

Resolution on Recommitment to DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion), Administrative Transparency, and Shared Governance

UWEC University Senate Resolution - April 17, 2024

WHEREAS, The Wisconsin Governor enacted the “2023 Wisconsin Act 19,” commonly known as the 2023-25 biennial budget, on July 5, 2023. It granted the Universities of Wisconsin’s pay raise and investments, without any stipulations regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion;¹ and

WHEREAS, The co-chairs of the Legislature’s Joint Committee on Employment Relations, however, did not schedule a meeting to approve and release the funds for Universities of Wisconsin, after the 2023 Wisconsin Act 19 was enacted; and

WHEREAS, The Universities of Wisconsin Board of Regents, in response, voted in favor of Resolution 12129, approving “Recommendation to Approve Proposed Terms Related to State Funding Proposal” on December 13, 2023 by vote of 11-6;² and

WHEREAS, The approved recommendation stipulates, “Through December 31, 2026, the System will not increase from the level currently in effect the aggregate number of positions that serve the System’s core DEI functions: (i) the DEI subfamily that provides DEI services, (ii) the job subgroup “academic services and student experience” with job titles that include DEI, and (iii) senior leadership positions in the dean and/or vice chancellor series focused on DEI. In addition, to continue the enhanced focus on student success, the System will, through a mixture of normal attrition and active restructuring and reimagining of the DEI function, realign over two academic years at least 33% of the above-referenced roles that are currently filled (or at least 43 positions) to areas with a primary focus on academic and student success”;³ and

WHEREAS, The resolution was introduced and passed without any discussion with faculty or staff and without any transparency about what changes will be implemented at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, even though UWS 36.09(4) and (5) give the faculty, academic staff, and

¹ <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2023/related/acts/19>

²

https://www.wisconsin.edu/regents/download/meeting_materials/2023_meeting_materials/December-13-2023-Special-Board-of-Regents-Meeting-Record.pdf

³

[https://www.wisconsin.edu/regents/download/meeting_materials/2023_meeting_materials/Meeting-Book--Special-Board-of-Regents-Meeting-\(December-13.-2023\).pdf](https://www.wisconsin.edu/regents/download/meeting_materials/2023_meeting_materials/Meeting-Book--Special-Board-of-Regents-Meeting-(December-13.-2023).pdf),

students the rights and responsibilities to advise the chancellor on academic and educational policies;⁴ and

WHEREAS, The Universities of Wisconsin 2023-2028 Strategic Plan includes plans to increase access to and success in higher education for historically underserved students; advocate for democratic principles of free expression, academic freedom, and civil discourse; and support an environment of civility, trust, collegiality, open and honest communication, and mutual respect. The Universities of Wisconsin 2023-2028 Strategic Plan states,⁵

- S1. "We will increase access to higher education and improve rates of success for historically underserved students."
- S4. "We will champion the democratic principles of free expression, academic freedom, and civil discourse"; and

WHEREAS, The University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire 2025 Academic Strategic Plan advocates for integrating equity, diversity, and inclusion in learning outcomes and using inclusive pedagogy across the academic curriculum. The UWEC 2025 Academic Strategic plan states:⁶

- "Integrate equity, diversity, and inclusion in learning outcomes; use inclusive pedagogy across the academic curriculum"
- "Understand faculty and staff workload and how aspects of workload enhance and impede innovation and student engagement"; and

WHEREAS, The UWEC "guidepost goals" establish a goal of 20% of students as students of color.⁷ The University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire advertises being ranked as a "best of the best LGBTQIA+ friendly college" in 2023 by Campus Pride;⁸ and

WHEREAS, Restructuring DEI services away from explicitly supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion can make the university appear less attractive to prospective students who are exploring these services, and additionally reflect a negative campus climate that has negative implications for retention of current students;⁹ and

WHEREAS, Diversity efforts at a predominantly White institution (PWI) play an important role for White students' development of skills that are needed for a diverse workforce;

WHEREAS, The UWEC 67th Student Senate approved resolution 67-R-17 titled "Demanding Urgent and Unwavering Support of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) and the Protection of the Rights of Faculty, Staff, and Students at UW-Eau Claire" on Monday, April 15, 2024;

WHEREAS, The combination of the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire's goals and those of the Universities of Wisconsin, and the need to support current and future students spur our need as

⁴ <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/statutes/36/09>

⁵

<https://www.wisconsin.edu/president/strategic-plan/#:~:text=What%20are%20UWSA%20Core%20Values%3E>

⁶ <https://publicwebuploads.uwec.edu/documents/2025-Academic-Strategic-Plan.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.uwec.edu/institutional-research/guidepost-goals/>

⁸ <https://www.uwec.edu/news/news/uw-eau-claire-named-among-nation-s-most-lgbtq-friendly-5821/>

⁹ See "Rationale" section of this document for an in-depth scholarly discussion on this issue.

a deliberative body to address the consequences of the Board of Regents' approval of Resolution 12129; **NOW**, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, that the University Senate calls on the University administrators

- To provide services and support dedicated to students in marginalized communities and with marginalized identities; and
- To be transparent in decision-making in all aspects of the university governance as allowed by the Wisconsin statutes and the university rules; and
- To reconfirm that the faculty have “the primary responsibility for advising the chancellor regarding academic and educational activities and faculty personnel matters”¹⁰;
- To reconfirm that the academic staff members have “The primary responsibility for advising the chancellor regarding the formulation and review, and shall be represented in the development, of all policies and procedures concerning academic staff members, including academic staff personnel matters”¹¹; and
- To follow other laws and the university rules which protect the rights of the faculty, staff, and students; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the University Senate calls on administrators, faculty, and staff at UW-Eau Claire to recommit to fulfilling our responsibilities

- To express unwavering commitment to academic freedom; and
- To retain local control of our curriculum, hiring procedures, and the university rules and procedures; and
- To support an environment of civility, trust, collegiality, open and honest communication, and mutual respect by building a sense of community and caring among faculty, staff, students, and community partners.¹²

¹⁰ Wisconsin Statute 36.09[4]

¹¹ Wisconsin Statute 36.09[4m]

¹² 2023-2028 Strategic Plan, <https://www.wisconsin.edu/president/strategic-plan/>

RATIONALES

Campus climate, particularly for diversity, is shaped by a combination of external and internal forces. External factors include the larger social issues and events that shape attitudes towards diversity as well as governmental policies, initiatives, and programs.¹³ The Board of Regents' vote to approve Resolution 12129 allowed the Wisconsin Legislature to directly impose its own ideology onto the Universities of Wisconsin. This decision stands in direct opposition to one of the System's core values to support (1) diversity and (2) mutual respect and trust.

Within university settings, institutional leaders play a role in shaping the climate of the campus. Decisions made at the administrative level function as "agents of socialization,"¹⁴ setting the tone for norms at the university. Restructuring DEI services to become general academic and student success programs conveys that a university, in whole or in part, does not value DEI efforts, and also can signal limited valuing of the student populations that these programs aim to serve. This poses potential downstream consequences at our institution, the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.

First, students from historically marginalized or underrepresented identities may become less interested in attending UW-Eau Claire. Viewing diversity-related information on university websites predicts a greater perceived fit with the university and enrollment intentions (Ihme et al., 2016).¹⁵ Thus, restructuring DEI services away from explicitly supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion can make the university appear less attractive to prospective students who are exploring these services. With the absence of explicit DEI services, this may reduce future enrollment at UW-Eau Claire.

Second, restructuring DEI programs may contribute to a more negative campus climate for diversity for students who are already enrolled. For example, among Students of Color, perceiving greater campus discrimination relates to lower grades, worse social experiences, and a greater sense of alienation, which has implications for student retention (Hurtado et al., 1998).¹⁶ For White students, perceived discrimination similarly relates to their persistence in college.¹⁷ Thus, having explicit DEI programs and services supports the success and retention of all students on campus.

Third, diversity efforts at a predominantly White institution (PWI) play an important role for White students' development of skills that are needed for a diverse workforce. Namely, for White students, greater cross-racial interaction during college predicts a higher pluralistic orientation

¹³ Hurtado, S., Milem, J. F., Clayton-Pedersen, A. R., & Allen, W. R., "Enhancing campus climates for racial/ethnic diversity: Educational policy and Practice," *The Review of Higher Education*, 21.3 (1998), 279-302.

¹⁴Hurtado, et al.,290.

¹⁵ Ihme, T. A., Sonnenberg, K., Barbarino, M. L., Fisseler, B., & Stürmer, S., "How university websites' emphasis on age diversity influences prospective students' perception of person-organization fit and student recruitment. *Research in Higher Education*, 57.8 (2016), 1010-1030.

¹⁶ Hartado, et al,1998.

¹⁷ Nora, A., and Cabrera, A. F., "The Role of Perceptions of Prejudice and Discrimination on the Adjustment of Minority Students to College, *The Journal of Higher Education*, 67.2 (1996), 119-148.

(e.g., tolerance, ability to negotiate controversial issues, perspective-taking, etc.) and greater cross-racial interactions after college. However, these outcomes are related to both a positive campus racial climate and having a greater presence of Students of Color on campus.¹⁸ Restructuring DEI programs has the potential to create a worse campus climate and reduce the number of Students of Color on campus. Thus, the resolution dated 2023.12.12 has the potential to negatively impact all students on campus. In turn, the Board of Regents resolution also limits White students' ability to build skills for a diverse workforce after leaving UW-Eau Claire.

IF THIS RESOLUTION PASSES, IT SHALL BE DISTRIBUTED TO THE FOLLOWING LIST OF PEOPLE:

- Dr. James Schmidt (Chancellor)
- Dr. Michael Carney (Interim Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs)
- Dr. Mary Hoffman (Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs)
- Dr. Louisa Rice (Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs)
- Dr. Kristen Abbott-Anderson (Dean, College of Nursing and Health Sciences)
- Dr. Lisa Jepsen (Dean, College of Business)
- Dr. Carmen Manning (Dean, College of Education and Human Sciences)
- Dr. Aleks Sternfeld-Dunn (Dean, College of Arts and Sciences)
- Dr. Teresa O'Halloran (Interim Assistant Chancellor for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion)
- Dr. Patricia Kleine (Provost Emerita)

¹⁸ Jayakumar, U. M., "Can Higher Education Meet the Needs of an Increasingly Diverse and Global Society? Campus Diversity and Cross-Cultural Workforce Competencies," *Harvard Educational Review*, 78.4(2008), 615-651.