DOI: 10.51845.39.2.11

The Masters of DEI

by Nathaniel Urban

Six years ago, I wrote about my experience being trained as a resident assistant at Ashland University. The job itself was simple enough: master the "gender unicorn," remain alert to microaggressions, and demonstrate a firm commitment to diversity. Only after graduating did I fully grasp the absurdity of the program, which led me to speak out publicly. In the aftermath of that article's publication, the head of residence life stepped down—though at the time I did not appreciate that she held a Master of Arts in higher education.

My initial understanding of the M.A. in higher education was limited. I regarded it as little more than an informal credential, a near-prerequisite for employment in student life offices. These offices typically oversee a wide range of campus functions, including residence life, fraternity and sorority affairs, counseling and disability services, career development, recreation, new student orientation, and Title IX compliance. Over time, however, it has become clear to me that the degree serves a broader and more consequential purpose. Increasingly, these programs operate as pipelines for administrators formed within a distinct ideological framework, placing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) at the core of their training.

My home state of Ohio passed Senate Bill 1 last year, requiring public universities to eliminate diversity statements in hiring and close their DEI offices. However, Ohio SB 1 did not address the presence of DEI in academic programs. I investigated M.A. in higher education programs at nine public universities and one private university in Ohio, and found that DEI, in its various forms, endures. At least one course on diversity, gender, and inclusion, multiculturalism, or critical race theory is required or highly recommended in each program.

(For consistency, the M.A. in higher education refers to the specific degree and related degrees. These include the Master of Education (M.Ed.) and Master of Science (M.S.) degrees with specialties in Higher Education, Student Affairs, Educational Studies, College Student Personnel, Higher Education Administration, and Educational Leadership.)

The Ohio State University—Main Campus

The M.A. in Educational Studies with a Specialization in Higher Education and Student Affairs.

- *ESHESA 7520, Diversity in Higher Education*—Required.

Official Course Description: This course examines structural and cultural diversity in higher education in relation to race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and religion of college/university constituents.

- *ESHESA 7550, Gender in Higher Education*—Optional, fulfills the Supporting Courses requirement.

Official Course Description: This course provides a critical overview of gender dynamics in higher education. It examines current situations of women and nonbinary people in higher education; focuses on understanding the diversity of experiences and perspectives relevant to organizational structure, policy development, and curriculum as they relate to gender dynamics.

- *ESHESA 7850, Critical Race Theory in Higher Education*—Optional, fulfills the Supporting Courses requirement.

Official Course Description: Critical Race Theory in Higher Education explores the history and development of CRT over time, paying close attention to how CRT can be (and has been) applied and used to address issues of structural injustice and inequality in American society and higher education specifically.

Master's Degrees Awarded in Education, General—163

(Ohio State did not provide specific degree numbers to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).)

Bowling Green State University—Main Campus

The M.A. in College Student Personnel

- *CSP 6035, Multicultural Competence in Student Affairs*—Required.

Official Course Description: A graduate-level course that emphasizes development of awareness, knowledge, and skills necessary to be a multiculturally competent student affairs practitioner. Emphasis on practitioner responsibilities, challenges, and opportunities for creating and sustaining multiculturally affirming campus communities.

Master's Degrees Awarded in College Student Counseling and Personnel Services—15

University of Cincinnati—Main Campus

The M.A. in Educational Studies with a Concentration in Higher Education Administration

- *EDLD 8062, Educational Equity and Diversity in Higher Education*—Optional, fulfills the Educational Foundations requirement.

Official Course Description: This graduate course is designed with a foundational focus on current issues related to education equity and access, and diversity and inclusion for a global society. Course uses cross-disciplinary pedagogy and theoretical frameworks commonly used in education and social sciences for the sole purpose of gaining comprehensive understanding of "intersectionality" across race, gender, sex, and ethnicity and how diversity issues within higher education impact groups in different ways. The course will provide a dynamic intellectual environment for inclusive discussion and analysis of how race, ethnicity, sex, and gendered social categories influence American higher education.

Master's Degrees Awarded in Higher Education/Higher Education Administration—14

Kent State University—Main Campus

The M.Ed. in Higher Education Administration and Student Affairs

- *HIED 66671, The Administration of Multiculturalism and Diversity in Higher Education*—Required.

Official Course Description: Course covers racial, ethnic and inclusive diversity and multiculturalism in U.S. higher education settings. Diversity is discussed from a historical perspective, providing a context for contemporary experiences described by and about students, staff, faculty, and administrators. Main topics include multiculturalism in higher education in light of inclusive education; racial and ethnic diversity in higher education history; benefits of diversity; faculty issues; student issues; curriculum and pedagogy matters; research issues; law and policy issues; and strategic planning for institutional diversity in higher education.

Master's Degrees Awarded in Higher Education/Higher Education Administration—28

Ohio University—Main Campus

The M.Ed. in Higher Education

- *EDHE 7210, Diversity in American Higher Education*—Required.

Official Course Description: The purpose is to facilitate the development of culturally effective higher education administrators and scholars through self-examination, understanding, and knowledge about culturally and racially diverse individuals.

Master's Degrees Awarded in Higher Education/Higher Education Administration—25

The University of Toledo

The M.Ed. in Higher Education

- *HED 5900, Diversity Leadership in Higher Education*—Required.

Official Course Description: Diversity Leadership in Higher Education explores issues of diversity on campuses through foundational and contemporary lenses. It is intended for students studying higher education as a major

or area of research interest, as well as employees in institutions of higher education at all levels. The course defines diversity in higher education settings and explores diversity through student, faculty, and administrative lenses, including the components of an effective diversity office on campus.

Master's Degrees Awarded in Higher Education/Higher Education Administration—7

Cleveland State University

The M.Ed. in Adult, Professional and Higher Education

- *ALD 647, Adult Learning and Workplace Diversity*—Required.

Official Course Description: The course will address the complex skills, concepts, and strategies relating to adult learning and workplace diversity as a component of human resource development in business, education, industry, government, and voluntary organizations.

Master's Degrees Awarded in Adult and Continuing Education and Teaching—12

Wright State University—Main Campus

The M.Ed. in Student Affairs in Higher Education—Administration

- *SAA 7630, Diversity Issues*—Required.

Official Course Description: Multidisciplinary learning opportunity for students to explore and broaden their understanding of multicultural issues, privilege, and oppression in the United States of America, with particular attention paid to these issues within higher education and student affairs.

- *SAA 7690, Designing Diverse Learning Experiences*—Required.

Official Course Description: Learning to design structured group experiences, from conception through program delivery and evaluation is the class focus. Training skills for exploring controversial issues including gender, role, class, language, spirituality, sexuality, and politics are covered.

Notes: The Pew Research Center published *Americans' Complex Views on Gender Identity and Transgender Issues* in 2022, noting significant generational and political differences in opinion.

Master's Degrees Awarded in Educational Leadership and Administration, General—20

Miami University—Oxford

The M.S. in Student Affairs and Higher Education

- *EDL 667, Diversity, Equity, and Dialogue in Higher Education*—Required.

Official Course Description: Critically examines issues in higher education access and equity with special attention on race and social class. As a way to learn to have conversations about diversity, this course introduces students to Intergroup Dialogue, a facil-

itated strategy for engaging in dialogue across difference.

Master's Degrees Awarded in Educational Leadership and Administration, General—46

University of Dayton

The M.S. in Education in Educational Leadership with a Concentration in Higher Education and Student Affairs

- *EDA 556, Leadership in Diverse Communities*—Required.

Official Course Description: This course will promote understanding of differences across social identities. Students will consider the implications of these differences for leadership in the professional setting. Emphasis will be on promoting understanding of diversity within learning organizations.

Master's Degrees Awarded in Higher Education/Higher Education Administration—8

Where Do They Work?

One outstanding question was whether my experience at Ashland University—working for a head of residence life who held an M.A. in Higher Education—was representative of similarly situated college campuses in Ohio. Of the ten universities reviewed, four included the biographies of the staff members in the student life offices. The staff members' titles and graduate degrees in higher education are listed below along with the total number of staff members in each office.

Office of Student Life—The Ohio State University—12 out of 40.

- Associate Vice President for Holistic Student Support and Well-being and Dean of Students (M.A. in College Student Personnel)
- Director, BuckID (M.Ed. in College Student Personnel/Higher Education and Student Affairs Administration)
- Managing Director, Buckeye Commons (M.Ed. in Higher and Postsecondary Education and Ph.D. in College Student Affairs Administration)
- Associate Dean of Students (M.A. and Ph.D. in Higher Education and Student Affairs)
- Director, Events, Conferences and Sponsorship (M.Ed. in College Student Affairs Leadership)
- Director, Disability Services (M.S. in College Student Personnel and Ed.D. in Educational Studies)
- Director, Sorority and Fraternity Life (M.S.Ed. in College Student Development and Administration and Ed.D. in Educational Leadership)
- Director, Ohio Union and Student Activities (M.A. in Higher Education and Student Affairs)
- Senior Director, Housing and Residence Education (M.A. in Student Affairs Administration and Ph.D. in Higher, Adult and Lifelong Education)

- Associate Dean of Students (M.Ed. and Ph.D. in Higher Education and Student Affairs)
- Program Director for the Second-year Transformational Experience Program (STEP) and Strategic Student Initiatives (M.A. in Higher Education and Student Affairs)
- Director, Student Conduct (M.A. in Higher Education)

Student Affairs Leadership Team—Ohio University—Five out of 29.

- Executive Director of Employer Engagement (M.A. in Higher Education)
- Director for Student Organizations and Campus Programming (Ph.D. in Higher Education and Student Affairs)
- Associate Dean of Students (Ph.D. in Higher Education and Student Affairs)
- Assistant Dean of Students & Director for New Student and Family Programs (M.Ed. in Higher Education)
- Executive Office Administrator (M.A. in Higher Education)

Office of Student Engagement Team—University of Toledo—One out of five.

- Director for Student Engagement & Campus Events (M.Ed. in Higher Education and Student Affairs)

Office of Diversity and Inclusion—University of Dayton—Two out of four.[1]

- Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion (Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Administration)
- Assistant Dean for Inclusive Excellence Strategic Initiatives (Ph.D. in Educational Leadership)

DEI still exists in Ohio, albeit under new branding, subtle initiatives, and the graduate programs identified in this report. The activists have not been disarmed: they are regrouping underground. I discovered that DEI at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) trickled down into interdepartmental initiatives after its main DEI office closed last year. Ohio SB 1 was a step in the right direction but more remains to be done. If you are an NAS member in Ohio, I hope I see you soon. I am indebted to you for your resilience, testimony, and support of Ohio SB 1. Now, once more unto the breach, dear friends.

Nathaniel Urban *is a development associate at the National Association of Scholars. Prior to joining NAS, Urban managed the "What Will They Learn?"® project at the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, an annual assessment of the general education programs at over 1,100 colleges and universities.*

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1. The University of Dayton is a private university. Ohio SB 1 pertains only to public universities.