

Chairman Young, Ranking Member Miller, and Members of the House Higher Education Committee,

My name is Clovis Westlund and I am a student at Ohio State University. I was recently asked to describe my personal philosophy of education. I'd like to share a condensed version of my answer with you today.

I look towards those I admire. One goes to law school, but breaks all the rules when she plays the game. Another puts on suits and shined dress shoes to one day turn corporate profits to social missions. One testifies to powerful interests, while whispering words of abolition.

Whether due to high hopes or frustrations with the conditions surrounding you, I see the purpose of education is to act on the world. We seek education to inherit the tools of previous generations, subvert their traditional uses, and make real the imaginings of our younger selves. But there are challenges. If we pursue higher education to know the world, we are unwittingly learning to live in the world.

For marginalized bodies, higher education is a tragedy of dissonant aims and outcomes. One worries a neoliberal graduate program will turn them into someone their younger self wouldn't recognize. Another hides behind the veil of professionalism, too fearful to talk about his mom or the diapers he changes on weekends. I think of my own mother and father, each estranged because of their teachings.

There are costs to higher education, particularly for people of marginalized and racialized identities who find themselves in these systems of oppression. We become alienated from our own biographies—the biographies that felt so salient at the onset. As values, priorities, and bases of knowledge shift without conscious notice, so does the self. We underestimate the transformative power of education, and falsely believe education is easily manipulated for our benefit.

We aim to preserve the self throughout our education and desire to come out on the other side with the ability to assert this self as a corrective force onto the world, but this does not play out. We may intend to become educated to act on the world, but we become educated to reproduce its workings. This tragedy is personal and patterned.

To embrace the tragic sense of education, we understand that alienation through education is not universal as it is marginalized students whose selves are the most forcibly distanced from accepted understandings of knowledge. So, I ask, for the larger aim of educating for action, how do we preserve the self in everyday university lectures and discussions?

To answer in short, the self is preserved in the interchange between educator, student, and curriculum. Course material must, first, provide you the context and history of your biography. In the words of the postmodern sociologist, all knowledge claims are power claims. Thus, supposedly neutral educations are disempowering to marginalized students as they present deficient knowledge reflective of existing structural power imbalances. African American, Women's, Gender & Sexuality, Jewish, and Ethnic studies programs serve this affirming function. It is difficult to put the value of this learning into words, but Adrienne Rich offers us some insight in her valuation of women's studies programs. She posits that "ignorance of our selves" is the basis of our socio-political powerlessness, women's education can undermine normalized and pervasive acts of dominance, and empowering education gifts marginalized students a particular mental freedom outside of material conditions (Rich, 1979). I would broaden Rich's ideas to say that identity-affirming content offers students language for their frustrations, knowledge of legacies of struggle and perseverance, and perspective on past and present actions on the world by those like themselves. Such curricula bring students back to their bodies. This education is not indoctrinating, but humanizing for its marginalized recipients.

I stand before you today to testify that education can be destructive, if you allow it. Identity-affirming academic programs preserve the humanity of marginalized and racialized students, and must be championed by our education leaders. Ohio students deserve better than what you offer.

I urge you to vote no on House Bill 151. Thank you.