
Debunking DEI Misconceptions



It was an interesting day. A representative from Missouri [misrepresented](#) the views of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. [Communism was conflated](#) with DEI. And the director of something called the “American Civil Rights Project” [described](#) anti-discrimination practices as discriminatory.

So proceeded a recent hearing of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Workforce, entitled “Restoring Excellence: The Case Against DEI” (diversity, equity, and inclusion).

For the most part, that case was based on conjecture and opinions dished out with a large side of revised history. [Shaun Harper](#) tried to push back. “As a citizen and scholar, I highly value and insist on evidence,” he [told](#) the lawmakers.

An NEPC Fellow and professor at the University of Southern California who founded the school’s Race and Equity Center, Harper was the [lone voice](#) using data to debunk some of the many misconceptions flying around the hearing room. Here’s what he had to say about five DEI falsehoods:

- 1. DEI has led to discrimination against white, male students:** After noting that the white male students he’s interviewed over his decades of research never asserted that “their racial group routinely experiences discrimination,” Harper pointed to the National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climates (NACCC),

a suite of quantitative surveys that [his] research center at the University of Southern California launched six years ago, has been administered to more than 2.5 million students on hundreds of campuses. They are population surveys—meaning, they are sent to every enrolled student. NACCC data do not show high rates of white male respondents reporting routine experiences with racial discrimination and harassment.

- 2. White applicants are being routinely passed over for campus jobs:** Harper points to data showing a very different picture:

U.S. Department of Education data show that during the 2023-24 academic school year, two-thirds of full-time assistant, associate, and full professors at degree-granting postsecondary institutions were white. Also, whites were 74 percent of full professors—meaning, faculty members at the highest rank. Those same federal data show that three-fourths of professionals who held management positions on college and university campuses were white. According to a 2023 report from the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources, 78 percent of senior and executive-level admissions officers were white. For nearly 30 years, the American Council on Education has administered a survey that captures the demographic composition of the college presidency—73% of presidents in the 2022 administration were white.

- 3. The curriculum has become too “woke” for students:** Again, a very different picture emerges from the data:

This spring, I conducted on-camera interviews with nearly 150 undergraduates and graduate students (including conservatives), [at] postsecondary institutions across the country. In every student interview, I asked if wokeness pervaded the curriculum and classrooms on their campuses. Students, including conservatives, said no. This is consistent with what collegians report in related NACCC survey questions and what they have been telling me for two decades in qualitative interviews. Noteworthy is that the overwhelming majority of students whom I interviewed for the film (including whites) insisted that their courses, readings, and assignments focus far too little, not too much on DEI-related topics.

- 4. College and university accreditors have also become too “woke”:** Here, Harper simply points to the lack of data:

DEI opponents have not published results of quantitative surveys capturing the experiences and perspectives of significant numbers of accreditation team members, including conservatives. They also have not published qualitative data from individual interviews and focus groups with defensible sample sizes.

- 5. DEI is overfunded:** Harper cautions against anecdotal evidence about purportedly overpaid leaders of DEI initiatives on college campuses. The particular instance he

uses involves the argument made by Rep. Bob Good (R-VA) that the Vice President for DEI and Community Partnerships at UVA makes \$340,000 annually and that UVA employs 94 DEI officers. The latter figure, Harper points out, is incorrect (the correct number is 55); the former number is very much in line with high-level university administrator salaries. The data and numbers used in DEI arguments should be accurate and understood in context.

We are in a moment when institutions and their leaders are taking cover, trying to avoid being targeted by the Trump administration. But Harper [warns](#):

Any effort, legislative or otherwise, that aims to pursue excellence in U.S. higher education without DEI will ultimately fail because it is inconsistent with what 50 years of research shows and because it is incongruent with values that are fundamental to our multicultural democracy.

NEPC Resources on Diversity – Race, Ethnicity, Class, Culture, and/or Gender

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