

Full text of Dean Jackson's Email to the STAMPS Community:  
(Transcribed from images by Francisco Brady, any errors are mine)

## **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion will continue at the Penny W. Stamps School of Art & Design**

Dear Colleagues,

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) will continue at the Penny W. Stamps School of Art & Design because our academic program and DEI initiatives are legally compliant, in alignment with our university values, and an extension of the mission of our school.

On Thursday, March 27th, 2025 at 3:30 p.m., President Ono, Provost McCauley, CFO Chantas, and VP for Medical Affairs Runge wrote to the University of Michigan community announcing the elimination of the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI), the discontinuation of the university DEI 2.0 Strategic Plan, university-wide elimination of diversity statements, and legal review of existing programs to ensure they comply with federal law and guidance.

Two hours prior to this announcement, I was walking through Pierpoint Commons and took a picture of this University of Michigan sign, which explicitly states, "Our Core Values: Integrity, Respect, Inclusion, Equity, Diversity, Innovation." The move to eliminate the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion directly contradicts these institutional values. While I, as Dean, and Stamps, as a school, did not directly, create the University of Michigan's Culture Journey or signify these six values, we have collectively worked to honor them. Integrity, Respect, Inclusion, Equity, Diversity, and Innovation are aspirations that establish a benchmark by which to measure our actions, actions that work to build and sustain our community. Throughout the 2024 national election, DEI, immigrants, and trans communities have been targeted as political flashpoints.

On January 27, 2025, two DEI-related Executive Orders that potentially impact the university were issued, including the Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity order, which expands the application of the Supreme Court ruling that struck down affirmative action in college admission to areas beyond its scope. The order also includes identifying "up to nine potential civil compliance investigations" of organizations including institutions of higher education with endowments over one billion dollars. The "Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing" order requires federal agencies to terminate "equity-related" grants or contracts and all DEI or DEIA performance requirements for employees, contractors, or grantees.

On February 21, 2025, a federal judge issued a preliminary injunction on the orders. Then, on March 14, a decision from the Fourth Circuit Court of appeals allows the Executive Orders to be enforced while a legal challenge proceeds. In that ruling, Judge Alberto Diaz stated: "And despite the vitriol now being heaped on DEI, people of good faith who work to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion deserve praise, not opprobrium. For when this country embraces true diversity, it acknowledges and respects the social identity of its people. When it fosters true equity, it opens opportunities and ensures a level playing field for all. And when its policies are

truly inclusive, it creates an environment and culture where everyone is respected and valued. What could be more American than that?"

As stated by the American Bar Association, Executive Orders are presidential directives "that manage operations of the federal government." These Executive Orders outline presidential commitment to enforce federal law, but the American Bar Association notes that they "are not legislation". To date and as noted in this email, our school operates in compliance with the law and in sustaining our DEI commitments, we continue to operate in compliance with the law.

Looking past the political talking points and disinformation tropes on DEI that circulate online, through cable news, and across social media, the logic behind the national movement to eliminate DEI is most clearly articulated in the Department of Education's "Dear Colleague" Letter, dated February 14, 2024." The "Dear Colleague" letter was issued to all educational institutions in the United States and demanded that all illegal DEI initiatives be immediately eliminated or educational institutions would face legal and fiscal consequences from the Federal Government. To be clear, the federal budget cuts from the National Institutes of Health and other organizations are not about DEI but rather about divesting from the public.

The "Dear Colleague" letter makes two major claims that I'd like to highlight here: The first is that DEI is 'illegal' because it discriminates on the basis of race. The second is that DEI is an extension of educational indoctrination "with the false premise that the United States is built upon 'systemic and structural racism'. Related to our work as a school of art and design, within the last 24 hours, another Executive Order aimed at the Smithsonian was issued, directly attacking the American Art Museum, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and the American Women's History Museum for their focus on DEI. It is critical in these moments to affirm these histories and cultures that have been and are central to the nation's history and contemporary formation.

Here, it is important to emphasize two critical points that have not been articulated by university leadership. Firstly, our DEI efforts and our academic program more broadly, are compliant with local, state, federal, and constitutional laws. Since the state of Michigan voted to ban affirmative action through Proposal 2 in 2006, the university has worked to ensure its programs and activities are compliant. As written specifically on the university website that addresses Proposal 2 FAQs, it states the following answer to the question of "Does Proposal 2 prohibit public institutions from seeking diversity?"

*No. Proposal 2 precludes discrimination and preferential treatment on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, or national origin in public education, public employment, or public contracting. It does not in any way mean that diversity is no longer a permissible, indeed compelling, interest. The University of Michigan is firmly committed to the goal of creating a diverse educational environment. We continue to work to build a community that is comprised of faculty, staff, and students who come to U-M with a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. This diversity contributes to the excellence and dynamism of the University's learning environment.*

**I assure you, the Stamps School's academic program and initiative to support faculty, students, and staff are fully legal and ethical.** Secondly, the central claim in the "Dear Colleague" letter is erroneous, which attempts to argue that the United States wasn't founded upon structural racism. Despite efforts to rewrite history, the fact remains that the United States was founded upon systemic and structural racism. Chattel slavery, African Americans designated as 3/5ths a person, broken treaties and forced relocation, and Jim Crow laws are just a few examples of racism that is structural and systemic. A further example that systemic and structural discrimination existed in the country's formation is the fact that women did not have the right to vote until 1920, as suffrage has existed for only 105 years. The forces behind the "Dear Colleague" letter want to ignore these difficult truths that our country was formed on very unequal and discriminatory terms. Wealth that was generated through the formation of the United States came from land-taking and the greatest form of dehumanization, enslavement.

These are difficult truths that our own University of Michigan's **Inclusive History Project** articulates through the most profound scholarly rigor and peer review. We must reckon with these difficult truths and figure out how to co-build the future together. This mandate of reckoning with history is the imperative that the civil rights movement and generation gave us, and we must now steward onward.

Rather than reaffirming that we are operating academic programs that are legally compliant and affirming the value and prestige of the peer-reviewed knowledge production produced by the University of Michigan's 100 academic programs that are ranked in the national top 10 within their respective fields, yesterday, the university chose to eliminate the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. This is an attempt to pre-empt federal action against the institution, federal action that is itself discriminatory and antithetical to academic freedom and freedom of speech. The rationale offered for cutting ODEI in the March 27, 2025 letter from President Ono, Provost McCauley, CFO Chatas, and VP for Medical Affairs Runge was vague, speaking to potential federal action and amplifying "some in our campus community" who "have voiced frustration that they did not feel included in DEI initiatives." Institutional efforts to create greater equity, diversity, and inclusion are difficult because they engage in a wide range of constituents who all have their own free speech rights and operate within a context of academic freedom. This work was never easy.

Yet, while the university has chosen to amplify "some" voices, many are also being marginalized, censored, and undermined at this moment. Eliminating ODEI cuts the jobs and livelihoods of individuals who have committed themselves to assisting our university in building more equitable, diverse, and inclusive communities. Their work was in alignment with the university's stated values. I abhor the elimination of ODEI, most especially the elimination of the staff positions in the office, staff who have been betrayed by the university.

As I state this, I am thinking of a recent print made by our colleague, Senior Associate Dean for Research Creative Practice, and Graduate Education, Dylan Miner. The print calls for university leadership to protect our students, faculty, and staff. I commit to you to continue to protect our

faculty, staff, and students so that they can do their work, live, and build creative lives in alignment with the imperatives of academic freedom and artistic freedom of speech.

What I have offered informally and formally in the past two years remains: we are living through a historically difficult moment, perhaps unprecedented. Difficulty defines our era. And yet, difficulty must be confronted. Difficulty is at the center of our methods as artists and designers, which seeks to materialize new knowledge, ideas, and interventions to heal ourselves, our society, and its relation to the land., The path ahead will continue to be difficult, regardless of presidential, national, or university politics. By continuing to commit to a space with the widest possible freedom of speech, we can ensure that all subjectivities, all backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives can coexist and be debated through the most generative and healthy way possible, out work. Our work in the studios, our work in the community, our work together in supporting students, our work generating new knowledge and ways of being... our work is what will see us through. I call upon each of us to reaffirm our work, which includes a commitment to building healthier futures, which requires generating communities that are diverse, equitable, and inclusive.

Yours,  
Carlos F. Jackson  
Dean and Professor