

Business school leaders converge on TCU to strategize on keeping up DEI

Academic leaders are working to regain the narrative on diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging initiatives.



As a private university, TCU is free to host discussions about how to strengthen DEI strategies and commitments at a business school collaborative conference titled, “Staying the DEIB Course: Courage Under Fire During Uncertain Times.”(Getty Images / Getty Images)

By [Arcelia Martin](#)

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Higher education experts from around the country gathered at Texas Christian University’s Neeley School of Business this week to talk about the three-letter acronym crowding legal landscapes and campaign agendas: DEI.

It’s a high-pressure topic as opponents and supporters alike of diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives carefully watch for shifting precedent.

The Supreme Court ruled against affirmative action and a [statewide ban outlaws Texas public universities](#) from diversity efforts. It’s led to business leaders like Mark Cuban and Elon Musk jousting online about DEI and hidden cameras aimed at exposing Texas educators pursuing diversity initiatives.

Discussions about how to foster and continue DEI at business schools across the country likely could not have happened at public schools like the University of Texas at Austin, Texas A&M or the University of Houston.

But as a private institution, TCU is free to host discussions about how to strengthen DEI strategies and commitments at a business school collaborative conference titled, “Staying the DEIB Course: Courage Under Fire During Uncertain Times.”

While TCU ought to be immune from most legislative dictation on DEI, Jonathan Benjamin-Alvarado, the university’s chief inclusion officer, warned it’s not unaffected by the consequences.

“We all drink from the same water here in the state of Texas,” Benjamin-Alvarado said. “These are huge issues and challenges that we are facing. But that’s just the beginning of it.”

As a result of state schools having to reconfigure their operations to abide by the constraints, Benjamin-Alvarado said prestigious faculty positions at public universities like UT Austin have gone unfilled and Texas is losing high-quality scholars as they seek less legally precarious states to work in.

It’s at universities where conversations about developing and supporting a diverse workforce should be happening, said Ian Williamson, dean of the Paul Merage School of Business at the University of California at Irvine.

“We have universities for that purpose – to have that rigorous discussion, to actually collect data, to analyze that data, to train people to understand how to think about these issues,” Williamson said. “That’s what we do.”

Related: [How Texas’ DEI ban is tripping up efforts to help undocumented students](#)

Successful businesses and schools recognize the importance of recruiting, retaining and propelling talent in an inclusive environment, said Hettie Richardson, interim dean of Neeley School of Business.

“Our faculty and staff are dedicated to developing business leaders better prepared than ever to make a difference,” Richardson stated. “To do so, we are committed to improving diversity, equity and inclusion in both business and society.”

The ones who will suffer the most from the culture wars surrounding DEI will be students, said TCU business school instructor Kenneth Chapman. While professors and deans have to have conversations surrounding the changing legislation, Chapman told an audience of business school leaders that they ought to prioritize the destiny of their programming and students.

“There’s a lot of noise. If you’re not careful, it’ll distract you,” Chapman said.

The work to end DEI as a practice is a well-financed and concerted effort, Benjamin-Alvarado said. Leading DEI critics argue that inclusivity initiatives are exclusionary, focus on ideology and favor race over merit.

The Chronicle of Higher Education tracks legislation aimed at ending diversity initiatives on college campuses. Since 2023, 81 bills have been introduced, eight have gained legislative approval, eight have become law and 29 have been tabled, failed or vetoed.

In addition to working to create a place for belonging for all students and opportunities for academic success, university leaders now have to work on regaining the narrative, said Robert Thomas, the inaugural associate dean for diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging at Indiana University's Kelley School of Business.

As higher education continues to be a battleground for DEI, Benjamin-Alvarado said inclusion practitioners are ill-prepared for the uphill battle still ahead of them.

"They're coming to the fight with a big sword," he said. "We're coming with a toothpick."



[Arcelia Martin](#), Business Reporter. Arcelia reports on equity and economic topics across North Texas' diverse communities. Before joining The Dallas Morning News in 2022, she covered housing, homelessness and real estate at The Tennessean in Nashville. She is a graduate of Gonzaga University and Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.