

The end of DEI programs

Let's Anticipate - Webquest

1. What Orders Were Signed?

In January 2025, President Trump signed three big orders:

- EO 14151: Told government offices to end diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs and jobs. That meant DEI training, staff positions, and special grants had to stop.
- EO 14168: Said federal rules must treat sex as only male or female, not based on gender identity. This affected how federal agencies deal with issues like identification documents, health care, and workplace policies.
- EO 14173: Stopped federal offices and contractors from using race or gender-based hiring or programs. Companies working with the government had to promise they would not use DEI hiring goals.

2. What Happened in the Government?

- Many DEI workers in federal jobs were put on leave while their jobs were reviewed or eliminated.
- Websites and online materials were scrubbed. Thousands of pages mentioning DEI or "equity" were taken down or rewritten.
- At the Pentagon, some history materials were flagged, including tributes to groups like the Tuskegee Airmen (famous Black fighter pilots in WWII). Some pages were taken down at first but later restored after criticism.

3. How Did Universities React?

Universities also had to respond to these changes:

- The University of Michigan, which had one of the largest DEI offices in the country, announced in March 2025 that it would close its DEI office. Leaders said they were following federal rules and trying to protect funding.
- Other colleges across the U.S. reviewed their DEI programs. Some shut down offices, while others tried to rename or reorganize services (like tutoring, mental health support, or cultural centers) under different labels to keep them alive.

These decisions sparked student protests on many campuses, with students arguing that support systems were being taken away.

4. What About States?

At the state level, some governments went even further. For example, in Ohio, lawmakers passed a law banning DEI in public colleges. As a result, schools like Ohio State University,

Kent State, and Ohio University closed or merged multicultural centers, women's centers, and LGBTQ+ centers.

University leaders often said they were sad to close these spaces but had no choice if they wanted to keep state funding.

5. Did Courts Push Back?

Yes, courts got involved quickly.

In Maryland, a federal judge issued a nationwide order stopping parts of Trump's executive orders. The judge said the rules might violate free speech (by punishing people who support DEI) and were too vague to enforce fairly. This ruling gave DEI programs a temporary shield, but it did not cancel the orders completely.

So, the courts slowed down the changes, but the legal fight is still going.

6. Lawsuits

Several civil rights groups filed lawsuits against Trump's orders.

- The National Urban League, along with other groups, argued that the orders violated free speech (First Amendment) and equal protection rights.
- Different courts gave different answers: one blocked parts of the orders, while another court in Washington, D.C. refused to block them.

This means the issue is not settled yet, and it may eventually reach the Supreme Court.

7. Companies' Responses

Private companies also reacted.

Google announced it would end its diversity hiring goals, which had aimed to bring in more women and underrepresented groups.

The company said it made this choice because of the new legal risks from Trump's orders, since Google works with the federal government.

However, Google and other companies said they would still support inclusion in other ways, like employee groups and training, even if they could not set official hiring goals.

This shows how government rules can strongly influence corporate practices.

8. Cultural Impact

Beyond jobs and policies, the orders had symbolic effects:

Federal agencies removed history pages and photos about minority groups who served the country, like the Tuskegee Airmen and Native American Code Talkers.

Critics said this felt like erasing the contributions of minorities from U.S. history.

Supporters said the changes were about removing politics from government and making policies “fair” and “merit-based.”

The debate shows a bigger cultural struggle: should institutions highlight identity and equity, or should they ignore it and treat everyone the same?

Let's Train – Essay

Essay prompt 1 :

Key concepts :

"Merit-based opportunity" = systems where advancement or selection is ostensibly based on individual talent, effort, or achievement, rather than other factors

DEI = Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs, often implemented to counteract historical or structural inequalities.

Fairness can be interpreted in different ways: equality of opportunity, equality of outcome, or procedural fairness.

Subtleties of the topic :

"Adequate replacement" > frames the question in terms of sufficiency: can merit-based systems fully substitute for DEI initiatives?

Possible arguments :

- What counts as “merit” can be subjective—academic grades, work experience, or performance metrics may favor those with pre-existing advantages.
- Many people treat merit-based systems as inherently fair, but “merit” often reflects pre-existing advantages (better schools, networks, financial resources).
> Meritocracy vs equity: Can pure meritocracy ever be fair if starting conditions are unequal?
- DEI is broad: it can include quotas, mentoring programs, inclusive hiring practices, unconscious bias training, or structural reforms.
- If you treat DEI as merely “helping underrepresented groups,” you may overlook its broader goals: changing culture, removing systemic barriers, or improving collective performance.
- Short-term vs long-term fairness: DEI might correct historic inequities now, while meritocracy rewards existing advantage.

Essay prompt 2 :

Key concepts :

DEI = cf. prompt 1

Minority or Disadvantaged Groups = individuals who are underrepresented or face systemic barriers due to factors like race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, disability, or sexual orientation.

Pitfall :

- Not all minority or disadvantaged groups experience the same challenges.
- The effects of ending DEI programs may vary across different sectors, regions, and institutions.

Specificities of a 'how' question

A more descriptive approach > possible outline with different scales of analysis.

Ex :

- 1) Immediate effects like loss of support systems, increased discrimination, and potential declines in academic and professional outcomes.
- 2) Long term consequences like potential widening of inequality gaps, diminished representation in leadership roles, and societal implications.

Let's Train – Listening Comprehension

- 1) When is the executive order expected to take effect?

February 19th.

- 2) What general reaction has emerged regarding misinformation about this executive order?

People are confused and spreading wrong information about its impact.

- 3) What does the executive order say about using diversity as a hiring or job criterion for federal positions?

Diversity cannot be used as a factor for hiring federal employees.

- 4) According to civil rights attorney Jon Marco, who will be affected by this executive order and who will not?

Affected: federal employees and contractors.

Not affected: workers in private companies or outside the federal government.

- 5) Which longstanding federal law continues to protect workers from employment discrimination despite the executive order?

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 (part of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act).

- 6) What is the role of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) mentioned in the report?

Investigates workplace discrimination complaints.

- 7) What confusion or potential harm does Marco warn could result from public misunderstandings of the executive order?

People might panic or think their rights are gone when they are still protected.

- 8) How do state and federal laws protect workers even when an executive order is signed, according to the report?

Laws already on the books, including state laws and the Constitution, still protect workers.