

Portland State University Faculty Senate Motion
1 November 2021

Defending Academic Freedom to Teach and Research Race and Gender Justice and Critical Race Theory

Background

"McCarthyism has returned." These are the recent words of Ellen Schrecker, author of *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities*. In the summer of 2021, Republican politicians began proposing legislation against "divisive concepts" and critical race theory. Bills have passed in twelve states and are pending in others. (The African American Policy Forum tracks the legislation [here](#).) The attempt to use the state to restrict teaching and research about race and racism is, in fact, "worse than McCarthyism," Schrecker [wrote](#), because "the red scare of the 1950s marginalized dissent and chilled the nation's campuses, but it did not interfere with such matters as curriculum or classroom teaching." Academics failed to come together to mount a strong defense of academic freedom in the 1950s. We can do better today.

Whether these bills are currently being proposed in Oregon or not, we believe that Faculty Senates everywhere must speak up against them and in defense of academic freedom. We join with our colleagues across the country in resolving the following:

Motion presented by the Steering Committee in collaboration with several other Senators

Whereas

State legislative proposals are being introduced across the United States that target academic discussions of racism and related issues in American history in schools, colleges and universities;

Whereas

The [Constitution of the Portland State University Faculty](#) (Article 3) states that "The Faculty has primary responsibility for such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, research, faculty status, and those aspects of student life that relate to the education process";

Whereas

The University and PSU-AAUP, in the [collective bargaining agreement](#) (Article 12), and the Board of Trustees, in [The Roles of the Board, President and Faculty, Shared Governance and Academic Freedom](#) (Article 4), citing the American Association of University Professors' [1940 statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure](#), affirm the importance of academic freedom to the proper functioning of this academic institution;

Whereas

The PSU Faculty Senate [resolved](#), and President Percy [affirmed](#), that faculty involvement in public campaigns intended to intimidate colleagues with whom they disagree is an abuse of academic freedom;

Whereas

State legislative proposals vary, but all seek to prohibit or restrict curriculum addressing what they call “divisive concepts” in the education and training of students; insofar as these issues are intertwined with faculty research agendas, these prohibitions and restrictions threaten research as well;

Whereas

The term “divisive” is indeterminate, subjective, and chills the capacity of educators to explore a wide variety of topics based on subjective criteria that are inapposite from the goals of education, research, and the development of essential critical thinking skills;

Whereas

Educating about systemic barriers to realizing a multiracial democracy based on race, gender, and other socially constructed categories of difference should be understood as central to the active and engaged pursuit of knowledge in the 21st century to produce engaged and informed citizens;

Whereas

Over seventy organizations, including the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU), issued the [Joint Statement on Legislative Efforts to Restrict Education about Racism and American History](#) (June 16, 2021) stating their “firm opposition to a spate of legislative proposals being introduced across the country that target academic lessons, presentations, and discussions of racism and related issues in American history in schools, colleges and universities ... In higher education, under principles of academic freedom that have been widely endorsed, professors are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject. Educators, not politicians, should make decisions about teaching and learning”;

Whereas

PSU’s [mission statement](#) expresses our shared value of “promot[ing] access, inclusion and equity as pillars of excellence.”

Whereas

PSU President Stephen Percy, in his “[Justice for George Floyd](#),” stated that George Floyd’s death “was an important catalyst for a broader awareness of the harm caused by systemic injustice and racial discrimination” and that “there is still much work to be done on racial equity”;

Whereas

In a nation that has for centuries struggled with issues of racial inequity and injustice, students do not have adequate knowledge of BIPOC and LGBTQI history

and the policies that contributed to inequities, Portland State University has a responsibility and opportunity to help build equity and social justice.

Be It Resolved

Faculty Senate resolutely rejects any attempts by bodies external to the faculty to restrict or dictate University curriculum or research agenda on any matter, including matters related to racial and social justice, and will stand firm against encroachment on faculty authority by the legislature and/or the Boards of Trustees.

Be It Further Resolved

Faculty Senate stands with our K-12 colleagues throughout the country who may be affected by this pernicious legislation.

Be It Further Resolved

Senate calls upon President Percy and Provost Jeffords to affirm that they reject any attempts by bodies external to the faculty to restrict or dictate University curriculum or research agenda on any matter, including matters related to racial and social justice, and will stand firm against encroachment on faculty authority by the legislature and/or the Board of Trustees.

Be It Further Resolved

Senate affirms the [Joint Statement on Efforts to Restrict Education about Racism](#), authored by the AAUP, PEN America, the American Historical Association, and the Association of American Colleges and Universities, endorsed by over seventy organizations, and issued on June 16, 2021.