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STATEMENT BY THE ASEE BOARD OF DIRECTORS October 16, 2020

The Board of Directors of the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) finds the September 22, 2020 [Executive Order \(EO\)](#) on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping inimical to the values of the ASEE and of the United States. We find the EO destructive of its stated goals of reducing divisiveness and promoting excellence and collaborative achievement in the workplace. We respectfully request its immediate rescission.

ASEE's mission is to advance innovation, excellence, and access at all levels of education for the engineering profession. It serves a vital national purpose. Our economy is the envy of the world. Innovation drives its growth and engineering education enables that innovation.

Six core values guide our work: excellence, engagement, innovation, integrity, diversity and inclusion. Each value is equally essential. We can only achieve true excellence in innovation when the full diversity of our nation is represented in our profession. Today, people of color and women of all races are significantly underrepresented in the study and practice of engineering. Less than 30% of the American population is white and male, and that proportion is decreasing. We cannot maintain our economic growth and global competitiveness if we fail to enable all Americans with the talent to become engineers to reach their full potential. To achieve this goal, the ASEE engages in work - including training - to remove the vestiges of racism and sexism that pose barriers to the full participation of all Americans who possess the skill and will to serve as engineers.

Diversity education does not just expand the community of engineering students and professionals, it makes for better engineers. This has been highlighted in the design changes made in the Ford Windstar by an all-women engineering design team, as well as in a recent National Institute of Standards and Technology report demonstrating the racial/ethnic biases within facial recognition systems, and accounts of biases in algorithmic systems to determine whether defendants should be granted bail. Engineering professionals design, develop, produce, and maintain systems that serve the human community. If our engineering students and professionals lack an understanding of the full diversity of that community, then they cannot adequately perform their duties.

Our core values as engineering educators are rooted in a shared American belief in certain self-evident truths, such that we are created equal and endowed with inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But to state what we believe does not define how we have lived. It is self-evidently true that for most of American history, men have been afforded political, social and

economic advantages not available to women, and whites have received advantages at the expense of other races. It is a fact that at the time of this country's founding, the franchise was restricted to the 6% of the population that was White, male, and owned property. It is a fact that African Americans were enslaved, that Native Americans were forcibly displaced to resource-poor locations, that Mexican Americans were made foreigners in lands their families had owned for generations, and that the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)—which was renewed with added provisions by the Geary Act (1892)—prohibited many Asians from legally immigrating until these Acts were repealed in 1943. It is a fact that White women were not permitted to vote in federal elections until 1920 with the passage of the 19th amendment; many Black men and women had to wait for passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. It remains a fact that, following World War II, “redlining” by Federal Agencies prevented members of poor or minority communities from purchasing homes and receiving financial services, and that this systematic denial of services by the United States government led to an enormous wealth gap between white and non-white communities. It remains a fact that most Americans, regardless of sex or race, hold implicit, unconscious biases against women and members of minority communities based on stereotypes that are pervasive in US culture. And, it remains a fact that our nation's past policies and practices continue to have negative impacts on students, educators, and working professionals. To deny these facts is to deny history.

We object to the EO because, although framed in terms of workplace training, its potential impact is much broader. The key sentence in Section 1 “Purpose” is “Therefore, it shall be the policy of the United States not to promote race or sex stereotyping or scapegoating in the Federal workforce or in the Uniformed Services, and not to allow grant funds to be used for these purposes. In addition, Federal contractors will not be permitted to inculcate such views in their employees.” The applicability of the EO is (a) all instruction and training in the uniformed services, (b) workplace training by government contractors of their own employees as well as the training offered by the contractors' sub-awardees and vendors of their own employees, (c) federal grant programs (by extension activities within federal grants), and (d) federal agencies (also covered by a separate executive order). The applicability to federal grants is likely to be particularly harmful to ASEE and its member academic institutions.

Although there are distractors (prohibited activities that few would seek to pursue) within the definitions of key terms, it is obvious that the intent of the executive order is to forbid any discussion (outside of academic instruction), by persons in any of the groups indicated above, of (a) systemic or structural racism or sexism, (b) acknowledgement of collective benefit from past discriminatory practices, or (c) implicit bias. Such discussions are key parts of current projects

by ASEE (a government contractor and federal grantee) as well as many of our member institutions.

With particular regard to the EO's impact on federal grantees, it appears that the effect of this EO would be, among other things, to

- Minimize our ability to develop programs to explain and mitigate the impact of stereotype threat on students, educators, and engineering professionals
- Endanger evidence-based systemic change strategies that promote equity in learning and working environments
- Inhibit efforts to catalyze the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) enterprise to work collaboratively for inclusive change and would hinder our efforts to develop a STEM workforce that reflects the demographics of our nation.

Regarding training programs, we note that millions of federal government employees, contractors, sub-awardees, vendors, and grantees have improved themselves through well-executed workplace trainings and programmatic activities targeting racism and sexism. In some cases, such training is the only formal opportunity they will have to grapple with ideas that challenge them and expand their thinking, enabling them to consider new viewpoints in a supportive setting. These sorts of training are intended to promote awareness of inequities that may potentially impact workplace performance and social interactions. Such training opportunities can improve team cohesion, better cross-cultural understanding among workers, and most importantly, make people aware of conscious or unconscious actions and words that are hurtful to others and perpetuate a racist and/or sexist workplace culture. Such training allows employers to have honest interactions with employees about underlying issues and their daily cumulative impact on minorities and women in the workplace. It is indisputable that a diverse and inclusive workplace positively impacts the bottom line by helping companies generate new ideas, which ultimately enhances business performance and strengthens our nation's competitive edge on the international stage.

The suggestion that efforts to minimize racial/gender social disparities are themselves racist and sexist is fashionable among those who do not want to accept the reality that American society has consistently privileged some groups at the expense of others. Rather than working to address the problem, they prohibit speaking the truth of its existence. Engineers know that properly framing a problem is fundamental to finding a solution. Denial doesn't yield solutions; it prevents them.

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The United States of America has many things for which we can be proud, including a Constitution that has been amended frequently to redress past inequities. The pursuit of continuous improvement guides all of us at the ASEE, as both engineers and citizen, in seeking to forge “a more perfect Union.”

It is in this spirit that we vigorously oppose the implementation of this Executive Order.