

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA  
FACULTY SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND  
INCLUSION  
ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

Throughout the 2023-24 academic year the Senate Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion gathered several times to consider events involving threats to academic freedom and doxing, how the University supports faculty who are teaching and doing research around controversial topics, and to begin work on a new campus climate survey. As a group, we were fortunate to have committee members with different perspective on the events, as well as how to grow as a university community afterward.

At the September meeting, the Committee considered an event that occurred at the College of Nursing that involved a graduate student who shared photographs of lecture slides presented during a class that addressed gender identity in the pediatric care setting with groups outside the University. These slides were posted to X (formerly Twitter) without any of the context provided during the lecture, and a social media firestorm resulted. College of Nursing faculty and staff received threatening emails and phone calls. In response, the College of Nursing and the University released a public statement, that while successful at quelling the social media firestorm did not express support for members of the College of Nursing faculty to teach essential but potentially controversial healthcare topics. Specific points considered during the September meeting were as follows:

- The Committee reviewed the facts of the situation known at the time, and considered the best way forward.
- Committee members commented that besides being of great concern regarding how the University supports its faculty and staff, the situation also represented a threat to academic freedom.
- The Committee decided to issue a public report to the Faculty Senate (see attached) that summarized the event, and also offered key recommendations to University leadership on how best to move forward.
- This report was to make clear the importance of University leadership's support of faculty, as faculty perform evidence-based teaching, service, and research.

At the December meeting, Mona Hymel, Presiding Officer of the Faculty Senate, asked Drs. Pace and Willis to serve as Committee co-chairs for the remainder of the academic year. The discussion then turned to briefly recapping the September incident at the College of Nursing, and how doxing had occurred in other ways involving members of the campus community. This then turned to a lively discussion about the possibility of taking a survey to understand the extent to which doxing has occurred on our campus, which then began to focus on understanding the broader campus climate. Specific points from the meeting were as follows:

- Members of the Committee pointed out that it has been several years since the last campus climate survey took place.
- The Committee discussed how it was important to consider the perspective of various student and affinity groups on campus if a climate survey was undertaken.

- There was discussion about the best approach for engaging different perspectives using focus groups with carefully developed questions.

In the February, March and April meetings, the focus continued on the development and planning of a campus climate survey regarding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI).

During the February meeting the following specifics were considered:

- The Committee discussed the logistics and goals of a new climate survey, emphasizing the need for contributions from various stakeholders and the importance of including input from colleges with and without DEI committees.
- Concerns were raised about the effectiveness and historical participation rates of similar surveys. The discussion also included using previous surveys and incidents to guide the new survey's focus.
- Plans were made to gather existing data and draft a purpose statement for the survey, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of campus issues.

During the March meeting the following was discussed:

- Strategic engagement plans for different stakeholder groups were considered, including students and faculty, to ensure meaningful responses.
- There was talk of collaborating with student organizations and experts to gather and analyze data effectively.
- The conversation included ideas for leveraging various data collection methods, including focus groups and qualitative analysis, to enrich the survey's results.

- Plans were laid out to identify collaborators and refine the approach to ensure the survey effectively captures the campus climate and informs potential interventions.

At the April meeting the following was discussed, or occurred:

- The committee engaged with the Vice Provost for Diversity and Inclusion and the Chief Inclusion Officer to further discuss the campus climate survey. During the meeting, the committee gained insights into the survey efforts spearheaded by the Provost's Office.
- The Vice Provost for Diversity and Inclusion and the Chief Inclusion Officer agreed to provide the committee with the latest draft of the survey for review and feedback, prior to its distribution to the broader campus community.

Meetings in the spring semester underscored the importance of a well-structured and inclusive approach to understanding and addressing DEI issues on campus through a comprehensive climate survey. The Committee resolved to carry these principles into the next academic, with the plan and overarching goal to contribute to the release of a campus climate survey before the end of the calendar year.

## Faculty Senate Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

### **Overview and Comments regarding the September 2023 Incident at the College of Nursing\***

#### *Overview*

Sometime before September 6, 2023, an advanced practice nursing student in the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program at the College of Nursing photographed slides during a clinical immersion class that considered complex issues that may be encountered in advanced clinical practice. The slides that were photographed addressed gender identity in the pediatric care setting. Against the social media policies of the College that apply to all nursing students, and in flagrant disregard of principles discussed in a class on nursing professionalism, the student shared photos of the lecture slides with groups outside the University and without context provided during the lecture. The photos were then weaponized by outside groups, and posted on various social media sites on September 6. A social media firestorm resulted. Some faculty and staff at the College received threatening phone calls and emails, and many of these were documented by the Threat Assessment and Management Team (TAMT).

In order to address the social media firestorm, the College, in consultation with the University, quickly prepared a statement that was released on September 8. Please find this statement at <https://www.nursing.arizona.edu/news/2023-09-08-statement-college-nursing-doctoral-student-seminar>

While this statement clarified that College faculty share evidence-based information, the statement also said that College faculty members “do not recommend any specific practice guidelines related to gender-related issues.” Of particular concern, the statement did not affirm the right and responsibility of faculty to teach principles of evidence-based care to nursing students, including care for LGBTQ+ people, or express support for the faculty members involved. In addition, the statement did not address the violent threats that faculty and staff at the College were experiencing stemming from the incident, nor did it express support for the health and well-being of members of the LGBTQ+ community. Finally, it did not express a commitment on the part of the College to principles of academic freedom, including the ability of faculty to teach and students to learn about gender-affirming care and LGBTQ+ health issues.

On September 21, a communication was sent from members of a campus faculty, staff, and student organization to President Robert Robbins, Vice President Craig Henderson, Interim Provost Ronald Marx, College of Nursing Dean Brian Ahn, Interim Associate Vice Provost of DEI Jenna Hatcher, and Faculty Chair Leila Hudson regarding how the University had distanced itself from gender-affirming care principles taught in the clinical immersion class and how the statement on September 8 did not defend academic

\*This document has been updated to correct a factual error in the version posted on Sept 29. In that document, it was stated that photographs of lecture slides were taken on Sept 6. Instead, these photos were posted to social media on Sept 6.

freedom. The communication from the campus organization also noted significant concern about how the College statement was harmful and “further contributes to the violence against transgender people, including transgender youth, and University of Arizona’s transgender employees and students.”

On September 22, Dean Brian Ahn and Vice President of Health Sciences Michael Dake sent a message to the College of Nursing community that affirmed the commitment of the College of Nursing to “to the health, safety and well-being of all, including members of our LGBTQA+ community, and their medical care,” as well as the College’s support and expectation that faculty will use evidence-based research in their teaching. This message also affirmed the College’s commitment to principles of academic freedom. Finally, the message summarized the extensive steps that were taken to ensure the safety of the College community, and mentioned a series of upcoming faculty forums that will discuss gender-affirming care. While this message was not posted to the College’s website, it can be viewed at:

<https://view.comms.arizona.edu/?qs=1aaff6d2919a81a96e9811c1a97e562a32db01229d6d85eb34d0f4197fb659238a82dcc70cdf9bfd43358c01dff581e729389064928eea73b83ba7d309a9864185df29a533f9927268d00cd47620909>

### *Comments from the Senate DEI Committee*

This event reminds us that in difficult situations involving exceptional external pressure, **it is imperative that college and university-level leadership take explicit steps to express support for the evidence-based teaching, service, and research** performed by faculty, especially when that work involves content that may be controversial but is supported by evidence. **By doing so, the leadership will also support our faculty and academic freedom as foundations of our academic enterprise.** We must all acknowledge that our people are our most valuable resource.

A threat to one part of our academic community is a threat to us all. We must not tolerate repression of ideas, or violence or intimidation of any kind.

As a university community, we courageously strive to teach our students, perform our research, and provide service to our communities in ways that are supported by evidence. **We must remember that the courage we show in our scholarship often supports those beyond the borders of our campuses.**

Faculty forums should be held at the College of Nursing, and at other units, in order to discuss topics around academic freedom. Such forums should be a place for open discussions that are genuine, so that faculty - of all ranks and tracks - can feel heard, and actually be heard. Only then can faculty be supported in the ways that they should be.

This issue, rather than being an isolated incident, is part of a larger attack on higher education and DEI efforts (e.g., attacks on DEI statements in job postings). Cowring and accommodating these attacks does not stop them. Rather, they embolden these

attacks. University leaders need to take a stronger and more proactive stance against these threats.

Regardless of individual positions of administrators on these issues, we must teach evidence-based practices for health and wellness of all, regardless of political pressure from those outside the University.