

To: Board of Education Members
From: LCCEA Officers
Date: December 6, 2023
Re: Concerning Parallels between Policies that Dismantle Public Higher Education and Undermine Democracy in Florida and Recent Events at LCC

Board of Education Members,

We are speaking as representatives of the part-time and full-time faculty of Lane Community College about issues of concern to faculty and to the public. We are reading this statement written by LCCEA officers listed below:

Adrienne Mitchell, LCCEA President
Wendy Simmons, Vice President at-Large:
Peggy Oberstaller, Vice President for Part-Time Faculty
Christina Howard, Vice President for Career-Technical Faculty
Kate Sullivan, Vice President for Transfer Faculty
Rosa Lopez, Vice President for Learning Advancement
Aryn Bartley, Secretary (on leave for Fall)
Sarah Erickson, Interim Secretary (for Fall)
Wendy Rawlinson, Treasurer

We are speaking today to:

- ❖ Unequivocally affirm the values of academic freedom – a bedrock principle for higher education in a healthy democracy;
- ❖ Emphasize the intrinsic connection between academic freedom and the role of higher education in promoting civic engagement, an educated citizenry and a vibrant participatory democracy in our communities;
- ❖ Recenter the goal of advancing social justice and equity in campus discourse and practices;
- ❖ Unwaveringly protect the role, responsibility, and right of faculty to teach diverse, comprehensive, culturally-accurate history and narratives, including critical race and gender theories and restorative justice concepts; and to develop and teach curriculum that promotes understanding of the experiences and needs of historically oppressed communities as well as systems of oppression;
- ❖ Make salient the need for checks and balances both within and beyond the walls of our institution; and
- ❖ Most importantly, we call upon you, our publicly-elected Board of Education representing the people of Lane County, to affirm these values. We ask you to take action to correct the course of our institution as it increasingly strays from principles that are fundamental to our college, our broader communities, and our democracy.

We are concerned about policies enacted in states such as Florida and Texas, which undermine academic freedom and the role of higher education in our democracy and devalue and oppress

women, people of color, and LGBTQIA communities. These policies recall those of the McCarthy era, which ultimately spurred the US Supreme Court to recognize academic freedom as “a special concern of the First Amendment.”

To illustrate our concerns, we offer a comparison of the concerning parallels we observe between recent events at LCC and policies enacted in Florida.

We seek to raise your awareness of these issues, and we ask you to carefully consider the implications for the communities of Lane County whom you represent.

And we ask you to take action to intervene.

Concerning Parallels between Policies that Dismantle Public Higher Education and Undermine Democracy in Florida and Recent Events at LCC¹

Legislative Policies and Practices, which comprise Florida's "Agenda to Dismantle Public Higher Education" according to Schoorman and Gatens*	Recent Parallel Events on Lane's Campus
Defunding of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Removal of classified professional from Office of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion in early Fall 2022, leaving the office without staffing; → Discontinuation of provision of weekly Cultural Competence Professional Development opportunities open to all employees, which are required for all higher ed employees by Board Policy 520 and state law, October 2022 → AVP of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion pushed to retire, Summer 2023, leaving the Office with no employees nor any plans for their replacement
Bullying against educators supportive of LGBTQ+ Communities, women and gender studies, and racial equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Unlawful targeting of three faculty racial discrimination complainants for layoff after a long history of their experiences of disparate treatment; Administration's efforts to layoff faculty of color <i>outside</i> the contractual seniority process after faculty experienced retaliatory language from their direct manager only heightens this concern.
Undermining voting rights and public oversight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → The official 2022-2027 Strategic plan includes the goal of "Foster civic engagement and prepare students to live and work in a diverse and global society," but it will be measured only by a metric that reduces and dilutes the concept of civic engagement and democratic literacy so as to render the goal virtually meaningless with indicators based solely on participation rates in, "Lecture series; Seniors (55+) learning program; Seniors (62+) free to audit credit courses; Senior companion program; SSS employer; Adult literacy and GED prep," largely unrelated to civic engagement & none of which even include credit students or student services → Presentation of "budget reduction package" to Board of Education for a vote without any public posting of its actual program and service cut contents, asking the Board to rush to pass the package without sufficient information about revenue and without public notice of the actual cuts and without publicly presented data or analysis to demonstrate the need for those cuts in programs and services,

¹ Schoorman, Dilys, and Rosanna Gatens. "A Threat to Democracy: Florida's Agenda to Dismantle Public Higher Education." *Journal of Academic Freedom*, vol. 14, 24 Oct. 2023. www.aaup.org/JAF14/threat-to-democracy. Accessed 27 November 2023.

	<p>September 2023</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Reducing the role of the Board in public oversight of the institution through Administration rhetoric that re-frames essential Board decisions as “operations”; reducing the democratic function of a publicly elected Board by influencing Board members to abdicate decision-making authority; Ongoing
<p>Targeting access to reproductive healthcare, including abortions & Targeting transgender rights</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → LCC President disallowed proposal by student health clinic manager to expand student access to reproductive healthcare. → Sudden announcement of student health clinic closure plans immediately following HB2002’s first hearing in the Oregon House. → At the time of that hearing, HB2002 would have required expanded access to reproductive healthcare and gender-affirming care at college and university health clinics. → The closure announcement also constituted an Unfair Labor Practice and violated the collective bargaining agreement.
<p>Targeting immigrants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Proposed elimination of LCC’s only bilingual, bicultural faculty counselor position → LCC President declined to remove BP5015 and BP5020 from Board’s consent agenda when asked by the spokesperson for the faculty in January 2023, who expressed concerns that the policies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Included offensive and discriminatory language (i.e., “alien”) ◆ Were inconsistent with the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board of Education’s Sanctuary Resolution; • Spirit of SB1560 passed by the Oregon legislature; • Higher Education Coordinating Commission’s equity-driven policies to expand access to students, regardless of immigration status ◆ Did not make explicit that in-state tuition is assessed for undocumented students, consistent with Oregon’s Tuition Equity Act
<p>Undermining school board membership and role</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Administration seeks to implement requirements that Board members notify President of any visits or contacts with campus, reinterpreting the role of the Board of Education to one that functions to support the President rather than represent the people of the district and provide public oversight (Summer 2023) → Board of Education direction at October 2023 work session to <i>not change</i> the shared governance system at this time undermined by LCC President through a campus wide resolution to reduce authority of shared governance system, November 2023

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Requests to LCCEA and Faculty Council that all communications from campus be provided to LCC President and then relayed by LCC President to Board of Education rather than through direct communication by campus constituencies at open, public Board meetings
Targeting, banning protests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Proposal to adopt policy to speech restrictions for employees and students despite restrictions already in effect for outside groups, in violation of employee and students' rights in October & November 2022
Undermining academic freedom by undermining faculty jurisdiction over curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Administration declined to allow Faculty Council to appoint faculty to Credit for Prior Learning committee in violation of Collective Bargaining Agreement, November 2023 → Administration claims at Board work session that Faculty Council is “too busy” to handle academic policies this year & did not assign policies that had been referred by Board of Ed to Faculty Council, November 2023 → Letter threatening legal action sent by college’s attorney to Faculty Council in an effort to silence Faculty Council discussion → Regular surveillance of Faculty Council and College Council by upper administrators (beginning Fall 2023)
Curriculum censorship and interference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Removal of <i>gender studies-based</i> course from a faculty member’s assignment, citing content was “too feminist” as the reason
Undermining academic freedom by undermining faculty role in hiring decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → After the only two full-time faculty members on VPAA search resigned from the committee in Fall 2022, Administration declined to investigate complaints about search alleging numerous violations of policy & procedure in December 2022. → Despite the Campus Climate Ethics and Integrity committee recommending a goal to, “Ensure all hiring processes adhere to COPPS hiring process with all participants, including search advocate, attending all meetings and all decisions made during meeting time” the executive administration has declared the procedure must be rewritten instead. Will the re-writing of the search procedure undermine faculty roles in hiring decisions and reduce accountability for managers?
Reducing or eliminating specific gen ed disciplines that further students’ understanding of civic engagement and/or their own experience and systems of oppression (e.g.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Proposed reduction of Political Science discipline, January 2023 → Reduction of Sociology discipline, January 2023 → November 2023 Elimination of all part-time faculty librarians despite Board vote in September 2023 to not make reductions of active personnel; libraries, especially in their service to community college students, are a bulwark

removal of Sociology course from Gen Ed options in Florida ²)	against misinformation and fake news
Attacks on unions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Too numerous to list; examples include targeted, threatened layoffs, which would affect union officers and racial discrimination complainants. (See ULP complaint for more examples.) → Unlawful dissemination of an anonymous, false and defamatory complaint about two high-ranking union officers by the College President to the Board of Education
Additional items from Florida and Texas: Undermining academic freedom by undermining tenure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Is this on the horizon for LCC? → For instance, will disparaging comments about “tenured faculty” become commonplace at LCC? → Will contracted faculty status in the collective bargaining agreement be misrepresented?

We will provide this document to you with our citations.

Thank you for your consideration and for your service to the people of Lane County.

Again, we seek to raise your awareness of these issues, and we ask you to carefully consider the implications for the communities of Lane County whom you represent.

And we ask you to take action to intervene.

² Alonso, Johanna. “Florida Looks to Remove Sociology from Gen Ed.” *Inside Higher Ed*, 17 November 2023, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/students/academics/2023/11/17/sociology-may-be-removed-gen-ed-course-list-florida>. Accessed 17 November 2023.