# North Carolina Senate approves bill restricting DEI initiatives at public universities



A legislative effort in North Carolina targeting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives within the University of North Carolina (UNC) System has made significant progress, with Senate Bill 558 passing the state Senate and now awaiting consideration in the House. The move reflects ongoing debates over DEI policies in public education institutions within the state.

The bill was approved on April 9 by a Senate vote of 28-18, with all Republican senators supporting the measure and no Democrats voting in favour. Senate Leader Phil Berger (R-Eden), who is the bill’s primary sponsor, articulated the motivations behind the legislation. Speaking to nsjonline.com, Berger stated, “Unfortunately, college campuses are plagued with ‘DEI’ initiatives. We want campuses to be welcoming environments for all students. It’s time for our higher education institutions to focus on their core missions, and this bill will do just that.”

Should the bill become law, it would require the UNC Board of Governors and the State Board of Community Colleges to establish policies in line with the legislation’s directives. Key provisions prohibit UNC System schools from engaging in what the bill terms “discriminatory practices” and from compelling affirmation or endorsement of “divisive concepts.” The bill further mandates the elimination of DEI offices and staff roles related to promoting these concepts within institutions.

The term “divisive concepts” is defined within the bill to encompass ideas such as the inherent superiority of any race or sex, claims of inherent racism or sexism, and assigning responsibility to individuals for historical actions based on their race or sex. The legislation forbids requiring courses that include such concepts for degree completion, though chancellors retain discretion to allow exceptions in specific degree programmes. The bill also stipulates that it should not be interpreted as restricting First Amendment-protected speech, individual research, or discussion of divisive concepts when clarified as not endorsed by the institution.

The bill makes reference to a forthcoming executive order by President Donald Trump, scheduled for January 2025, and underscores the importance of maintaining the substantial federal funding received by North Carolina’s public higher education system, which amounted to $2.4 billion in the previous year.

Analysis by the North State Journal reveals that several current courses at institutions such as NC State University and UNC Chapel Hill could be affected should the bill become law. Examples include NC State’s honours seminar “Music Beyond Binaries,” which examines binaries of gender, race, and sexual identity through musical works ranging from Taylor Swift to operas by Mozart. Additional courses in areas like international studies and critical thinking across differences similarly cover topics that could be classified as divisive under the bill’s definition.

At UNC Chapel Hill, first-year seminars within the Ideas in Action programme frequently centre on themes of race and diversity, with courses including “Gender Equity in STEM” and “Defining Blackness.” The university’s course catalogue also lists classes such as “Diversity and Inclusion and Work” and “Cultural Competency in Journalism and Strategic Communication,” which focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion issues using critical media literacy approaches.

In parallel with this legislation, the UNC Board of Governors replaced its existing DEI policy in spring 2024 with one emphasising equality and nondiscrimination. This followed a significant retrenchment in DEI programme funding, with the Board of Trustees cutting $2.3 million from DEI-related expenses and reassigning that money towards enhancing campus safety. By the preceding autumn, statewide DEI staff reductions included more than $17 million in budget cuts, elimination of 59 positions, and reassignment of 132 employees across the system’s 16 campuses.

Senate Leader Berger has also championed Senate Bill 227, which aims to impose similar restrictions on DEI efforts within North Carolina’s K-12 public schools. Passed by the Senate in March and pending House review, that bill would prohibit public schools from promoting divisive concepts or discriminatory practices and prevent compelling students or staff to affirm such concepts. Definitions in the K-12 bill parallel those in the higher education measure, addressing inherent supremacy, inherent racism or sexism, and assigning moral guilt based on race or sex.

Further provisions in the K-12 legislation would ban the maintenance of DEI offices and associated staff roles focused on the prohibited concepts. The bill includes exceptions for freedom of speech, independent research, and unbiased instruction aligned with state education standards. Additionally, it requires schools to have conduct policies forbidding discrimination based on federally protected categories, explicitly including antisemitism.

These legislative initiatives mark a significant development in the ongoing discourse surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion policies in education across North Carolina’s public school and university systems.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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