

LGBTQ+ Faculty and Staff Caucus Statement in Response to LSU President William F. Tate IV's Posts Regarding Olympian Imane Khelif

August 28, 2024

Precis

LSU President William F. Tate IV reposted an X (formerly Twitter) post from an anti-trans hate group. We, the LSU LGBTQ+ Faculty and Staff Caucus, have heard from students, parents, faculty, staff, and loved ones who feel that with these posts, institutional leadership has failed the LGBTQ+ community and did not uphold LSU Faculty Senate Resolution 24-01.

Background

On August 1, 2024, LSU President William F. Tate IV reposted an X (formerly Twitter) post from Fair Play for Women, an anti-trans hate group. The post included a video of an Olympic boxing match between Angela Carini and Imane Khelif. Khelif is an Algerian woman who was subjected to selective "gender testing" by the International Boxing Association but then cleared to compete by the International Olympics Committee. She has since faced widespread, false allegations of being "trans" or even "a man." Above the video, President Tate added the comment, "This is illegal in Louisiana. We have established guidelines in our laws. Why don't the Olympics go to two divisions--Open and Women? It allows everyone to compete. Will it take a death to stop this at the Olympic level?" President Tate's comment alluded to Louisiana's 2022 Senate Bill No. 44, which bars trans women from competing in women's sports. He swiftly issued the following correction: "Colleagues pointed out LA laws do not deal directly with this context. Thank you. And I appreciate the correction! I apologize for the error and any harm caused. I am committed to a solution that allows for broad, fair and safe participation. We can get there."

The next day, the *Louisiana Illuminator* published an article noting that President Tate's original comment spread misinformation, contradicted his prior remarks about institutional neutrality, and violated LSU Faculty Senate Resolution 24-01, which states that institutional leadership should not take public positions on social and political issues unless those issues directly impact LSU's academic mission (Hutchingson, 2024). In addition, four LSU student organizations released a joint statement about the incident (College Democrats et al., 2024).

As members of the LGBTQ+ Faculty and Staff Caucus at LSU, we wish to contribute to this conversation first by acknowledging President Tate for issuing a correction. At institutions of higher learning, we hold a special responsibility for verifying the accuracy of our evidence and the reliability of our sources, and we should follow President Tate's example of issuing a correction when we get it wrong.

Nonetheless, we feel that the correction does little to mitigate the harm caused by the original comment's contribution to the disproportionate scrutiny of women of color, especially but not exclusively from the Global South, in sports. Historically, such scrutiny has included the many double standards applied to Serena Williams, Simone Biles, and Angel Reese (Abad-Santos,

2023; Martin, 2018); the selective “gender testing” of Santhi Soundarajan, Caster Semenya, Dutee Chand, Francine Niyonsaba, and Margaret Wambui (Batelaan & Abdel-Shehid, 2021; Orsak, 2024; Vedder, 2024); the singling out of Andraya Yearwood and Terry Miller as the only trans athletes named in a wave of anti-trans legislation (Murib, 2022; Sharrow, 2021); and most recently, the “gender controversies” surrounding Khelif and Lin Yu-ting at the 2024 Paris Olympics. Regardless of any individual commenter’s intent, these discourses reinforce racist and colonialist constructs of women of color as less than women.

Moreover, President Tate’s correction fails to address his original comment’s implication that legislative and policymaking bodies should exclude trans women from women’s sports. For both trans and non-trans women, women’s sports are critically important because of “the physical, social, and mental health benefits of participation” (Australian Human Rights Commission, as cited in E-Alliance, 2022, p. 40). As individuals, competitors in women’s sports have a range of biological and social advantages and disadvantages in comparison with one another. (Social advantages include access to nutrition, training, and equipment.) A meta-analysis of a decade of research found that as a group, trans women who have hormonally transitioned have no clear biological advantage over non-trans women but have substantial social disadvantages (E-Alliance, 2022). Arguments in favor of excluding trans women from women’s sports have been popularized through a coordinated political strategy designed not to extend the benefits of women’s sports but to reverse progress for LGBTQ+ communities by falsely “framing trans rights as coming ‘at the expense of’ cis women and girls” (McNamarah, 2023, 922). Thus, the exclusion of trans women from women’s sports is not evidence-based; it unfairly denies the benefits of women’s sports to an already disadvantaged subgroup of women; and it harms LGBTQ+ communities.

The harms perpetuated by President Tate’s posts occur not in a vacuum but in a context in which our constituents are already under attack, as our caucus has detailed in our statement against Louisiana’s anti-trans legislature (LGBTQ+ Faculty and Staff Caucus, 2021). We have heard from students, parents, faculty, staff, and loved ones who feel that with these posts, institutional leadership has fallen short of the values of our university.

Moving Forward

To our community members experiencing deep hurt as a result of this incident, we recognize and affirm your experience, and we’ve compiled supportive resources at <https://www.lsu.edu/lgbtq-caucus/resources/>. You can also find many allies around campus by keeping an eye out for Safe Space stickers or other symbols of allyship. Finally, we wish to let our institutional leadership know that we would welcome a face-to-face conversation about how we can work together to foster an environment of inclusion and respect where all LSU community members can fully engage in the university’s academic mission as we move forward.

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