

## The “Intellectual Diversity” of Ohio State’s Center for Civics

This article was originally published in the [Columbus Free Press](#) on September 18, 2025 with most of its references removed by the editor. In order to have something that better resembles an academic paper, those references have been restored here but the text is otherwise the same.

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Is a lack of intellectual diversity causing university faculty to self-censor? That’s a central claim [made by advocates](#) of Ohio State University’s Salmon P. Chase Center for Civics, which is one example of a slate of new [“viewpoint diversity” centers](#) established recently on college campuses. In an era of dwindling state support for higher education, [Ohio State’s version](#) was created by the state legislature (over the [objection](#) of the Faculty Senate) at an initial cost of [\\$24 million](#).

As evidence for the self-censorship claim, conservatives point to a [2024 survey](#) by the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), with a provocative thesis that there is presently more self-censorship within academia than at the height of McCarthy’s Red Scare. This is a [standard talking point](#) promulgated by conservative political groups, and it needs context. FIRE is [funded](#) by right-wing groups that include the Koch and Heritage Foundations, both of which are [hostile to higher education](#). More granular data indicate that although [conservatives do self-censor more than liberals](#), this is driven by “micro-environments” consisting of friends, family, and neighbors. In other words, individuals self-censor their most radical views to avoid shaming from within their own social networks.

These new “intellectual diversity” centers on campus are [anything but viewpoint-neutral](#) and Ohio State’s Chase Center is no exception. Its inaugural director, Lee Strang, is a [constitutional “originalist”](#) and a [Christian Nationalist](#) who wrote an [amicus brief](#) advocating that the Supreme Court should outlaw abortion rights. This is the context in which “intellectual diversity” should be understood: a Trojan Horse designed to sound benign but calculated to inject overtly partisan viewpoints into higher education. Recent Chase Center events have included a [lecture on “free speech”](#) by Dr. Lucas Morel, a member of the National Association of Scholars (NAS) whose previous work includes an attack on the [1619 Project](#), titled [“America wasn’t founded on White supremacy”](#). Like FIRE, the NAS is [funded by right-wing donors](#) and [opposes diversity efforts](#) in higher education.

Ohio State’s President Ted Carter has said that [faculty hiring should be meritocratic](#), yet faculty appointments to the Chase Center exist [outside of normal procedures](#). This is bitterly ironic given that [Ohio, Indiana, Florida, Georgia, and West Virginia](#) have effectively eliminated tenure in recent years. Faculty hired through normal channels are presently being silenced by a [culture of fear and intimidation](#), while conservative voices are injected into the discourse whether their credentials merit it or not.

Proponents of the Chase Center frame it as a centrist cure for [“fringy ideas and divisive racial and gender stereotypes”](#) promoted by [“loud culture warriors”](#). This reliance on right-wing

shibboleths, reminiscent of Nixon's paean to the "silent majority", gives the game away: to replace perceived indoctrination by university faculty with very real indoctrination by conservative appointees. Notably, elimination of tenure has [long been a right-wing goal](#), specifically to [stymie discussions of race and gender](#).

Indeed, these critics would level the epithet of "social justice warrior" at anyone concerned about stark inequities in higher education. If proponents of diversity programs are loud about it, perhaps that reflects how little attention society pays to inequality. Just within academia, [racial disparities are increasing](#) amongst science and engineering faculty, eroding the [minimal gains](#) made by faculty of color over several decades. Given current trends, racial minorities are [unlikely ever to achieve parity](#) amongst collegiate faculty, despite a U.S. population that is headed for [racial plurality by mid-century](#). Faculty gender diversification has [also stalled](#), and an increasingly diverse undergraduate student body [no longer looks like its teachers](#). This has consequences for [mentoring underrepresented scholars](#), who continue to encounter [racism](#) and [systemic barriers](#). Proponents of "intellectual diversity" would cover their ears and ignore these realities, lamenting only that "culture warriors" deign to point them out.

Along with cancellation of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs, these "intellectual diversity" centers should be viewed as components of an anti-education agenda that has [festered for years in right-wing circles](#). The current political climate is hostile to DEI but this does not mitigate the circumstances that necessitate such efforts. Institutions such as the Chase Center are deliberate efforts to dilute the voices who would point this out, while elimination of DEI programs is an equally focused attempt to mute the "loud culture warriors" whose truth-telling so offends the ostensible "silent majority". Please see through the façade and appreciate this for what it is: a broadside attack visited upon both higher education as well as the educators who strive to create inclusive learning environments.

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