AFFIRMATION OF SUPPORT FOR ANTI-RACISM, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION SCHOLARSHIP, TEACHING, AND TRAINING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

Resolution jointly proposed by: ASUU, the University of Utah Staff Council, and the School for Cultural & Social Transformation

ISSUE
In the face of recent White House moves to defund anti-racism and diversity training and disparage those who conduct this work, we request the Academic Senate approve a clear statement (1) to affirm the importance of supporting anti-racism, diversity and inclusion scholarship, teaching, and training at the University of Utah and (2) to call for leadership to protect and extend this work on our campus.

CONTEXT
A series of White House memos and an executive order have issued an immediate mandate to investigate and ban anti-racism and diversity training to federal contractors and federal grant recipients. The memos and executive order, listed below, obstruct efforts by corporations and universities to support diversity and anti-racist endeavors.

- OMB, September 28, 2020, “Ending Employee Trainings that Use Divisive Propaganda to Undermine the Principle of Fair and Equal Treatment for All”
- Executive Order 13950, September 22, 2020, “Combatting Race and Sex Stereotyping”
- Office of Personnel Management (OPM), October 2, 2020, “Mandatory Review of Employee Training under E.O. 13950”

The OMB September 4th memo states: “All agencies are directed to identify all contracts or other agency spending related to any training on ‘critical race theory,’ ‘white privilege,’ or any other training or propaganda effort that teaches or suggests either (1) that the United States is an inherently racist or evil country or (2) that any race or ethnicity is inherently racist or evil.” The memo defines such trainings as “divisive” “propaganda training sessions” and these orders were followed by direct condemnation of scholars doing anti-racism work as “un-American.” Furthermore, President Donald Trump stated that critical race theory in particular is “a sickness that cannot be allowed to continue” (September 5, 2020).

The September 22nd executive order charges diversity training with promoting a “destructive ideology” via “divisive concepts.” The OMB September 28th memo provides clarification of “divisive concepts,” suggesting that “reviews of specific training curriculum materials can be supplemented by a broader keyword search…for terms including, but not limited to”:

- critical race theory
- white privilege
- intersectionality
- systemic racism
- positionality
- racial humility
- unconscious bias
The U.S. Department of Labor established a webpage dedicated to enforcement of Executive Order 13950 including a hotline to file complaints.

**OVERVIEW OF RESPONSES**

- The University of Utah School for Cultural & Social Transformation crafted and widely circulated a statement—“We Will Not Stand By Without Responding”—reaffirming their devotion to critical race theory and related theories under attack.
- President Watkins, Senior VP Reed, and Senior VP Good issued a “Statement on the Executive Order,” affirming that the “commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion at the University of Utah remains unchanged.”
- In response to Executive Order 13950, some universities temporarily halted diversity training.
- Statements by corporations, universities, and professional organizations have focused on the right to free speech, academic freedom, and calls to condemn the ban while defending and supporting scholars who do anti-racism work.

**WHY STATEMENT FROM U of U ACADEMIC SENATE MATTERS**

The Academic Senate plays “an integral part in the shared governance of the University of Utah,” as “both Senate and Administration take the initiative in formulating issues and in developing responses to them.” Part of the charge of the Academic Senate is to “consider matters of professional interest and faculty welfare and make recommendations to the University President and other administrative officers concerned.”

While the University’s Office of the VP for Research will monitor the implications of Executive Order 13950, the Academic Senate Resolution would affirm support for all faculty, students, and staff engaged in anti-racism, diversity, and inclusion scholarship, teaching, and training at the University of Utah.

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1. https://attheu.utah.edu/university-statements/statement-on-executive-order/
4. https://academic-senate.utah.edu/academic-senate-overview/
FURTHERMORE, this Academic Senate Resolution:

- confirms the U’s commitment to be an “anti-racist University” (President Watkins, “Confronting Our Racism,” September 29, 2020)
- demonstrates leadership on academic freedom and inclusive campus culture
- recognizes the personal and professional vulnerability of those who provide anti-racism, diversity, and inclusion scholarship, teaching, and training at the University of Utah

RESOLUTION (for discussion, consideration, and vote)

This Resolution recognizes that race classifications in the United States intersect with other forms of social distinction (including but not limited to class, sex, gender identity, religion, sexuality, disability, nationhood, and citizenship status) that lead to the mistreatment of members of different population groups in educational, legal, administrative, and commercial settings. Scholarship and teaching, as well as diversity training, on such disparities educate members of a university campus and facilitate a more socially just and integrated community.

This Resolution acknowledges that anti-racism, diversity, and inclusion work is often under attack and that calls to ban these approaches and activities are a threat to academic freedom and institutional culture. Calls for bans of specific topics, concepts, and activities also invite denigration of and personal threats to those who do this work.

Thus the University of Utah Academic Senate affirms support for scholarship, teaching, and training focused on anti-racism, decolonization, anti-oppression, and equity. These approaches include but are not limited to intersectionality, critical race theory, Indigenous inquiry, queer theory and queer of color critique, theories of transgender and gender non-conformity, Women of Color feminisms, critical disability studies, anti-carceral studies, transnational feminisms, race theory, structural racism, systemic racism, bias, whiteness studies, and related theories as applied across all disciplinary areas of study. These fields and foci are part of research, teaching, and training across the University, including University Neighborhood Partners, the Staff Council, the Associated Students of the University of Utah, and additional organizations.

This Resolution acknowledges the necessity of a campus climate that fosters this critical scholarship and engagement, while affirming the unique contributions of the School for Cultural and Social Transformation, the Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, the Office for Inclusive Excellence, and the University’s cultural and resource centers, alongside the anti-racism, equity, diversity, and inclusion advocacy work and advancement occurring across campus in schools, colleges, and praxis initiatives.

This Resolution requests that the University of Utah campus and University of Utah Administration defend the rights of members of our University community to research, challenge, and eradicate systemic racism, while proactively and creatively developing institutional climate actions, policies, and funding mechanisms that extend support for the University of Utah’s ongoing commitment to diversity, inclusion, equity, and anti-racism.