

Ohio Senate Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education
Ohio Federation of Teachers Testimony on HB 49
Dr. Michael Smithback

Chair Gardner, Vice Chair Williams, and Senators Bacon, Dolan, Kunze, Thomas, and Wilson, my name is Michael Smithback and I am an associate professor of Chemistry at Terra State Community College. I am also honored to serve the Ohio Federation of Teachers as a higher education representative to the executive committee. Thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to provide further faculty perspective on the aspects of House Bill 49 that pertain to higher education.

1 Post Tenure Review

The collective bargaining agreement at TSCC¹ states that “Tenure at Terra State Community College is the right of those faculty members holding full-time continued employment following completion of a specified probationary period and written notice that tenure has been granted. Tenure is a faculty member’s right to continued employment in the absence of just cause. Tenure is granted to faculty members who demonstrate distinguished performance in teaching, scholarship and service to the College.” It continues to outline five general requirements to achieve and maintain tenure which include a plan for professional development, performance at rank, a lengthy probationary period, and additional requirements provided by the Tenure & Promotions committee at TSCC. At TSCC, the Tenure & Promotions committee (comprising currently tenured faculty) has determined that faculty seeking tenure will prepare a written application that includes classroom reviews by administration, student feedback, statements regarding committee/college service, annual plans for professional development and demonstration of success in prior year’s plans. The CBA continues, outlining nine broadly defined guidelines for just cause termination. For example, “Failure to maintain performance satisfactory to the College in teaching, scholarship, college services, or other professional duties,” and, “Any serious violation or repeated violation of College policies,” and concludes with, “Any other act of similar seriousness which is detrimental to the effective operation of the College or its educational programs.” My review of several other faculty collective bargaining agreements at the SERB website found that the process and procedures are much the same throughout Ohio.

My reason for directly including contract language is to show that Ohio’s faculty are thoroughly vetted before tenure is awarded and, more importantly, faculty continue to be reviewed *after* tenure is awarded. Additional legislation requiring post tenure review is rather onerous given the processes already in existence within Ohio’s colleges and Universities. Legislative mandated additional review will only add to the administrative burden and ultimately, increase the cost of attending college.

¹http://www.serb.state.oh.us/sections/research/WEB_CONTRACTS/WebContracts.htm

Colleges and Universities have mechanisms available for the reduction of teaching load. For example, by waiving a small amount of weekly classroom contact hours, a college may free a faculty member's time in order for them to serve as undergraduate program coordinator. This saves the university money in that an additional hire is not made and has the added effect of making a full-time faculty available for student interaction. Studies^{2,3} have repeatedly shown that faculty-student interaction is a strong predictor of student success. A faculty member is the correct choice in this matter for two unique and intersecting reasons. First, faculty are familiar with the college landscape as perceived by students by virtue of being in the classroom and second, faculty are a model of successful navigation of the mechanisms required by colleges. Not all faculty can serve as undergraduate advisors. Dr. Krane mentioned a research/teaching balance, noting that some faculty may be 'better' at one or the other in his previous testimony to this committee and I would like to take a moment to address that balance. Funded research is a huge benefit to Ohio colleges; a reduction in load to pursue research can positively impact the growth of knowledge in any field and it's concomitant funding. I would add that studies⁴ indicate that direct involvement by first year students with faculty research positively affects retention. It is my claim that this too is teaching and that a faculty may best serve on the research side of teaching as opposed to the classroom side; faculty are not necessarily 'better' at research/teaching, but one's time may certainly be better spent in one or the other and it is the college or university that is best suited in finding that balance.

2 Financial Disclosure by Published Faculty

Most publishing professors write research monographs for very limited audiences, perhaps selling only thousands of copies. Moreover, academic royalties rarely reach exceed 5-10% of the publisher's price⁵ to the bookstore. The combination of low number of sales and low royalty proceeds simply cannot cause the desired reduction of textbook costs to students. Moreover, the disclosure of benefits will likely hurt publishing companies and reduce the dissemination of scholarly work. One published author I know receives approximately \$30 annually in royalties for her monograph, which I note is less than the filing fee proposed in HB 49.

One way I've reduced costs to students at TSCC is to use a free online textbook in my Introduction to General Chemistry course. The majority of my students have expressed appreciation for a couple of common themes, from having their textbooks always available on their devices to having financial aid money for other required supplies. I would add that there is a print copy of the textbook available for students who prefer to have a physical copy, and that it is priced roughly equivalent to the cost of printing it for oneself. Other faculty

²<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/173984/summary>

³<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/30127>

⁴<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/30062/summary>

⁵<http://dailynous.com/2015/05/28/answers-from-academic-publishers/>

control costs by providing copies of the textbook and holding them in reserve in the campus library, or by teaching from a wide collection of sources that they provide via online access.

I certainly applaud the Senators for their desire to control the costs of college. I must stress focusing on the meager royalties a markedly small number of faculty receive only serves to add administrative burden. Instead, the decrease in SSI is widely accepted⁶ as a direct cause of the increase in student's college costs.

3 Reduction in Sick Leave

The reduction in sick leave from 4.6 hours to 3.1 hours for every 80 hours worked has no impact upon the cost of higher education while massively impacting faculty should an unfortunate event occur, especially early in one's career. All of the colleges and universities across Ohio have policies in place that limit the total aggregation of sick leave. I note too that the language here is strikingly similar to SB 5, an issue strongly rejected by Ohio voters.

Chairman Gardner and members of the subcommittee, thank you for allowing me the time to share with you a community college faculty perspective on the proposed budget. I think it is admirable that you're working to reduce the costs associated with attending college, and I hope that I've illustrated that faculty have been innovative in voluntarily addressing this need. I welcome any questions you may have for me.

⁶<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/05/05/report-says-administrative-bloat-construction-booms-not-largely-responsible-tuition>