

**In support of Dr. Abigail Thompson, academic freedom,  
and viewpoint diversity**

I am writing to commend Dr. Abigail Thompson for her leadership and courage to write a very thoughtful editorial<sup>1</sup> on the use of diversity statements for faculty hiring, and specifically on the politicized rubric<sup>2</sup> constructed by UC Berkeley, and to commend Dr. Erica Flapan for the courage to publish it. In case you missed it, the crux of her argument is that *"requiring candidates to believe that people should be treated differently according to their identity is indeed a political test"*, and that should be juxtaposed with the classical liberal viewpoint that every person should be treated as a unique individual. The UC Berkeley diversity score favors one viewpoint over the other, making it a political test. A similar argument, in more extended form, was previously made in a well-researched white paper by Dr. Bruce Gilley<sup>3</sup>.

Hidden in plain sight is the observation that there is nothing for a job candidate to add on top of what can be explained with a cover letter, a curriculum vitae, a teaching statement, and a research statement, since candidates, that have a record of diversity-related contributions, have the choice to report on them in these other documents. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to surmise that the sole purpose/function of asking for separate diversity statements in job applications, is to frontload them ahead of consideration of the entire application, and use a scoring system to weed out "politically incorrect" candidates, without looking at the entire application holistically. What we are seeing in UC Berkeley is the beta-test for what will eventually be deployed at the national level.

Those of us who have a tenured position will not be off the hook, when frontloaded diversity scoring is introduced in tenure and promotion evaluation and, even worse, in post-tenure review. According an earlier article by Robert Shibley<sup>4</sup>, diversity statements are also being used at UCLA,

not only for hiring, but also for faculty evaluation, with the article further explaining how that violates academic freedom and undermines public trust in academia. Our hiring practices and faculty evaluation practices should remain apolitical and meritocratic, focused on recognizing excellence in teaching, research, and service, with the understanding that Mathematics faculty have varied interests, and varied strengths and weaknesses, and a diversity of talent is needed to make the whole strong.

The retaliation attempt to damage Dr. Thompson's career and to bully the AMS towards practicing censorship against one speaking truth to power is frightening, and I unequivocally condemn it. Free speech, academic freedom, and a diversity of viewpoints are fundamental principles of academic life, and speech that we disagree with should be confronted with more free speech, and not with personal attacks, "cancel" culture, and "public shaming". An interesting perspective on the deeper issues that underlie the recent rise of hostility towards freedom of expression is given in the book<sup>5</sup> by Lukianoff and Haidt. The best way forward is to stand for and unify under universal principles of freedom, fairness, and justice applied equally to everyone, and to live by the ideal of servant leadership. An encouraging development in this direction is the adoption of the Chicago principles on free speech<sup>6</sup> by 70 institutions<sup>7</sup> over a short period of 5 years.

Yours sincerely,

Eleftherios Gkioulekas  
University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Thompson, *Notices of the American Mathematical Society* **66**, 1778-1779, 2019

<sup>2</sup>[https://ofew.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/rubric\\_to\\_assess\\_candidate\\_contributions\\_to\\_diversity\\_equity\\_and\\_inclusion.pdf](https://ofew.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/rubric_to_assess_candidate_contributions_to_diversity_equity_and_inclusion.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Gilley, "The Imposition of Diversity Statements on Faculty Hiring and Promotion at Oregon Universities", Oregon Association of Scholars, 2017  
[https://www.oregonscholars.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/DiversityStatements\\_Rev16Mar17.pdf](https://www.oregonscholars.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/DiversityStatements_Rev16Mar17.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Robert Shibley, "UCLA diversity requirement threatens academic freedom, trust in academia", 2018,

<https://www.thefire.org/ucla-diversity-requirement-threatens-academic-freedom-trust-in-academia/>

<sup>5</sup>G. Lukianoff and J. Haidt: "The Coddling of the American Mind", Penguin Random House, New York NY, 2018

<sup>6</sup><https://freeexpression.uchicago.edu/>

<sup>7</sup><https://www.thefire.org/chicago-statement-university-and-faculty-body-support/>