SPECIAL REPORT

of the

STATUS OF DIVERSITY COUNCIL

concerning

RESOLUTION: DEFENDING ACADEMIC FREEDOM TO TEACH ABOUT RACE AND GENDER JUSTICE AND CRITICAL RACE THEORY (CRT)

Presented at the
814th Regular Meeting of the Faculty Senate
April 28, 2022

STATUS OF DIVERSITY COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

RATIONALE:

WHEREAS state legislative proposals and local school board ordinances are being introduced across the United States that target academic discussions of racism, sexism, sexual orientation, gender identity and related issues in U.S. history and other courses in schools, colleges and universities, as so-called “divisive concepts”;

WHEREAS Section 2.1 of the Academic Personnel Policy (a.k.a., The Red Book) and Article 8 of the Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Faculty and Librarian Union (MSP) and the Board of Trustees affirm the importance of academic freedom to the proper functioning of universities, citing the American Association of University Professors’ 1940 statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure and protecting academic freedom within K-12 and higher education colleagues “in and outside the classroom;”

WHEREAS faculty “exercise primary responsibility in such academic matters as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, research, admissions, libraries, and other aspects of University life which directly relate to the educational process,” as stated in Board of Trustees Document 73-098 and in Article 13 of the Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Faculty and Librarian Union MSP) and the Board of Trustees;

WHEREAS the term “divisive” is indeterminate, subjective, and chills the capacity of educators to explore a wide variety of topics based on subjective criteria that run contrary to the goals of education and the development of essential critical thinking skills;

WHEREAS educating about systemic barriers to realizing a diverse and inclusive democracy should be understood as central to the active and engaged pursuit of knowledge in the 21st century, so as to produce engaged and informed citizens;

WHEREAS 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.”

WHEREAS the University of Massachusetts Amherst’s mission acknowledges that “Our institution is rooted in the idea that any qualified individual, regardless of wealth or social status, should have access to high quality higher education. We draw from and support diverse experiences and perspectives as an essential strength of this learning community and accept for ourselves and instill in our students an ongoing commitment to create a better, more just world.”
WHEREAS the University asserts in its Diversity Mission Statement that: “The University of Massachusetts Amherst, as a public land-grant institution, has a responsibility to provide access and opportunities for all people, while demonstrating our commitment to inclusion of historically underrepresented groups. We believe that a culturally diverse campus is integral to academic excellence and that our students, faculty, and staff should reflect the diverse world in which we live. The university recognizes and values the wide range of voices and perspectives in all spheres of the academic enterprise. The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to policies that promote inclusiveness, social justice, and respect for all, regardless of race, color, religion, creed, gender, sexual orientation, age, national or ethnic origin, physical or mental disability, political belief or affiliation, marital status, veteran status, immigration status, gender identity and expression, genetic information, or any other characteristic or status protected by state or federal laws.”

WHEREAS in a nation that has historically struggled with racial, gender, sexual, and class inequities, yet where many students have little knowledge of this history and of the policies that have contributed to these inequities, the University of Massachusetts has a responsibility and opportunity to help build equity and social justice by encouraging critical dialogue around these matters--as is expressed in the University’s Land Acknowledgement;

WHEREAS the goals outlined in the University’s Be Revolutionary Strategic Plan are to: “Improve and utilize curricular, co- and extracurricular opportunities to enhance student development and success in a diverse, inclusive environment and “Ensure that the allocation and utilization of resources and services provided reflect institutional commitment to the support and success of all members of the community and address concerns of discrimination and unfair treatment.”

RESOLUTION:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate resolutely rejects any attempts to undermine the rights that the faculty and the MSP have already established on this campus; rejects any efforts to restrict or dictate university curriculum on any matter, including matters related to racial and social justice; and will stand firm against any encroachment on our existing rights by the legislature or the Boards of Trustees.

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 all efforts to empower K-12 educators and their union representatives by making university resources available, welcoming university-school cooperative activities, and assisting in formulating arguments for community meetings where these issues arise.
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Faculty 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.

Background:

- Right-wing campaign to block teaching for social justice (Zinn Education Project, January 20, 2022)
- How picking on teachers became an American tradition: And why spying on the “bums” has been terrible for schools (Slate, January 28, 2022)
- Steep rise in gag orders, many sloppily drafted (PEN America, January 24, 2022)
- The backlash against C.R.T. shows that Republicans are losing ground (New York Times, February 4, 2022)
- Right-wing legislators are trying to stop us from teaching for racial justice. We refuse (Rethinking Schools, Summer 2021)
- 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)
- Where does the bizarre hysteria about ‘Critical Race Theory’ come from? Follow the money! (Inside Higher Ed, June 3, 2021)

MOTION: That the Faculty Senate adopt Resolution: Defending Academic Freedom to Teach About Race and Gender Justice and Critical Racy Theory (CRT) as presented in Sen. Doc. No. 22-082.