



Responding Constructively to Mandated Diversity Training

About this resource

Faculty, staff, and students regularly reach out to Heterodox Academy with concerns about mandated diversity training at their schools, given their dubious empirical or practical merit, and the problematic theoretical frameworks they often uncritically draw from.

Diversity-related training programs are generally ineffective and often bring negative side effects (see [here](#) for a review of the literature). Mandatory training causes people to engage with the materials and exercises in an [adversarial and resentful](#) frame of mind. Consequently, mandatory training often leads to more [negative feelings](#) and behaviors, both towards the institution and minority co-workers. This [effect](#) is especially pronounced among the people who need the training most. Yet [roughly 80%](#) of diversity-related training programs in the U.S. seem to be mandatory.

This tip sheet offers five pieces of practical advice to constructively engage campus communities in discussion about the unintended negative consequences of mandated diversity training, including suggestions for more effectively advancing the goal of creating a more positive and welcoming environment for people from historically marginalized and underrepresented groups.

Share Common Ground

Be sympathetic to the purported goals of the training: creating a more positive and welcoming environment for people from historically marginalized and underrepresented groups. The realm of dispute should be on whether the program can actually achieve that goal and how the goal can be better pursued. A conversation that does not begin by creating this common ground will generally be a non-starter. Try to [speak in the language](#) of the people you are trying to reach, for instance, emphasize the importance of evidence-based interventions and of avoiding harm (including inadvertent harm [caused by the intervention](#) itself). A constructive and positive tone will generally be more effective than a condescending screed. If the goal is to persuade, build bridges.

Recognize pressures and good intentions

Recognize that university leaders and administrators are committed to “doing something” at this moment to demonstrate their commitment to combatting bias and discrimination, and supporting students, faculty, and staff from historically marginalized and disenfranchised groups. Remember that administrators are under significant pressure to show they are “with it” and are taking action. And, of course, many also feel a deep personal commitment to creating just and equitable campuses and are thus personally driven to take some kind of action. Suggesting that your college or university simply “do nothing” will not be a winning argument. Doing nothing is not an option.

Suggest alternatives

Thinking about the possibilities and constraints within your local context, highlight actions your college or university could take to more plausibly advance their diversity for the same resource investment (or less). [For example:](#)

- **Provide more academic and financial support** to students from historically marginalized and underrepresented groups;
- **Name [scholarships and fellowships](#)** in honor of [George Floyd](#) or other victims of racial injustice;
- **Highlight the scholarship of faculty** from your college that advances understanding of topics such as racism, discrimination, police violence and social movements;
- **Collaborate with your institution’s** Teaching and Learning Center and the Diversity Office to create a list of readings that help [provide a window](#) into the realities of race and racism, including excellent texts from minority authors instead of [trendy-yet-vacuous](#) books like [White Fragility](#);
- **Assign those texts** in your courses;
- **Launch optional discussion groups** or book clubs around those texts. Here’s a [discussion guide](#) for Irshad Manji’s [Don’t Label Me](#) to get the conversation going;
- **Advocate for new faculty** lines for minority scholars;
- **Advocate for new research** grants to empirically study police violence, inequality and related topics.



Advocate for empirically-supported training

If, for whatever reason, your university is resistant to alternative strategies, and committed to diversity and inclusion training, ask leaders to ensure that the training is designed around the empirical literature on what works (better) – see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) for more. If an institution is going to offer diversity-related training, it should do so as a resource for those who want to learn more. To encourage more people to volunteer for the training, its value and purpose should be linked to specific organizational and development goals. Small incentives could be offered for those who participate, rather than the current norm of sanctioning those who do not.

Organize Collective Action

If you have a conscience objection to your school's announced diversity-related training requirements, it is ill-advised to unilaterally go rogue and simply refuse to comply. Instead, identify others with similar concerns. Build allies. Then, launch a [stochastic campaign](#) to underline to administrators, university leadership, and external stakeholders that there are a number of faculty, staff and students with significant and legitimate concerns about these programs.

Effectively advancing the goal of creating a more positive and welcoming environment for people from historically marginalized and underrepresented groups requires effective interventions and institutional leaders willing to advocate for such interventions despite incredible pressure to default to outdated and harmful practices. It insults, rather than honors, the memory of George Floyd and so many others to offer empty gestures like mandated diversity training in their name. Indeed, as Cyrus Mehri aptly [put it](#), “When you keep choosing the options on the menu that don’t create change, you’re purposely not creating change. It’s part of the intentional discrimination.”