

Testimony on House Bill 49

Ohio House of Representatives Finance Committee' Subcommittee on Higher Education
Representative Rick Perales, Chair

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Chair Perales, Ranking member Ramos, and Representatives Anielski, Antonio, and Duffey, my name is Beth Quitslund and I am Associate Professor of English at Ohio University. In addition, I have the privilege of serving as the Vice Chair of the Ohio Faculty Council and served during the 2014-15 and 15-16 academic years as the Chair of Ohio University's Faculty Senate. I am honored to be able to testify today on some aspects of House Bill 49 as they relate to faculty concerns for and activities at Ohio University.

The fundamental work of faculty is to create, preserve, and find ways for our students to make living use of our knowledge and skills, preparing them to be full members of our economy and to serve their families, state, and country to the best of their abilities. Our success is measured in how many students we can reach and how deeply we can enrich their lives. That means that we are profoundly concerned with the ability of students and their families to afford to attend an institution that can fulfill its promise to provide a high-quality program that matches the individual students' goals.

With regard to these professional obligations, I want this afternoon to briefly address three concerns in House Bill 49: the proposal on baccalaureate degrees at two-year institutions; the distribution of OCOG grants; and the proposal on textbook purchasing.

Baccalaureate Degrees at 2-year Institutions

Community colleges are a tremendously important resource for many kinds of students: non-traditional students who are not looking for a degree or who need to re-establish their readiness for academic work; students who want to pursue more technical fields that require an Associates' degree, or who need to improve their preparation before moving to a four-year institution; or students who are not sure what degree they ultimately want and can use a low-cost way to fulfill broad general education requirements, among others. What community colleges are not usually prepared to do as well is to offer the full range of specialized, advanced courses that make up a high-quality baccalaureate degree. My own experience with this comes from two sources: advising transfer students into the English degree at Ohio University, and working extensively with faculty on our five undergraduate regional campuses, which participate in delivering Ohio University 4-year degrees as well as Associates' degrees, but nevertheless have many of the same constraints as traditional 2-year institutions (including significantly lower tuition).

The first issue is staffing. Community colleges have not had a mandate to hire within a full range of specializations for upper-division courses and at the qualification levels that four-year institutions must maintain for accreditation purposes in technical and professional fields. And many 2-year institutions lack physical facilities to support additional advanced coursework, especially in hands-on STEM disciplines. Moreover, students in baccalaureate programs benefit

from and may need resources from closely adjacent fields, which means that there are costs in quality to offering only one or two bachelor's programs among related disciplines. Both additional, more precisely qualified professors and expanded facilities bring costs with them that would exceed any redirected SSI. Without increasing tuition, the only reasonable result that we could expect is a diminishment in quality, both for the new bachelors' degrees but also for the programs that these schools do well now. For precisely this reason, despite Ohio University's best efforts, including very talented regional faculty, online and commuting Athens instructors, and targeted specialized hiring in at some regional campuses, the vast majority of Ohio University's 4-year degrees cannot be obtained without some residency in Athens.

OCOG

I would like to reiterate Dr. Krane's testimony about the continued and increasing importance of the Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG) to public institutions. OCOG represents approximately 7% of total undergraduate grant funding at Ohio University, and it goes to our very neediest students: of the more than 3000 OU students who are served by the program, the average family income is \$25,000 or lower.

Ohio University, which maintains need-blind admissions, is proud of its role in expanding access to higher education—about 25% of our Athens students are first-generation, and the proportion is higher on the regional campuses. We are grateful for recent changes to OCOG that have already made a difference to some of our students: beginning with the 2015-16 Aid Year, OCOG eligibility was expanded to allow spring semester awards to regional campus students who had exhausted their annual Pell Grant eligibility over the summer and fall semesters. Although we maintain our own robust scholarship programs and have committed to making costs stable and predictable through the OHIO Guarantee, we will continue to need more targeted state help to support the mission of increasing the number of educated Ohioans.

Textbooks

About a year and a half ago, Ohio University created two ongoing, coordinated programs for reducing the cost of textbooks. One, alt-Textbook, is sponsored by our libraries and offers small stipends to faculty to create or convert course materials to low- or zero-student-cost forms. Last year, the total cost of incentives was \$16,000, yielding a collective savings this year of over \$236,000 to more than 2300 students. The library has also joined the Open Textbook Network, which helps provide continued professional development for librarians and faculty in support of adopting and measuring the impact of using open textbooks.

The second major initiative is our Textbook Affordability Task Force, which brings together leaders from the Provost's office, Information Technology, the Registrar's office, the faculty, and the student body to generate and review ways to decrease the costs of course materials. This kind of coordination is important because the uses and nature of textbooks and course materials can vary so widely across disciplines and course level. Some "textbooks" include highly interactive digital content that needs to be frequently refreshed and which thus requires a subscription model. Other expensive resources like an advanced neurobiology textbook represent investments that the student will need to take with them to graduate school. But there are places to find cost savings. Our CIO, Craig Bantz, negotiated a contract to make TopHat our sole in-class response system—i.e., "clickers" for use in lecture. The resultant first-year savings to

students is \$250,000, with the expectation that this will increase as more instructors adopt this kind of technology. The Task Force has also worked with local bookstores to increase rental options, with an estimated savings to students this year of \$300,000. In sum then, one year of concerted effort has yielded over \$1 million in savings to students, all in ways that are responsive to the academic preferences of students and faculty.

Ohio University does not have its own bookstore and is thus not in a good position to negotiate directly with publishers across a variety of courses. What we would welcome, however, is cooperation with other institutions, perhaps most efficiently through OhioLINK, to negotiate for resources we can agree that we want to use, and to consider other multi-institution initiatives to develop open-source materials. What is essential, however, is that programs and faculty retain the ability to assign materials that allow them to effectively teach in the way that their own expertise demands, and that students be allowed to choose how to acquire and use the assigned materials—to purchase physical books if they exist or to take advantage of lower-cost options. This flexibility is essential for the kind of teaching and learning that our students both need and deserve.