

Testimony on Substitute House Bill 49

Ohio Senate Finance Higher Education Subcommittee

Dear Chairman Gardner, Vice Chair Williams, and Senators Bacon, Dolan, Kunze, Thomas and Wilson,

My name is Rebeka Campos-Astorkiza and I am an Associate Professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the Ohio State University. I would like to share my perspective on Sec. 102.023 of the revised HB 49, i.e. the proposed textbook disclosure mandate. This mandate requires instructor assigning instructional materials to disclose any conflicts of interest they might have, in addition to enumerating any benefits they might have received from publishers. After attending several hearings of this committee, I understand that this mandate attempts at addressing the cost of textbooks for college students. Unfortunately, from my point of view as faculty, this mandate does little to that end but instead imposes further burden on faculty and other instructors, who are already aware of this issue. There seems to be also the impression that textbook writing is seen as a business by faculty, an opportunity to make profit. This is, in my opinion and experience far from the truth. In what follows I give evidence to support this statement.

I regularly teach an undergraduate course on Spanish Pronunciation. This is a very popular course and we offer 3 or 4 sections every semester, with around 28 students in each section. This means that roughly 100 undergraduate students take this class every semester. As an instructor, I use a textbook that one of my colleagues wrote, and this textbook is used in virtually every section of the course. Selecting a textbook for a course is not an easy task given that it becomes the central instructional tool and the one single element that ties all sections and students' experiences together. This means that, even if the instructor is different, all undergraduates will be exposed to the same context and with a similar pedagogical approach. This allows them to move to upper level courses in Spanish without any disadvantage that might stem from who their instructor was. In a nutshell, adopting the same textbook allows us to give our students the same high quality teaching and bring them to the same level of knowledge. Clearly, the textbook means a lot in this course and we, the instructors, want the best material for our students. This is the number one reason why we assign my colleague's book – his book is based on the materials he developed during his years teaching Spanish Pronunciation at OSU, he tried them out on many different groups and, very importantly, his teaching experience is based on our students. There is little to be said to argue against adopting his textbook – it is a Buckeye product! It is full of references to our state!

As I said, my colleague developed his materials over the period of several years. During this time, before he has a published textbook, he made his materials available through the Foreign Language Publications as a course packet. However, he got a lot of pressure from the university to submit them to a prestigious university since only that kind of publication would count towards his reviews and ultimately, to his promotion to Full professor. But this publication

not only brought recognition to my colleague but to our university as THE place to do Spanish Pronunciation. His textbook has been adopted by many peer and non-peer institutions. I constantly get questions from colleagues all over the country about my experience with the textbook, and I also get reports about how successful the book is at other institutions. This fame has certainly had an impact on our department, OSU and the city of Columbus. Given the prestige of this textbook and the recognition by the community of our relevance in the field of Spanish Pronunciation, OSU was selected to host the biannual conference on “Current Approaches to the Acquisition of Spanish Pronunciation.” This is the only such conference in the world and it attracts researchers from all over the US and beyond. As part of the OSU conference, nearly 100 participants came to Columbus and, even though this number might be small compared to Medicine or Engineering conferences, they certainly contributed to the region’s economy by staying in local hotels, dining in local restaurants, etc. And they certainly helped further develop the rightful place of OSU as a leader in the teaching and research on Spanish Pronunciation. It might sound far-fetched to place so much importance on a textbook, but I do believe that my colleagues’ book has been the main engine behind this growth.

However, despite this outward projection of the textbook, my colleague and OSU instructors in general are very much aware of the cost of textbooks for our students, and I know that many of us are always looking for ways to control this cost. For instance, my colleague together with a group of graduate students got a grant from the OSU Office of Distance Education and E-Learning to digitize the book with the assumption that the final product would be made available at no cost to OSU students. Unfortunately, the publisher did not agree to this and the project could not be completed. This brings to light the fact that oftentimes textbook authors do not own the copyright of the material and they cannot legally make decisions about making published materials available to students in some other, cost-free format. One way in which we make up for the fact that the textbook is not free for our students is by regularly assigning it to the Spanish Pronunciation course, so students can sell their books to each other, borrow them or rent them. In an effort to have my students get the most out of the book, I have adopted it as part of a more advance Spanish course, where the materials I use are a combination of parts of the textbook under discussion and research papers (which have free-access for our students).

Summarizing, my experience is that faculty are very much aware of our students’ hardship in college (textbook cost being a small one compared to tuition and cost living expenses). Many of us use the resources available to us to curtail this cost and the last thing we need is a further mandate on how to operate. On the contrary, we need to be included in this conversation because we can bring creative ways to the textbook issue (and other topics related to higher education as well). Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Rebeka Campos-Astorkiza