

Testimony on the unconstitutional, illegal, unworkable, and anti student and knowledge SB83—an unedited mixture of the worst of Florida, Texas, Georgia, and Arkansas

Presented as illiterate, dishonest copies of other right-wing states with no connection to the Ohio in 2023

Cancel Culture in Ohio

Who is now canceling whom?

The State of Ohio moves to abolish public higher education

Harvey J. Graff

Continuing its now regular practice, Ohio blindly copies other red states in seeking to erase higher education in almost all fundamental ways. It races to be the Florida, Texas, Georgia, and Arkansas of the Midwest. The proposals are unconstitutional, contradictory, unworkable, counter-productive, and self-destructive. They confirm the Constitutional and historical illiteracy of the Senators.

More than ironic, with unacknowledged and unapologetic contradictions, in their self-imposed campaign to stomp out never defined “cancel culture,” what State representatives, who are unable to answer any questions about their duplicated legislation, march like 21st century Nazi Storm Troopers to cancel American culture, the historical and constitutional basis of the United States itself. Before the second decade of the 21st century, this was unimaginable.

I choose my analogies carefully. These are the radically gerrymandered elected undemocratically elected representatives who hold a super-majority in both legislative chambers. In 2022, one of their number—home-schooled with no college—boldly asserted that “both sides of the Holocaust should be taught.” More recently, exposure of homeschooling with a 1930s Nazi—not neo-Nazi—curriculum caused little stir and no action by the state.

In mid-March, state Senators propose their “Ohio Higher Education Enhancement Act,” a misnomer for the termination of public post-secondary education in any

recognizable form. Imitating other states, it commands that all syllabi be posted online with professors' identification; ban strikes even by formally organized, legally recognized organizations; disallow any institutional-mandated form of never defined Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training; in some imagined way evaluate how professors "cultivated classrooms free from bias;" and mandate annual review at all ranks.

Not surprisingly, this set of dictatorial edicts comes not from any educational authority but is sponsored by the "Senate Workforce & Higher Education Committee," in that order, not the reverse. That is a questionable ordering.

The contradictions and complications are countless. Nothing is defined. National and state laws as well as established legal precedents are ignored. There is absolutely no regard for the workability or operationalization of the authoritarian edicts that together constitute aggressive acts of suppression, contrary to all accepted understandings of education.

Despite claiming college and sometimes law degrees, these elected unrepresentatives know nothing about education higher or lower. They show no awareness that their unconstitutional overreach bans free speech, ignores the contexts of education itself—all that we know about young people's learning and professors' teaching, and ignores the legal right to organize and act collectively. They are not conservative by any definition.

The wish-list is completely counter-productive. There is no awareness than forbidding "partnerships" with Chinese universities will remove the 10s of thousands of Chinese international students on whom Ohio State, Ohio University, Cincinnati, and others depend for both cash and US News & World Report rankings. This is not relevant to sponsor Jerry Cirino's Lake Erie College who slim liberal arts are minors not majors.

These illiterates—those who do not read or cannot read--are unaware that the US Constitution, Declaration of Independence, Federalist Papers, Emancipation Proclamation, Gettysburg Address, and Dr. King's Letter from Birmingham jail, on one hand, **do not in themselves constitute American history, but only an incomplete part.** On the other hand, **none of them can be taught without social context and recognition that genuine differences of opinion and interpretation surround them.**

Most incredibly and self-indicting, in their mad dash to be the Tallahassee and Austin of Ohio, **they strive to erase never defined “woke” “counter culture” by abolishing the bases and contours of American culture themselves. Senator J Cirino can’t speak two sentences without canceling the one.** For example, he opines, “Let’s just say there are a lot of things on my mind about higher education, and I decided to put them all together here... I believe these are inherently the right things to do....”

The *Columbus Dispatch* barely opens the door in reporting, “opponents think these changes might actually chill free speech on Ohio campuses and make professors more afraid to share their views.” (Mar. 14, 2023).

This bill will end genuine higher education in Ohio, lead to the exodus of students and faculty, and do irreparable harm to all but a tiny number of genuinely disrupted persons.

That’s exactly the radical right’s point. The mere existence of intellectual inquiry, asking basic questions, and seeking a range of answers threatens the fearful.

That is why they must be rejected in their entirety. Now.

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