

Testimony of Ben Givens, PhD
Ohio Faculty Council
Before the Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Senator Terry Johnson, Chair
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Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide Interested Party testimony for Senate Bill 135.

I am a faculty member in the Department of Psychology and the Secretary of the University Senate at the Ohio State University. Today, I am speaking as the chair of the Ohio Faculty Council, an organization that represents the faculty at the 14 state-supported universities in the great state of Ohio. The faculty represent the academic core of any institution of higher education, and our support of the goals of SB 135 predate this bill. We agree with the goal of increasing the number of Ohioans who attain post-secondary certificates and degrees. An educated citizenry of Ohio will make Ohio a more productive and attractive place for people to live and do business. We support the goal of all Ohioans having access to higher education while making the cost of education affordable. We also want students to be suitably employed upon graduation, and we want technical institutes, community colleges, regional and 4-year universities to work together toward these goals.

One approach to reducing the cost of education and student debt is to have universities partner with community colleges. There are many excellent examples where this is being done well and successfully. For example, at Ohio State University, 40% of the graduates either transferred in or started at a regional campus, with most of those transfers coming from Columbus State Community College. This is just one of many solutions for reducing cost and debt, and our universities are working hard every day toward that end.

Appropriately, the State Share of Instruction (SSI) formula incentivizes universities to have students successfully complete courses and degrees, and in fact our universities are doing an outstanding job of graduating our students. The 6-year graduation rate for our institutions is 77% according to the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE), which is well above the national graduation rate of 4-year public institutions of [69.7%](#), according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Our Ohio universities are doing a great job with student attainment, but we of course understand the desire to do better.

In-demand Jobs

We applaud the state's effort to promote preparation of Ohioans for in-demand jobs. Ohio's 4-year public universities have many job specific degrees that lead to gainful employment the day after graduation. However, we believe that the 4-year universities also provide experiences and opportunities that allow students to be successful employees through degree programs that do not have only one specific job as its culmination. All our degree programs are aimed at developing productive, well-rounded life-long learners and thoughtful citizens.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average number of jobs a person has in a lifetime is twelve. Universities prepare students for careers that will likely involve many different jobs. The ability to think broadly, flexibly, and creatively enables students to thrive in their careers. These transferable skills are taught and learned in many academic disciplines and have been acknowledged by employers as crucial to a wide range of jobs. Having excellent communication and collaborative skills lead to success. Making decisions about degree programs or the State Share of Instruction (SSI) based on in-demand jobs could lead to harmful unintended consequences for students and employers and could put Ohio's universities at a disadvantage for attracting the best students and faculty.

Suspension/Limitation of Enrollment in Bachelor's Degree Programs

Ohio's universities are committed to providing relevant and useful degrees that support students in their careers and that are economically viable for the university. As currently written, there is some very general and concerning language in the bill about authorizing the chancellor to suspend or limit enrollment in degree programs with a low completion rate. It is not clear how completion rate will be measured, but the bigger question is why these determinations would not be left to the institutions. Universities are highly motivated to provide the best educational opportunities to serve the needs of students and the state, and to do so in the most efficient and effective way possible. Universities regularly evaluate their programs, with both internal and external reviews, in the interest of improving and refining them. Some programs that do not meet the needs of students are eliminated; however, that does not mean that degree programs with low completion rates are, by that measure alone, expendable. For example, a degree program in Forensics is highly specialized, likely to have low enrollment, but will turn out graduates that are highly valuable to society. To give authority to the chancellor to suspend programs based on an undefined measure is not in the best interest of students, the universities, or the state.

4-year degrees at Community Colleges

Opening community colleges to provide non-applied bachelor's degrees creates the risk of significant duplication of degrees, and more troubling the potential delivery of advanced coursework with less qualified instructors. Instructors matter. The Higher Learning Commission, the body that accredits institutions of higher education in Ohio, looks very carefully at instructor qualifications as one of the many strict criteria for accreditation. The full time and tenure track faculty at the state universities are highly qualified and have a deep and broad understanding of their fields of study. Upper-level course work in all disciplines require highly technical understanding of the subject matter for faculty to teach accurately and in a way that prepares students for the realities of the world they will enter after graduation. Community colleges and technical centers are poised to provide the best resources for many applied degrees and to prepare students for further education in a variety of disciplines, but to allow for the creation of duplicative baccalaureate programs, which would require hiring qualified instructors, diminishes resources and fails to honor the outstanding programs that technical schools, community colleges, and four year institutions currently provide to offer a range of opportunities to Ohio citizens and a range of specializations for Ohio's employers.

Administrative Costs and Reporting Requirements.

Faculty are researchers who understand the importance of data to drive decision-making and recognize that data-collection and reporting are essential. Faculty are in favor of the chancellor reporting how revenue is used, with respect to teaching costs and administrative costs, although in calculating administrative costs it is important to keep separate some categories of administrative costs, like research-related costs and Health Systems costs. We are concerned with the significant growth of spending on administrative processes and initiatives that may affect faculty employment and productivity, taking away from the core mission of teaching and research. Unfortunately, the additional reporting requirements that are included in this bill will further increase administrative costs. For example, staying in touch with alumni is something all universities work hard to do. We all survey our recent graduates for their initial employment. However, for the state to mandate accurate and up-to-date employment information from all alumni will require additional staffing. We already attempt to get this data, but to mandate it will certainly increase administrative burden at our universities. The Ohio Faculty Council urges the committee to consider the added benefit of requiring additional data collection and reporting relative to the added cost. These added costs will increase the cost of education and further erode the budget for the core academic mission.

Second Chance Grant Pilot Program

The idea of getting students who have not completed their degrees back into post-secondary institutions is an important goal for the state and for society. We wholeheartedly support it. We agree that supporting individuals who have started but not completed a degree is a great way to get to the 65% attainment goal. However, individuals who do not complete certificates or degrees come from all certificate and degree institutions, not just the universities. In fact, students are just as likely, or more so, to have started at a community college or technical

center, and thus targeting students from the 4-yr institutions for the 2nd chance grant pilot program severely limits its impact. In addition, it may be easier and less expensive to complete a certificate or associate's degree, and so the \$2000 grant would have a larger impact on those students, and be more likely to lead to completion, and thus accelerate Ohio's progress toward our attainment goal.

Campus Free Speech

One of the most important ways for faculty to engage student learning is to relate what is being discussed in the classroom with what is happening in the real world. Students enjoy connecting course material to their lives. The idea of discussing only material for which the faculty member has scholarly expertise risks depersonalizing the instructor, missing important cross-disciplinary connections and real-world applications, as well as alienating students from the faculty.

Universities lead society in encouraging free thought and speech. **That is what we do.** There is little evidence that there is any suppression of speech happening in classrooms. It is quite the opposite. The bill contains phrases like "attempt to shield individuals from free speech", "closing off the discussion of ideas", "substantially interfere with the freedom of others to express views", or "penalty imposed on a student's grade ...based on the contents of student's free speech". There is a complete disconnect of these ideas from what actually happens within our universities and our classrooms. Faculty and students have hundreds of thousands of interactions each semester, and yet few if any instances of what this bill points to are ever reported. We encourage and relish alternative viewpoints. We like nothing better than a good discussion and seek to question every perspective. That is what we do, and what we strive for in the classroom.

Free Speech is founded on the US and Ohio Constitution which already sets out the parameters of free speech; These founding principles protect students in our institutions, and the processes to address concerns of free speech are embedded in our codes of conducts and disciplinary and grievance procedures. In grade disputes, students have many informal and formal process to address their concerns. To impose additional board oversight and reporting is duplicative, costly, and unnecessary. I or any one of our OFC members would be happy to have you sit in on our courses and observe how we welcome and encourage ideas and discussion. You will be amazed at how open the discussion is, and how informed, diverse, and thoughtful our students are.

Summary

In summary, we agree with the overarching goals laid out in SB 135 and would contend that universities work hard every day to obtain those goals of access, affordability, efficiency, attainment, open discussion, and student success. We have had many successes in these areas over the past five years. The faculty are concerned that putting additional restrictions and requirements on universities and their programs will produce **unintended consequences**. We ask you to consider the cumulative effect of additional legislative requirements on the efficiency of the university, which will produce shifts in effort and priorities away from our core mission of education.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I welcome any questions you may have.