It wouldn’t matter; no partisan of EDI would be impressed. Treating people with respect for their intellectual and moral autonomy is directly opposed to treating people with respect for their feelings and identities. “E” and “I” in EDI are not the sort of equity or inclusion that respect for intellectual and moral autonomy promotes.

There is simply no way a prospective professor committed to academic values and goals could write an honest EDI statement that wouldn’t disqualify them from further consideration. The claim that asking for an EDI statement is just a way of weeding out inconsiderate, arrogant, narrow-minded or chauvinistic scholars is without merit.

“Inclusive Excellence” is a spectacularly dishonest phrase, another reminder of EDI’s chutzpah. A much more honest response to the argument that EDI is inconsistent with academic values and goals is to accept that it is and then to note that universities are marked by other values and properly serve other goals. On this response, universities are to promote EDI precisely because EDI serves

important non-academic goals. EDI portends the end or, at least, the diminution of the academic university, partisans of EDI agree, but EDI envisions something better in its place.

Asking prospective professors to submit EDI statements and using those statements to weed out applicants who value the academic ethos and the academic mission above the culture and ends of EDI is just what we must do if equity, diversity and inclusion are our primary goals. What can those of us committed to the academic university say in response?

There's nothing to be gained by arguing in favour of the correctness of our values and the evil or perversity of theirs. At this deep level of conflicting values, such arguments would be sterile and would move no one. What we have to do, I think, is to articulate our vision of the academic university and disseminate our articulations. And we must tease out the implications of EDI practices, initiatives and attitudes and make them known as well. By doing so, members of our audience can weigh for themselves what's attractive to them in each vision and what's repellent. Much depends, then, on the nature of our audience. Will it be receptive and sympathetic? That EDI has so quickly progressed as far as it has—so far, indeed, that universities openly and proudly ask job applicants to swear fealty to a very specific and ugly ideology without thereby provoking a public outcry—is worrying, for it suggests our audience doesn't much mind that universities have become post-academic institutions. Well, don't it always seem to go that you don't know what you've got till it's gone? Maybe a little more rot, and *then* people will notice. I suspect that even that's optimistic.