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Opinion

Allen Mendenhall: To foster true academic freedom, we must enforce anti-DEI laws

[Allen Mendenhall](#) | 06.08.25



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In 2024, the Alabama Legislature enacted a measure barring the deployment of taxpayer dollars for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programming or bureaucracies that advance such initiatives within public university systems. Private funding for these endeavors remains *wholly permissible* under the statute's framework.

The legislation incorporates vital academic freedom protections by forbidding state entities, local education boards, and public universities from compelling students, faculty, staff or contractors to disclose their views on contentious ideological matters.

Similarly prohibited are mandatory indoctrination sessions on such topics, as well as any retaliatory measures against those who decline to endorse or voice support for prescribed viewpoints.

What a necessary prophylactic against the tyranny of zealots who, having mistaken their prejudices for pedagogy, dragoon colleagues and students into intellectual genuflection before their ideological altar, thereby corrupting the very notion of education as the cultivation of independent thought rather than the manufacturing of compliance.

The Alabama law targets explicitly pernicious doctrines, including racial supremacist teachings, race-based discrimination advocacy, assertions of inherent racism tied to melanin content, collective racial guilt for historical transgressions, and demands for racial contrition. These represent the kind of toxic ideas that have metastasized throughout our educational institutions, transforming centers of learning into factories of division and resentment.

Alabama lawmakers, in passing this section of our code, erected a necessary bulwark against the institutional capture that has weaponized higher education in service of a corrosive agenda fundamentally at odds with both intellectual inquiry and the principles of equality under law.

But how to enforce it?

For months, conservative faculty at public universities across the state have told me that their campus climate remains unchanged despite this law's codification. A recent [incident](#) at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, where an administrator was caught boasting about the crafty ways she evades anti-DEI codes, suggests administrators are simply rebranding DEI there rather than jettisoning it.

Might that be happening here?

The Faculty Senate at the University of Alabama adopted [a resolution](#) in April brazenly asserting that this very law, designed to protect academic freedom, somehow violates it.

The resolution's architects appear blissfully oblivious to the suffocating atmosphere of intellectual intimidation that envelops conservative voices on campus, as well as the pervasive hostility directed against individuals based upon their racial characteristics.

The very faculty who wail about academic freedom too often reveal themselves as its most zealous enemies, wielding their power to enforce ideological conformity while crying persecution when challenged.

To burden the academy's most defenseless constituencies – conservative faculty who justifiably fear tenure denial and promotional sabotage, who face quotidian discrimination and institutional retribution, alongside students whose academic fate rests entirely upon professorial caprice – with the responsibility of policing faculty lawbreaking represents both a moral abdication and a strategic folly.

Because it's unreasonable to expect these marginalized groups to initiate legal action on their own behalf, what alternative mechanisms could ensure that public universities comply with applicable rules?

Alabama may benefit from reviewing Senate Bill 37 in Texas, which, as of this writing, awaits Gov. Abbott's signature. This legislation mandates that each board of regents within the public university system, appointed by the governor, establish

oversight committees to review curricula and reject courses considered ideologically biased or incompatible with workforce development goals.

The measure would cap the number of faculty council or senate members at no more than 60. It would include members from each college or school. The institution's president or chief executive officer appoints one member. Faculty members in each college or school elect the remaining representatives.

The law outlines specific conditions under which faculty council or senate members may be removed from their positions: "A faculty member serving on the faculty council or senate may be immediately removed from the council or senate for failing to conduct the member's responsibilities within the council's or senate's parameters, failing to attend council or senate meetings, or engaging in other similar misconduct."

Moreover, it authorizes institutional leadership to initiate removals: "A member of a faculty council or senate may be removed on recommendation of the institution's provost and approval by the institution's president or chief executive officer."

No statutory remedy achieves perfection, yet this approach represents meaningful progress toward shielding vulnerable faculty and students within our public university systems. It recognizes a fundamental truth that academic freedom's defenders have long understood: When institutions systematically abuse their authority to suppress dissent and enforce ideological conformity, external oversight becomes both prudent and essential.

The alternative – allowing academic commissars to police themselves while their victims suffer in silence – constitutes an abdication of governmental responsibility to protect constitutional rights within taxpayer-funded institutions.

Such measures acknowledge that true academic freedom requires not only the absence of formal censorship but also the presence of structural safeguards against soft totalitarianism at the commanding heights of higher education.

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And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."
Matthew 4:19



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