



FACULTY SENATE

The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

April 17, 2024

Dear OU Faculty,

As the deadline nears for OU to comply with the Governor's December executive order regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, the reach and implications of this order are becoming very tangible. As a result, many faculty have contacted the Senate to ask what we are doing, and have done, on issues related to this executive order.

As Faculty Senate Chair this year, I can say that the Senate officers and Executive Committee have discussed these issues with the President, Provost, and several other members of the OU administration on multiple occasions. I also can say that the officers and the Faculty Senate Executive Committee (FSEC) have discussed many times how we, and the full Senate, should respond to this executive order. After weighing our options carefully, we concluded that the best and most appropriate response for FSEC and the Senate was to gather information about faculty concerns and to push the administration to address those concerns in its discussions and negotiations with the Governor's Office and legislature.

While we may disagree with the administration on some issues, we see the OU's administration and the Faculty Senate as allies in defending the value of public higher education for our state and nation, and in supporting freedom of speech and inquiry. While we are concerned that there are political forces that would like to exercise an ideological surveillance of our teaching and scholarship, we note that the executive order specifically protects freedom of speech in our classrooms and freedom of inquiry in our research, as well as protecting activities that are necessary to retain accreditation or to comply with federal regulations. There are institutions in other states that do not have such protections, and they are facing major challenges to accreditation and access to federal funding, in addition to having to navigate a legal minefield of conflicting state and federal obligations.

That said, we remain concerned about issues surrounding the implementation of this executive order, and we wish all faculty to know that we are here to represent you and your concerns. If you are worried or confused about what, exactly, is required, talk to your chairs and deans, consult the University's (quite helpful) website on the executive order (<https://www.ou.edu/president/executive-order-update/faq>), and bring your concerns to us so that we can ensure that they are heard.

Sincerely,
Hunter Heyck
Chair, OU Faculty Senate 23-24