

Column: Indiana University's diversity loyalty - Herald-Times (Bloomington, IN) - September 19, 2021
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You may not have noticed, but the websites at Indiana University have had a significant change. Instead of promising "equality" they now advertise "equity." The difference is not trivial. "Equality" means equal opportunity for all regardless of how people were born. "Equity" means the percentage of people with various characteristics in IU's workforce, especially skin color and gender, need to reflect the same percentage in the population. Nobody voted on this change. Nobody has ever found any evidence that equal opportunity has ever been denied anyone at IU. The goal of "equity" was simply imposed by the administration and various faculty and student groups.

How are they enforcing "equity?" A primary tool is to require all new faculty to fill out a "diversity statement." Candidates for faculty positions are required to describe exactly what they have done in their careers to support the goal of "equity" especially combined with the undefined words "diversity" and "inclusion." Administrators now carefully comb through these statements to determine if a candidate supports the goals of diversity, inclusion and equity. If they are not sufficiently supportive of, or heaven forbid, are opposed to, these goals they will not be interviewed. One wonders what they would do if a black woman candidate said she is opposed to diversity efforts.

Currently Purdue, Notre Dame and Illinois do not require faculty candidates for jobs to submit a "diversity statement." As a result, when IU competes for faculty with these schools it will be at a competitive disadvantage. IU is telling potential faculty that the administrative burden is greater here and that some political views are not tolerated.

Abigail Thompson, chair of University of California Davis's math department, opposes diversity statements in California because they are inevitably political. She observes that politics reflects how you believe society should be organized. Her view and mine is that Americans should aspire to treat every person as a unique individual, not as a representative of their gender or their ethnic group. In contrast, a diversity statement is a loyalty oath to a political view that celebrates identity politics. Employers who demand a diversity statement are looking for a political perspective that promotes hiring based on characteristics a candidate has never been able to change: their age, race, ethnicity, disability, gender, or nationality. IU's "diversity statement" makes these characteristics relevant for employment and requires new faculty to be loyal to the goal of promoting "equity."

The imposition of a "diversity statement" allows administrators to be biased against candidates who are not in these categories (e.g. white, Asian) and against those who think hiring should be only on merit. Units of IU who try to achieve equality of opportunity based on merit, as opposed to "equity," can be denied permission to interview people unless this means "equity." There is currently no room at IU for those who will not submit an oath.

Loyalty oaths have a long history in U.S. higher education. In 1950, the University of California required all faculty to sign a statement asserting that "I am not a member of, nor do I support any

party or organization that believes in, advocates, or teaches the overthrow of the United States Government, by force or by any illegal or unconstitutional means, that I am not a member of the Communist Party." Thirty-one faculty members were fired over their refusal to sign. Among them was David Saxon, an eminent physicist who later became the president of the University of California. Indiana went to the extreme of requiring all professional boxers and wrestlers to sign a similar loyalty oath. These oaths were repeatedly challenged in court and eventually the Supreme Court ruled they violated freedom of speech and freedom of association.

University education should allow a wide range of opinions addressing every issue from all points of view. The political loyalty oaths of 1950 and of 2021 are an attempt to discredit certain views and to make universities homogenous. The 2021 oath is used by administrators to hinder or exclude those who are defined as "non diverse" or who are opposed to diversity efforts. These oaths should be resisted by all who believe that universities are intellectual centers with freedom to explore all ideas. Taxpayers should never support a public university that requires loyalty oaths whether these oaths are against communism or for "diversity." IU needs to drop the requirement to fill out a diversity statement and should change "equity" to "equality" on all websites. The new IU President can certainly make this happen and move IU forward. Elected officials should make sure she does so and our competitors will no doubt force us to change if she does not.

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