

How One CU Boulder Department Ended DEI Statements

A FACULTY-LED SHIFT TO PROMOTE VIEWPOINT DIVERSITY IN FACULTY HIRING

HxA members and CU Boulder Campus Community Co-Chairs Matthew Burgess (now at U. Wyoming) and Peter Newton wanted to reform faculty hiring to better reflect academic values. Instead of only critiquing DEI statements, they offered a constructive alternative: service statements.

CASE AT A GLANCE

- In early 2024, CU Boulder's Department of Environmental Studies voted unanimously to end diversity statements in hiring, replacing them with service statements.
- Service statements—describing one's professional contributions to their department, university, profession, or society in general—align with professional activities valued in tenure and promotion, giving hiring committees a fuller view of candidates.
- The first proposal failed amid concerns about tone, content, and compelled speech.
- After revisions, dialogue, and alignment with departmental strategic imperatives, the measure passed unanimously.

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We consider it a small but significant shift of the needle toward a more fair, ethical, legal, and liberal hiring process.



– Matt Burgess and Peter Newton

THE CHALLENGE:

Diversity Statements—essays on advancing DEI—became common in faculty hiring in the 2010s. Today, more than [one in five faculty jobs](#) require them. Critics argue they pressure applicants to adopt specific ideological stances, functioning as compelled speech and limiting viewpoint diversity among hired faculty.

Burgess and Newton further noted misalignment: DEI work is not part of tenure or promotion criteria at CU Boulder, rendering their use in hiring as misaligned with the scholarly attributes valued by the department.

THE CHANGE:

Burgess and Newton proposed ending DEI statements, replacing them with service statements that cover professional contributions to the department, university, profession, or public.

The first proposal, with a detailed 9-point critique of DEI statements, failed because some faculty felt that endorsing the proposal also meant endorsing each critique.

Afterward, Burgess and Newton held one-on-one conversations with the department chair and the Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion committee. Together, they revised the language, tying service statements to the department's strategic initiatives. The updated proposal passed unanimously.

THE IMPACT:

- Ending of compelled political speech in faculty hiring.
- New hiring indicates that the service statement is being interpreted broadly, giving applicants freedom to describe various forms of service, including but not limited to DEI work.
- The process helped promote departmental culture change: more dialogue, more clarity about expectations, and better alignment of hiring practices with what is actually evaluated in faculty careers.

ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS

- 1 Offer alternatives to DEI statements, not just critiques.
- 2 Consider service statements as a fair replacement.
- 3 Allow DEI contributions to be discussed, but avoid mandating their inclusion.
- 4 Work with skeptics to refine proposals and build consensus.

