



FACULTY SENATE RESOLUTION

FSR-2021-2022-005

I. Resolution Name:

Defending Academic Freedom to Teach About Race and Gender Justice and Critical Race Theory

II. Stated Proposal:

BE IT RESOLVED that the University of Central Oklahoma Faculty Senate resolutely rejects any attempts by bodies external to the faculty to restrict or dictate university curriculum on any matter, including matters related to racial and social justice, and will stand firm against encroachment on faculty authority in the classroom by the legislature or RUSO.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate stands with our K-12 colleagues throughout the country who may be affected by this pernicious legislation when they seek to teach the truth in U.S. history and civics education. We support teachers' freedom to teach the truth about our accurate history by raising multiple voices.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Faculty Senate calls upon President Patti Neuhold-Ravikumar and Provost Charlotte Simmons to affirm that they reject any attempts by bodies external to the faculty to restrict or dictate university curriculum on any matter, including matters related to racial and gender and social justice, and will stand firm against encroachment on faculty authority by the legislature or the Regents.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Senate affirms the [Joint Statement on Efforts to Restrict Education about Racism](#), authored by the AAUP, PEN America, the American Historical Association, and the Association of American Colleges & Universities, endorsed by over seventy organizations, and issued on June 16, 2021.

III. Background & Justification:

State legislative proposals are being introduced across the United States that target academic discussions of racism and related issues in American history in schools, colleges and universities. The Oklahoma legislature passed HB 1775, which was signed into law by Governor Stitt on May 7th, 2021. The bill primarily focused on censoring K-12 educators from holding honest discussions about the history of our nation, and chilling all talk about unconscious biases, structural inequalities, or anything else that could potentially make a student “feel discomfort, guilt, anguish or any other form of psychological distress on account of his or her race or sex.” Arguably, the bill is also testing to see if higher education will take a stand; the bill’s prohibition of “any form of mandatory gender or sexual diversity training” in higher education is an opening volley in a fight to curb our academic freedom. It is a slippery slope once politicians have been allowed to dictate which facts the educated experts in a field are allowed to teach about, and recalls the fanatical purges of the McCarthy era. The terms used in the bill are intentionally vague, subjective, and serve to chill the capacity of educators to explore a wide variety of topics based on subjective criteria that are inapposite from the goals of education and the development of essential critical thinking skills. Our faculty endorse the inherent equality of all students as human beings, and reject attempts to teach any inherent superiority between groups. HB 1775 proponents have made strawman arguments that characterize opposition to HB1775 as ‘defending bigotry’ when this is patently not true.

The University of Central Oklahoma’s Diversity Statement makes clear our “explicit commitment to diversity” as essential to fulfilling our mission as a university to transform students to become “productive, creative, ethical, and engaged citizens.” Educating about systemic barriers to realizing a multiracial democracy based on race or gender should be understood as central to the active and engaged pursuit of knowledge in the 21st century to produce engaged and informed citizens.

The Faculty Handbook asserts that “Administrators must protect, defend and promote academic freedom” (Faculty Handbook, 2.10) and therefore asks the administration to explicitly fight back against educational gag-orders of all kinds. We must support our teachers’ freedom to teach the truth about our accurate history. Teachers must be allowed to teach the facts to be effective. These laws seek to create a chilling effect on public speech about race, gender,

and sexuality. All who care about education as the cornerstone of democracy should care about this attack on public education and work actively to resist it.

The Faculty Handbook further affirms the importance of academic freedom to the proper functioning of universities, by stating that “The university upholds the principle of academic freedom, providing the faculty member with free choice in matters of the presentation and delivery of curriculum” (Faculty Handbook, Appendix H, 2.4, B). The Faculty Handbook quotes the Regional University System of Oklahoma’s Policy Manual thusly: “Faculty members are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject” (RUSO, 3.4, a, 2). We know that democracy requires freedom of thought, expression and inquiry, and that any society that seeks to censor teachers who are teaching historical facts is headed for disaster. We should all seek to foster robust classroom conversations and debate about structural inequalities. State bans on teaching about racial injustice include prohibitions that are overbroad, vague and highly subjective. Such bans seek to impose sanctions and penalties if even one student might feel “discomfort” in a classroom, or might believe that a particular lesson or curricular subject is “divisive.”

The Regents Policy Manual also argues that faculty “have responsibilities to their students. They shall encourage in students the free pursuit of learning and independence of mind, while holding before them the highest scholarly and professional standards.” (RUSO, 3.4, b, 3). We cannot responsibly perform our duties by erasing the uncomfortable parts of American history, and we cannot educate the future leaders of our state by ignoring systemic racism and sexism. We cannot allow politicians to dumb down curricula to satisfy their narrow definition of “patriotic education.” The crackdown on Critical Race Theory especially seeks to censor and shut down the very conversations on systemic racism and sexism that students are eager to engage in, depriving them of the opportunity to develop analytic tools, and rendering them less prepared for living in a multicultural society.

The American Association of University Professors’ [1940 statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure](#) is the original statement on how academic freedom is crucial to the functioning of all higher education institutions. “Institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either the individual teacher or the institution as a whole. The common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition.... Academic freedom is essential to these

purposes and applies to both teaching and research. Freedom in research is fundamental to the advancement of truth. Academic freedom in its teaching aspect is fundamental for the protection of the rights of the teacher in teaching and of the student to freedom in learning.”

Faculty have responsibility for the curriculum at their universities, as stated in the Regents Policy Manual. “Faculty members have responsibilities to their discipline and to the advancement of knowledge generally. Their primary obligation in this respect is to seek and to state the truth as they see it. To this end, they shall devote their energies to developing and improving their scholarly competence. They shall exercise critical self-discipline and judgment in using, extending, and transmitting knowledge and they shall practice intellectual honesty” (RUSO, 3.4, b, 2).

Over seventy organizations, including the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU), issued the Joint Statement on Legislative Efforts to Restrict Education about Racism and American History (June 16, 2021) stating their “firm opposition to a spate of legislative proposals being introduced across the country that target academic lessons, presentations, and discussions of racism and related issues in American history in schools, colleges and universities . . . In higher education, under principles of academic freedom that have been widely endorsed, professors are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject. Educators, not politicians, should make decisions about teaching and learning.”

There is a precedent for the Faculty Senate to unite around defending social justice. Faculty Senate Resolution 2021-2022-002 on the “Acknowledgement of Native Lands and Continued Support and Respect for the Tribal People of Oklahoma” affirms the importance of racial and social justice, as well as our commitment to recognize “that humanity must learn from the past to act collectively toward our future” for “collective healing and true reconciliation.” Faculty Senate Resolutions 2020-2021-01 (“Resolution Against Racial Injustice”) and 2020-2021-04 (“Resolution in Support of All Ethnicities on UCO’s Campus and in our Communities”) both reaffirm the faculty’s stance that fighting racial injustice is key to supporting our diverse student body and providing “a rich educational experience for all of our students” (FSR 2020-2021-04).

In a nation that has for centuries struggled with issues of racial inequity and injustice, many students do not have adequate knowledge of BIPOC and BGLTQ+ history and the policies that contributed to inequities, the University of Central Oklahoma has a responsibility and opportunity to help build equity and social justice. As the proclaimed “Leadership University,” we can do no less than to build up ALL of our students into the ethical and engaged citizens they can be.

IV. Sponsored by 2021-2022 UCO Faculty Senators:

LEEDA COPLEY
ALYSSA PROVENCIO
CHERYL EVANS
JILL DAVIS
JERRY GREEN

Further background:

- Scholarly Groups Condemn Laws Limiting Teaching on Race
(New York Times, June 16, 2021)
- Texas 'critical race theory' bill limiting teaching of current events signed into law
(ABC13, June 16, 2021)
- Republicans Want Federal Funding Cuts to Schools Using ‘1619 Project’— But There’s a Twist
(Education Week, June 15, 2021)
- Critical race theory battle invades school boards — with help from conservative groups
(NBC News, June 15, 2021)
- Teachers across the country protest laws restricting lessons on racism
(Washington Post, June 12, 2021)
- ‘Children deserve to be taught’: Teachers in 22 cities are planning protests over laws restricting racism lessons in schools
(USA Today, June 11, 2021)
- 'Critical Race Theory Is Simply the Latest Bogeyman.' Inside the Fight Over What Kids Learn About America's History (TIME Magazine, June 24, 2021)
- Uncovering Who Is Driving The Fight Against Critical Race Theory In Schools (LISTEN) (Fresh Air, June 24, 2021)
- How the media's helping GOP fuel critical race theory hysteria
(Press Run, June 23, 2021)
- Critical race theory has been around for decades — why’s it a powder keg now? (LISTEN)

- (Marketplace, June 22, 2021)
- VIDEO: Creator of term ‘Critical Race Theory’ Kimberlé Crenshaw explains what it really is
(MSNBC/The Reid Out, June 21, 2021)
 - VIDEO: The truth about ‘critical race theory’: co-founder breaks down GOP gaslight
(MSNBC/The Medhi Hasan Show, June 20, 2021)
 - Fox’s anti-“critical race theory” parents are also GOP activists
(Media Matters, June 17, 2021)
 - Critical Race Theory: What It Means for America and Why It Has Sparked Debate
(Wall Street Journal, June 17, 2021)
 - Why are states lining up to ban critical race theory?
(University World News, June 12, 2021)
 - The New York Times’ Culture-War Definition of Free Speech
(Melissa Gira Grant, The New Republic, June 8, 2021)
 - Guest Blog: Where Does the Bizarre Hysteria About ‘Critical Race Theory’ Come From? Follow the Money!
(Inside Higher Ed, June 3, 2021)
 - Opinion: Why Conservatives Really Fear Critical Race Theory
(Christine Emba, The Washington Post, May 26, 2021)
 - (VIDEO) What critical race theory is really about
(CNN/Don Lemon Tonight, May 17, 2021)