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DATE: February 25, 2022

ALABAMIANS FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AND INTEGRITY SAYS DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION GOES BEYOND SIGNAGE AND MONUMENTS

On Friday, February 25, the University of Alabama renamed Bibb Graves Hall for Autherine Lucy (Foster), the first Black student to attend classes in February 1956 who was expelled after a mob intent on killing her besieged the hall now named in her honor. While we recognize her courage and the horrific events of that time, Alabamians for Academic Excellence and Integrity believes history belongs to everyone and should be preserved without bias. Cultural artifacts, historic artworks, monuments commemorating our university and buildings named for people who built it, should not be obscured, hidden or suppressed to further political or ideological agendas. This is part of a larger strategic plan emanating from the Division of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to ensure all aspects of the university adhere to the beliefs it endorses. There are issues beyond signage on campus buildings.

According to the university's strategic plan's "Path-Forward Progress Update", issued in May 2021, under the goal of "Recruiting and Retaining More Diverse Faculty and Staff," three stated objectives undermine the pursuit of academic excellence as foundational to any university's mission. These are as follow:

"Develop and implement a campus-wide inclusive hiring practice workshop for faculty and hiring committees to support the goal of increasing the diversity of staff and tenure-track faculty. The workshop would include training on recognizing implicit bias, building a diverse candidate pool and incorporating institutional cultural responsiveness in the search process." This is troubling because hiring the best possible candidate regardless of race, color, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation should be the goal rather than hiring anyone because of the color of their skin, gender or sexual proclivities.

"Embed DEI competencies into the employee annual performance review process to measure inclusive behavior by employees, ensure accountability of Goal #3 of the strategic plan, track employee growth overtime, and recognize the contributions of outstanding employees." This means professors will be rated on how they have incorporated DEI ideology into their teaching and research.

"Conduct with the leadership of the provost, a review of the tenure and promotion process to re-value the service performed by faculty in the interest of advancing racial equality. The review would take into account (underlined in text) such work as

mentoring of underrepresented students or performing service to underserved communities. Units should ensure that these highly valued contributions of the tenure and promotion process do not prohibit faculty from advancing in rank in a timely manner.”

There are two vexing issues here. First, are professors tasked with paying special attention to students based on race or sexual orientation? Second, is social activism to be considered along with pedagogy, research, publication, and service to the university? If so, what kind of “underserved communities” are acceptable? Would a candidate who demonstrated in front of an abortion clinic be considered doing “service” to the life of an unborn child? We doubt it.

These provisions of the strategic plan are politically and ideologically skewed. Alabamians for Academic Excellence and Integrity believes academic subjects have to be taught in an environment that encourages critical thinking, respectful disagreement and the pursuit of objective truth by thoroughly investigating subject matter exposing diverse concepts and perspectives.

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