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Opinion | The Stanford Guide to Acceptable Words

The Editorial Board

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Behold the school’s Elimination of Harmful Language Initiative.



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Parodists have it rough these days, since so much of modern life and culture resembles the Babylon Bee. The latest evidence is that Stanford University administrators in May published an [index of forbidden words](#) to be eliminated from the school’s websites and computer code, and provided inclusive replacements to help re-educate the benighted.

Call yourself an “American”? Please don’t. Better to say “U.S. citizen,” per the bias hunters, lest you slight the rest of the Americas. “Immigrant” is also out, with “person who has immigrated” as the approved alternative. It’s the iron law of academic writing: Why use one word when four will do?

You can’t “master” your subject at Stanford any longer; in case you

hadn't heard, the school instructs that "historically, masters enslaved people." And don't dare design a "blind study," which "unintentionally perpetuates that disability is somehow abnormal or negative, furthering an ableist culture." Blind studies are good and useful, but never mind; "masked study" is to be preferred. Follow the science.

"Gangbusters" is banned because the index says it "invokes the notion of police action against 'gangs' in a positive light, which may have racial undertones." Not to beat a dead horse (a phrase that the index says "normalizes violence against animals"), but you used to have to get a graduate degree in the humanities to write something that stupid.

The Elimination of Harmful Language Initiative is a "[multi-phase](#)" project of Stanford's IT leaders. The list took "18 months of collaboration with stakeholder groups" to produce, the university tells us. We can't imagine what's next, except that it will surely involve more make-work for more administrators, whose proliferation has driven much of the rise in college tuition and student debt. For 16,937 students, Stanford lists 2,288 faculty and 15,750 administrative staff.

The list was prefaced with (to use another forbidden word) a trigger warning: "This website contains language that is offensive or harmful. Please engage with this website at your own pace."

Evidently it was all too much for some at the school to handle. On Monday, after the index came to light on social media, Stanford hid it from public view. Without a password, you wouldn't know that "stupid" made the list.

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