

Public statements are important positions that many NASSS members support. These are not formally voted on by the membership, but members have the opportunity to sign their names in support.

The following statement expresses the opinions of only the people who sign onto it, this is not a formal position of the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport or its membership as a whole.

Public Statement on Academic Freedom in Higher Education

An anti-democratic, authoritarian wave is rolling across the world that threatens democracy and the integrity of higher education. In the United States this has taken several forms. However, one especially dangerous form is when reactionary political groups use government to legislate against knowledge and education that they find threatening. Examples include local or state governments censoring specific texts like the 1619 Project, banning approaches to scholarship like “critical race theory”, and eliminating entire fields of inquiry like African American studies. These laws and policies do not just attempt to rewrite history and limit scholarly inquiry; they are a calculated political assault on knowledge, knowledge production, and the ability for scholars to teach dissent.

Florida’s currently pending House Bill 999 is an especially dangerous example. Specifically, HB 999 would allow the Florida Board of Governors to remove any program for providing “critical” education, “including, but not limited to, Critical Race Theory, Critical Race Studies, Critical Ethnic Studies, Radical Feminist Theory, Radical Gender Theory, Queer Theory, Critical Social Justice, or Intersectionality”. By banning the use of “state or federal funds to promote, support, or maintain any programs or campus activities that... (a)dvocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion” the Bill intentionally attempts to foster a hostile environment for racially minoritized and LGTQI+ students, faculty, and staff that is contrary to the goals of higher education.

This is nothing less than an attack on theories that highlight the structural inequality, discrimination, racism, sexism, and misogyny built into the fabric of society, and not merely consequences of individual’s bad intentions. Removing these programs also represents an incredible disservice to all students. Since critical, anti-racist, decolonial and social justice lenses are fundamental to civic engagement in the 21st century, removing these from our curricula will both devalue the education students receive but also further alienate researchers, teachers, and students who care deeply about equity, inclusion, and decolonization.

As members of the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport (NASSS), we object to the premise that the role of education is solely to provide curriculum that “promotes citizenship in a constitutional republic and the state’s existing and emerging workforce needs.” The sentiment expressed in this sentence alienates a large proportion of our membership who are not only uninterested in, but who also challenge the conception of education that must serve “citizenship of the constitutional republic and the state’s existing and emerging workforce needs.” NASSS actively supports researchers, teachers, and students engaging in anti-colonial, anti-state, anti-racist, and generally critical work, which does not take the constitutional republic

or the state's needs as the premise of education. To ensure that NASSS heeds the call of Tuck and Yang – and not talk of decolonization in a metaphorical sense – we hold that any commitment to decolonization must be built on the foundation of *repatriation of Indigenous land and life*, which fundamentally conflicts with “education for citizenship of the constitutional republic and the state's existing and emerging workforce needs.” We thus denounce HB 999's premise that education must serve existing state needs or solely promote citizenship in a constitutional republic.

HB 999 demonstrates why political operatives should not write education policy. The Bill is filled with inaccurate or absent definitions, vague statements, and contradictory clauses. The poor writing of the Bill is not merely unintended sloppiness, it allows for expansive and discriminatory interpretations that could be broadly used to demonize and punish people politically deemed undesirable.

Many members of NASSS engage in scholarship that advocates for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Many members of NASSS “promote or engage in political or social activism”. Many members of NASSS draw upon a range of critical intellectual traditions. All of which would be specifically outlawed in the state of Florida should HB 999 go into effect. And some members of NASSS live, teach, and conduct research in Florida. Laws like HB 999 attempt to outlaw the mission of academic organizations like NASSS.

As members of the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport, we unequivocally denounce and condemn the use of state institutions to censor knowledge, to limit education, and to police people's political imaginations. Rather than attempting to foster political inquiry and rational debate necessary to democratic deliberation, political reactionaries are attempting to outlaw opposition and dissent. The use of state institutions to silence political opposition is a fascist attack upon academic freedom – one rooted in white supremacy. As a transnational academic organization dedicated to the study of sport and physical activity, we call on all sport scholars to reject attacks upon academic freedom, censorship of knowledge, and the political targeting of critical, anti-racist, anti-colonial, and social justice-oriented research, teaching, and scholarship.

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