

WGU Position Statement on Measures to Restrict or Limit DE&I Efforts

While Western Governors University (WGU) is a private, nonprofit institution and therefore likely not subject to these measures, we offer our perspective as a university whose primary objective has centered around expanding access. Our founding governors recognized that many were not served well by traditional postsecondary education options in their states. These learners include those with some college but no degree, individuals from low-income backgrounds, students who are the first in their families to attend college, students of color, residents of rural communities, students with disabilities, and students with ties to the military. With a steady focus on reaching these individuals—two-thirds of our student body belong to one or more historically underserved populations—we're working to ensure all learners are able to experience the transformational impact of education.

Often the debate around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) pits such efforts against academic rigor, teaching, and learning. This is a false dichotomy, pernicious in its effects. Instead, both endeavors should share the same objective of providing pathways to opportunity that are accessible and traversable by all. This is not something owned by an office or officer; rather, it requires an intentional student-centered design. If institutions and policymakers start with that simple premise, we can tailor approaches so that each student can thrive.

At WGU, for instance, commitment to equity is woven into our DNA and is integral to how we define and measure progress toward our mission. Known as our Key Results, these metrics track on-time completion, lifetime financial return for graduates, and, critically, equitable access and attainment—outcomes that loom large for today's learners, and especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Over the last 50 years, while completion rates for those from the top income quartile has increased from 40% to 62%, for their peers from the bottom income quartile, it has barely risen from 6% to just 13%. Today, while the completion rate has steadily held at about 60% for all students, the rate is 54% for Hispanic/Latin@ students, 40% for Black students, and 39% for Native American students. Equity gaps like these exist across myriad dimensions and serve as a constant reminder that we must do more to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds so they may persist, complete, and thrive post-graduation.

Students come with different backgrounds, motivations, and expectations, which impact their persistence differently. DE&I is not about being politically correct. It's a rejection of "one-size-fits-all" education. Above all, it's about honoring diverse perspectives and lived experiences, and responding to students' individual needs with personalized interventions so that every learner succeeds.

Political leaders across the country regularly urge higher education leadership to increase their numbers of graduates to meet the demand of state, national, and global economies. With the U.S. population becoming more diverse, an awareness of best practices in aiding students to attain higher education credentials is imperative. With an understanding that the purpose of higher education is to provide pathways to opportunity that are both accessible and traversable, policymakers should act with deliberation to create policies that promote both persistence and completion for America's diversity of learners. Measures to restrict or limit diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education are in opposition to this mission.

About WGU

WGU was founded in 1997 by a bipartisan group of 19 governors who saw the opportunity to leverage technology and competency-based education to improve access, quality, and outcomes in higher education. Our mission is to change lives for the better by creating pathways to opportunity. Today, we serve more than 200,000 students and graduate over 45,000 during an academic year.