

The Dangerous DEI Bloat at Virginia's Public Universities

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

Virginia leads the nation as the state with the largest diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) bureaucracies in its public universities.

DEI staff and departments urge students to embrace radical leftwing ideologies, including that people should be treated differently due to their race.

Ideological indoctrination is utterly unacceptable at taxpayer-funded universities, and Virginia lawmakers must abolish the DEI bureaucracy in state-funded schools.

Which state's public universities have the largest diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) bureaucracies? It is not a deep-blue state, like California or Oregon. It is the decidedly purple state of Virginia.

When Heritage Foundation analysts measured the size of DEI bureaucracies in the 65 universities that were members of one of the Power 5 athletic conferences (the Big Ten, the Big 12, the Pac-12, the Southeastern Conference, and the Atlantic Coast Conference) in 2021, they discovered that Virginia led the nation as the state with the biggest DEI bureaucracies in its public universities.¹

The University of Virginia (UVA) listed 94 people on university websites as part of its DEI bureaucracy.² Two years ago, UVA had 1,454 tenured or tenure-track faculty, giving it a ratio of 6.5 DEI personnel for every

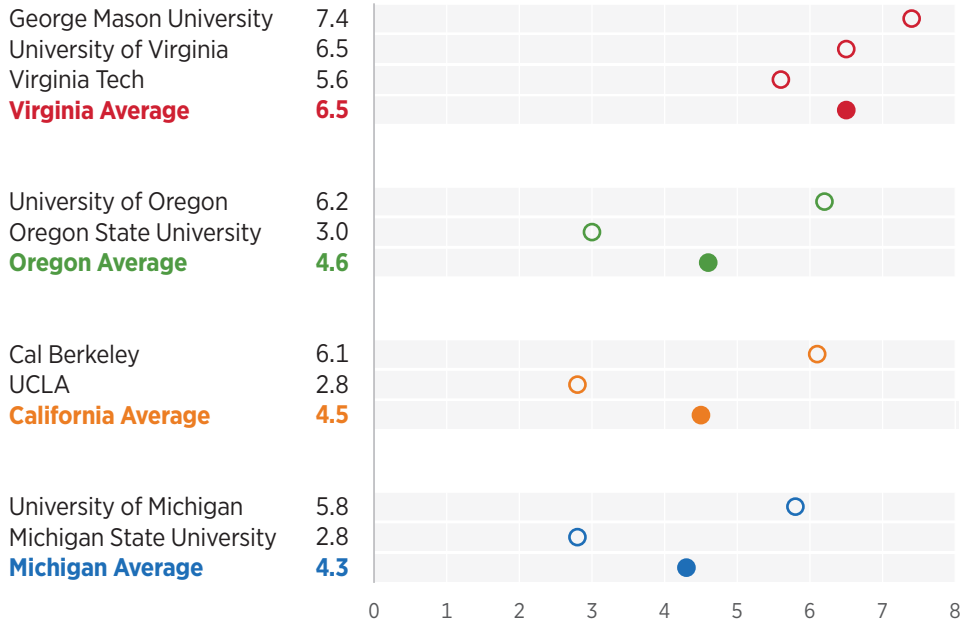
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CHART 1

DEI Personnel per 100 Faculty Members



SOURCE: Authors' research.

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100 faculty members. Only the University of Michigan had more DEI personnel, with 163, but Michigan lagged UVA in the size of its DEI bureaucracy relative to the number of faculty, with a ratio of 5.8. Virginia Tech was not far behind UVA in DEI bloat. Virginia Tech had 83 DEI personnel and 5.6 DEI staff for every 100 faculty.

To paint a more complete picture of public universities in Virginia, the authors of this *Backgrounder* also collected information on the size of the DEI bureaucracy at George Mason University (GMU). GMU has at least 69 DEI personnel, which, given that it has 938 tenured or tenure-track faculty, yields a ratio of 7.4 DEI staff per 100 faculty. Only Syracuse University, a private institution, matched GMU's ratio of 7.4 DEI per 100 faculty.

When adding GMU to the set of data from the 65 Power 5 universities collected in 2021, the Commonwealth of Virginia has three of the top six spots among public universities for DEI size relative to faculty. GMU has the highest DEI ratio, followed by UVA, with Virginia Tech coming in sixth. No other state has more than one public university in the top six. See Chart 1. The average ratio of these three Virginia public universities is 6.5 DEI staff per 100 faculty, which is higher than any single public university outside Virginia.

The state of Oregon, which had both the University of Oregon and Oregon State in the Power 5 conferences in 2021, has much smaller DEI bureaucracies, despite the state’s “crunchy” reputation. The University of Oregon had 6.2 DEI staff per 100 faculty, but Oregon State only had a ratio of 3.0, giving Oregon an average of 4.6. The state of California also had two public universities in the Power 5 conferences, University of California Berkeley (Cal Berkeley), and the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Cal Berkeley had the third-highest ratio of DEI to faculty, with 6.1, but UCLA only had a ratio of 2.8. Combined, these California public universities average 4.5 DEI personnel per 100 faculty. The University of Michigan had a DEI staff to faculty ratio of 5.8. When averaged with the 2.8 ratio of Michigan State, the state of Michigan had 4.3 DEI personnel per 100 faculty.

No other state, including ones with very left-leaning populations, has the scale of DEI bureaucracies in its universities that is found in Virginia’s large, public institutions. This is particularly surprising given that neither Virginia’s electorate nor student populations lean nearly as far left as those of the other states.

Samples of DEI Staff Titles

It is sometimes difficult to imagine how universities could have so many people working on DEI—how could there be meaningful work for so many of them?—so difficult in fact that it may lead some to be skeptical of claims about the size of these bureaucracies. To address that skepticism, listed here are samples of job titles for DEI personnel at UVA,³ Virginia Tech,⁴ and GMU.⁵ Seeing these titles provides facial validity to the total count, but it also conveys how duplicative and absurd these DEI efforts are.

Sample of University of Virginia Titles

1. Vice President for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Community Partnerships
2. Director of Communications, Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
3. Director of Community Partnerships, Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
4. University–Community Liaison, Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

5. Communications and Programming Assistant, Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
6. Chief of Staff, Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
7. Program Coordinator—Men of Color, Honor and Ambition (MOCHA) and Women of Color, Honor and Ambition (WOCHA), Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
8. Senior Director for Grants Administration and Strategic Partnerships, Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
9. Administrative Assistant to the Vice President, Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
10. Senior Director for Equity and Inclusive Excellence, Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
11. Associate Dean of Students and Director, Multicultural Student Services
12. Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, College and Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
13. Senior Associate Dean & Global Chief Diversity Officer, Darden School of Business
14. Assistant Dean for Global Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Darden School of Business
15. Assistant Dean for Diversity, Equity & Belonging, School of Law
16. Associate Dean of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, School of Education and Human Development
17. Programs Manager—Office of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion, School of Education and Human Development
18. Associate Dean for Diversity and Inclusion, School of Nursing

19. Associate Dean for Diversity and Inclusion, School of Medicine

20. Director, Center for Diversity in Engineering Staff

Sample of Virginia Tech Titles

1. Vice President for Strategic Affairs and Diversity

2. Assistant Provost for Inclusion and Diversity

3. Assistant Provost for Diversity Education and Programs

4. Director of Diversity Education Programs

5. Director of Diversity Engagement

6. Assistant Provost of Faculty Diversity

7. Associate Director of Faculty Diversity

8. Faculty Diversity Specialist

9. Chief of Staff, Office of Inclusion and Diversity

10. Director of Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

11. Associate Dean of Equity and Engagement, Center for the Enhancement of Engineering Diversity

12. Assistant Dean for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences

13. Dean's Faculty Fellow for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences

14. Director of Inclusion and Diversity, College of Natural Resources and Environment

15. Director of Inclusion and Diversity, College of Science

16. Director, American Indian & Indigenous Community Center

17. Director, Asian Cultural Engagement Center

18. Director, El Centro—Hispanic and Latinx Cultural Center

19. Director, LGBTQ+ Resource Center

20. Interim Director, Black Cultural Center

Sample of George Mason University Titles

1. Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion & Chief Diversity Officer

2. Inclusive Education Manager

3. Director of DEI Strategic Partnerships and Initiatives

4. Equity, Engagement, and Belonging Manager

5. DEI Case Coordinator for Community Engagement

6. Director, Center for Culture, Equity, and Empowerment

7. Assistant Director, Coalition Building and Diversity Education

8. Assistant Director, Student Engagement for Racial Justice

9. Director, LGBTQ+ Resources Center

10. Associate Director, LGBTQ+ Resources Center

11. Officer, Coalition Building and Diversity Education

12. Director, Office of Diversity and Inclusion, College of Education and Human Development

13. Associate Dean for Diversity, Outreach, and Inclusive Learning, College of Engineering

14. College of Science Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
15. Assistant Dean, Director of Diversity and Inclusion (UL)
16. Associate Professor & Director of Faculty Diversity (CHSS)
17. Director of Faculty Diversity, Inclusion, and Well-Being, (FA&D)
18. Director, Corley Institute for Diversity and Inclusion Education (Law)
19. Assistant Director, Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Multicultural Education
20. Business Manager, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

DEI Bureaucracies Promote Radical Ideologies

Diversity and inclusion are nice-sounding words that people might associate with positive activities, like the assimilation of immigrants, welcoming people from different backgrounds, and facilitating mutual understanding. The reality of DEI as it is currently defined is that these activities are functional⁶ opposites of traditional definitions. Take just the “E” word—equity—for example, it means that government and the private sector must treat Americans differently due to their race, which is the opposite of equality or equal treatment.

DEI bureaucracies are better understood as an academic version of a political commissariat that articulates and enforces an ideological orthodoxy on campus. That orthodoxy tends to make many groups of people feel unwelcome, promotes division, and encourages conformity rather than diversity on various social and political issues.

A case in point is the man wearing a “Jesus Saves” T-shirt who was thrown out of the Mall of America in the name of “inclusion.”⁷ Earlier this year, Liam Morrison, a student at a public middle school in Middleborough, Massachusetts, wore a shirt bearing the statement, “There are only two genders,” and was told to remove the shirt or be sent home. Another example of suppression of diversity in the name of DEI can be found when Pace Law School’s Student Bar Association refused to grant official recognition to a Christian student organization, citing concerns that the group’s religious identity would not be welcoming to non-Christian students.⁸

Consistent with this understanding of the actual function of DEI bureaucracies, Heritage analysts found that surveys of students reported worse campus climates—measured, for example, by how accepted or respected students feel at the campus—at universities with larger DEI bureaucracies than at those with smaller DEI staff.⁹

The Case of George Mason University

A review of George Mason University websites also reveals a disturbing amount of radical content that is inappropriate for a public university supported by taxpayers. This is particularly surprising given GMU’s reputation as a center-right university.¹⁰ GMU’s large DEI bureaucracy is creating a reality that is at odds with this reputation.

A glaring example can be found at GMU’s University Life division, which says its work centers “on student engagement and sense of belonging, creating a welcoming and inclusive campus environment.”¹¹ It hosts a “Black Lives Matter” website that endorses racially discriminatory behavior.¹² In particular, it recommends donating to or signing petitions for organizations and proposed legislation to abolish police departments, engage in Marxist revolution, treat Americans differently according to their race, and diminish the nuclear family. It provides a list of “action items” that includes a hyper-linked box saying, “Advocate.” That link directs people to an article titled, “Guide to Being an Anti-Racism Activist.”¹³ That article implores readers to combat systemic racism, which it defines as

characterized by unjust enrichment of White people, unjust impoverishment of people of color, and an overall unjust distribution of resources across racial lines (money, safe spaces, education, political power, and food, for example). Systemic racism is made up of racist ideologies and attitudes, including subconscious and implicit ones that might even seem well-meaning.

The article then provides a list of remedial actions, emphasizing that “these actions are mostly for White people.” Those actions include: “have hard conversations with yourself about the racism that lives within you.” It also declares: “It’s time to stop defending the idea of a post-racial society, and recognize instead that we live in a racist one. Listen to and trust those who report racism, because anti-racism begins with having basic respect for all people.”

The article also urges readers to “advocate for Affirmative Action practices in education and employment,” “vote for candidates who make ending

racism a priority and vote for candidates of color,” and “join the movement for reparations for the descendants of African enslaved people and other historically oppressed populations within the U.S.”

The University Life website also lists “National/Non-local Organizations to Support” as well as “Petitions to Sign.” The organizations listed are Black Lives Matter, Reclaim the Block, Black Visions Collective, The Bail Project, and Minnesota Freedom Fund. The petitions urge support for a variety of causes, including backing specific legislation. Several of these organizations and petitions advocate defunding police departments, diminishing the traditional family, revolutionary redistribution of wealth, and radical gender ideology.

These political positions are on the fringe of American political discourse. They are also embraced by only one side of the political spectrum. Students may choose to endorse these views on their own, but to be urged to adopt them as “action items” for which they should “advocate” by a University Life website at their public university is clearly unacceptable—and politically biased. It may also be in violation of both federal and state anti-discrimination laws and regulations.

GMU’s University Life is *not* one of the DEI bureaucracies whose staff counted toward the DEI total at GMU. As the website describes its mission, “University Life provides services and resources to help students succeed and offers activities that instill a sense of belonging and Mason pride.”¹⁴ According to its strategic plan, University Life is supposed to be focused on promoting “students’ persistence, completion, and overall success,” improving “student learning,” supporting “mental health and well-being,” engaging students, and preparing “students for better jobs, happier lives, and higher incomes.”¹⁵ Agitating for radical political activity is not among the normal roles of a University Life unit on campus, especially if it is on only one side of the political spectrum.

GMU’s main “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion” website also endorses a number of disputed political goals.¹⁶ For example, it declares support for anti-racism, which it defines as “an actionable commitment that intentionally looks at systemic levels of oppressions and challenges the paradigms, ideas, languages, and behaviors resulting from White supremacy.” That website also offers a very good definition of what “equity” means today, and how it amounts to the opposite of equality:

Equality is about sameness or uniformity while equity addresses universal fairness. When systems are built on equality, they assume that everyone is starting from the same point. Equity assures conditions for optimal access and

opportunity for all people, with particular focus on promoting policies, practices and procedures that do not advantage one group of people over others.

Another set of websites hosted by GMU's libraries provides a set of recommended actions and readings on politically contentious topics. For example, the GMU Library's Guide to Finding Diverse Voices in Academic Research notes: "This section will take time and brainpower to think about oppression, your own biases, and finally how to find the sources you seek, but the effort is worthwhile as you will find more meaningful sources."¹⁷ It continues, "One of the ways to counter white supremacist teachings and to highlight diverse perspectives is through telling and advocating for counter narratives."

This "InfoGuide" is accompanied by a lengthy "Disclosure Statement" that reads more like the ritual confessions and self-criticisms of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. It begins:

All of the collaborators responsible for this guide are white. We benefit from the white supremacy and suppression maintained in publishing practices and academic values outlined in this guide. There are limits and hidden biases at work that stem from our privileges and perspectives.

Another InfoGuide on the GMU Library website addresses "Anti-Racism, #BlackLivesMatter, and Civic Action."¹⁸ The GMU librarians who compiled that website also self-confessed: "The creators of this guide, many of whom are white, acknowledge that racially biased structures and practices have shaped and continue to shape the library and the university."

The "Protest and Civic Action" tab on that page recommends (among other works) the book, *We Will Shoot Back* by Akinyele Omowale Umoja.¹⁹ From the description provided for that book:

As the civil rights movement developed, armed self-defense and resistance became a significant means by which the descendants of enslaved Africans overturned fear and intimidation and developed different political and social relationships between Black and White Mississippians. This riveting historical narrative reconstructs the armed resistance of Black activists, their challenge of racist terrorism, and their fight for human rights.

At public universities, scholarly examination of ideological topics like anti-racism, equity, white supremacy, and even armed self-defense may be appropriate in certain optional class settings. But such scholarly examinations should include critical examination and consideration of differing

perspectives and must not prefer or punish students based on sex, skin color, or beliefs. The problem is that these various resource websites at GMU, some of which are developed by its DEI staff, are not scholarly and are more like indoctrination. They instruct students on what to think, which advocacy groups to support, which petitions they should sign, and what kinds of political candidates they should elect.

Policy Recommendations for Virginia Lawmakers

In order to rein in the dangerous DEI bloat at Virginia's public universities, Virginia lawmakers should:

- **Abolish DEI bureaucracies in all state-operated schools** and condition state funding of private universities on compliance with antidiscrimination law and the U.S. Constitution.
- **Reduce state appropriations** if institutions are unable to serve the state properly.
- **Rescind the 2020 law creating the position of Virginia's Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**, whose job it is to develop and promote DEI policies through the state government.
- **Work with university trustees or boards of visitors to rein in ideological excesses on campus** to ensure greater balance and improved intellectual exchange.

Conclusion

Public universities in Virginia have the largest DEI bureaucracy in the country. George Mason University, which has a reputation as a right-of-center institution, has 74 DEI personnel per 100 tenure-track faculty, which is the highest of any public university in the country for which data were collected. These bloated DEI staffs are wasteful, associated with worse campus climates, and are found at universities that promote radical ideologies. Virginia policymakers must rein in this dangerous DEI expansion.

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Endnotes

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