

As a citizen of the state of Ohio, a parent of a University of Cincinnati graduate, and a university professor, I am a steadfast and strong supporter of higher education. Because of this, I am strongly opposed to Senate Bill 83. This bill will in no way “enhance” higher education. Rather, it will undermine Ohio’s efforts to attract and retain a talented workforce; it will waste state money by duplicating pre-existing laws, policies, and practices; and it will degrade, rather than promote, free expression and academic freedom.

A central tenet of my university teaching is multiple perspectives. Regardless of the text and concepts under study, I strive to engage my students in critically considering the content, inviting them to always read *with* and *against* the ideas at hand in order to take informed, ethical stances in response. Ultimately, the positions they hold will be their own. My job is to ensure they are allowed to explore, discuss, understand, weigh, and engage with a diversity of perspectives as part of “education for citizenship” per the motto of my institution. Doing this is my academic responsibility, as is creating an environment that is safe and supportive enough for students to take risks, try out ideas, make mistakes and learn. Academic freedom allows me to engage in my teaching – and research – in alignment with these tenets. As outlined in the Ohio revised code,

...academic freedom [is] essential to attain the goal of the free search for truth and its free exposition. Academic freedom and academic responsibility are twin guardians of the integrity of institutions of higher learning. This integrity is essential to the preservation of a free society and explains the willingness of society historically to accept the concept of academic freedom and, in addition, to protect it through the institution of academic tenure.

Ohio revised code goes on to state that, *the principal elements of academic freedom include the freedom of faculty to:*

- (1) Teach, conduct research, and publish research findings;*
- (2) Discuss in classrooms, in their own manner, any material that is relevant to the subject matter as defined in the course syllabus;*
- (3) Exercise their constitutional rights as citizens without institutional censorship or discipline; and*
- (4) Seek changes in academic and institutional policies through lawful and peaceful means.*

Nearly every one of these principal elements of Academic Freedom are under attack or being suppressed by Ohio Senate Bill 83. In its most recent version, SB 83 undermines the “intellectual diversity” it espouses by pre-determining some content as “controversial beliefs or policies.” This language is not only vague it is also illogical. As noted above, in my own approach to teaching, no beliefs, policies, concepts or ideas should be pre-ordained as “controversial” – particularly by individuals outside of our classroom. Rather, in alignment with

“intellectual diversity,” my students and I should feel free to discuss any germane topics from multiple perspectives in pursuit of truth and warranted, ethical positions. By singling out some beliefs and policies as “controversial,” SB 83 curtails intellectual diversity, chills free speech, and degrade academic freedom.

The mechanisms by which this occurs are many, but of most concern are the proposed allowances for post-tenure review at any time; and public positing of syllabi, including instructors contact information, course schedule, and detailed calendars of course topics. The former is a direct attack on academic freedom, as outlined above. The latter opens faculty and students to extremists’ external threats at worst and costly duplicative monitoring at best. As such, Senate Bill 83 is an unnecessary, fiscally irresponsible piece of legislation. Ohio universities already collect and make available course syllabi, regularly review faculty, and offer students the opportunity evaluate instruction, including opportunities for open-ended response. The costs and bureaucracy of these requirements is a clear example of unnecessary government overreach and fiscal irresponsibility.

Senate Bill 83 will not enhance higher education. Instead, it will waste Ohio resources, and curb the academic freedom of faculty. Rather than fostering intellectual diversity, this bill will only hinder dialogue by squelching discussion of necessary topics and hampering academic freedom. As Ohio legislators, if you truly seek to enhance higher education and protect free expression, then you should reject this bill in its entirety.

Caroline T. Clark
391 Glenmont Avenue
Columbus, OH 43214