

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Alma Adams (NC-12)

Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development

"Restoring Excellence: The Case Against DEI"

Wednesday, May 21, 2025 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I want to first of all thank our witnesses for being here today.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) efforts are essential to ensuring that our education system reflects the richness of our society and provides every student with the opportunity to succeed. DEIA is not about lowering standards or moving away from merit-based selection: it's about ensuring that everyone has a fair shot, everyone is respected and feels like they belong. Historically, policies like slavery, Jim Crow laws, and redlining have systematically excluded marginalized communities from equal opportunities. DEIA works to systematically include people on campuses and ensure that no one feels unwelcome.

As a former college professor for 40 years, I've seen firsthand how DEIA initiatives can transform the lives of students. These programs provide students from historically marginalized backgrounds with the tools, resources, and opportunities they need to succeed and thrive. DEIA efforts are critical to breaking down barriers, eliminating educational disparities, and ensuring that all students regardless of their background receive a high-quality, well-rounded education.

These efforts help level the playing field for students from all walks of life, from first-generation college students to those from racially diverse communities to students with disabilities, veterans, and more. They are vital in creating learning environments where every student has the chance to succeed, not just a few.

Every student deserves a safe, diverse, and welcoming learning environment. This isn't just an ideal; it is a necessity for the future of this nation. Diversity in education in our classrooms, campuses, and curricula leads to better outcomes for all students. It fosters critical thinking, enriches the educational experience, and prepares students to navigate the complex and diverse world we live in. We cannot afford to rewrite history or roll back the progress we've made. It is our responsibility to ensure that all Americans, no matter their race, background, or economic status, have access to the opportunity to pursue a college degree and to achieve their dreams.

Today, I want to take a moment to specifically address the harmful effects these anti-DEIA efforts have had on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), institutions which I hold dear. These attacks on DEIA initiatives, universities like my alma mater North Carolina A&T and Morgan State University have been forced to confront the loss of millions of dollars in research funding.

These losses are a direct result of federal grants and contracts that are tied to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility programs being slashed or eliminated altogether. And that tie may have to do with the DEIA initiatives. Simply having the wrong word in the title of a program can result in your funding being cancelled as Morgan State recently found out. The school's Center for Equitable Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning Systems, which seeks to create a "trustworthy" A.I. that draws on real research, had its federal funding they had it cut. Work to limit A.I. hallucinations, a problem we all know exists, is defunded because the word "equitable" was in the Center's title.

For HBCUs, these cuts are especially devastating. HBCUs have long played a critical role in educating students from historically marginalized communities, particularly Black students. However, many of these institutions already operate on tight budgets, relying heavily on federal grants and research funding to sustain programs that support students and faculty. With federal agencies slashing funding for DEI efforts, HBCUs are forced to do more with fewer resources. Institutions have had to trim already lean budgets, while others are launching emergency fundraising campaigns just to stay afloat.

These funding cuts are not just numbers on a page, they represent real consequences for students. Without these resources, our HBCUs cannot offer the support that so many of their students need to thrive academically and professionally. The impact is widespread, affecting not just the institutions themselves, but also the students they educate, the faculty who teach them, and the communities these schools serve.

The truth is, all institutions are grappling with a crisis as they navigate an ever-shifting federal funding landscape that increasingly undermines their ability to fulfill their mission.

The loss of funding for DEI initiatives and research grants represents an attack on the heart of what our universities stand for: providing access to higher education for students who have historically been excluded from these opportunities. We cannot allow the damage to continue. We must work together to ensure that our institutions of higher education receive the support they need to continue educating the next generation of leaders, doctors, lawyers, teachers, and changemakers.

In conclusion, we cannot allow the work of advancing educational equity to be undone. We must protect and strengthen DEI efforts—not just for the future of higher education, but for the students it serves. We have a responsibility to ensure that every student, regardless of background, has a real opportunity to succeed.

Mr. Chairman I thank you, and I yield back.