

Chris Parmenter

Dear Members of the Committee,

I write to voice my opposition to the latest revision of SB 83.

In 2022, I joined the Classics Department at Ohio State as an Assistant Professor. (I am writing in my capacity as a private citizen. I do not speak for the University or my Department). At OSU, students from any part of our state, and from any economic background, can receive a world-class education in virtually any discipline for an affordable tuition. OSU is Ohio's crown jewel.

SB 83 aims to solve a problem that does not exist. Nearly all OSU faculty are subject to annual review, a laborious administrative process that consumes nearly 1/3 of the academic year. SB 83's proposed changes to annual review will severely degrade the process. Aside from establishing an unfunded mandate for OSU to expand the scope of annual reviews, the new version of SB 83 gives Student Evaluation of Instruction (SEI) comments outsized weight (25%) in the teaching section of the review.

This is mistaken for three reasons. First, SEI results penalize faculty who teach harder subjects, including science and engineering. There is a correlation between the ease of a class, the professor's lenience, and high SEI scores.

Second, research consistently shows that anonymous student evaluations favor younger, white, male professors with gregarious personalities. Increasing the weight of SEIs in annual review increases the likelihood of systemic bias in evaluation.

Third, predicating annual review on SEIs threatens the stature of the university. OSU is a public research university: faculty are hired for their publications and evaluated on productivity. The University takes its reputation seriously. SB 83 would rebalance the scales towards non-research activities.

I should be clear that SEIs have value. SEIs are useful for collecting student feedback, improving teaching, and for alerting administrators to red flags. But they should not be used in performance reviews to any significant degree.

SB 83's combination of enhanced SEIs and unclear language surrounding "intellectual diversity" creates a strong incentive for OSU's most dynamic faculty to leave for competitor institutions, e.g. the University of Michigan. Such a process is already playing out across the border at West Virginia University.

Finally, I have deep reservations about posting course syllabi online. My research focuses on the history of 'race' as a concept from classical antiquity to the present. It is of interest to provocateurs on the Internet. While I am happy to interface with the public, I am increasingly worried about security risks on our open campus. Just last month, an intruder came into my classroom and was only made to leave with prodding. Posting detailed syllabi online would seem to invite this kind of activity.

The Legislature has oversight over our public universities. There are many ways that the Legislature could contribute to the improvement of our institutions. SB 83 is not one of them.

Sincerely,

Christopher S. Parmenter