

Testimony of Claire Metzger, MA
Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair
April 17, 2023

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Claire Metzger, and I am an instructor and student of English at Miami University of Oxford. I do not represent Miami University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

I have been a student all my life and have had years of experience sitting behind the desk onlooking a blackboard. This position does not make me unique, but recently I have had the privilege to be the person at the front of the classroom, helping my students learn and become critical thinkers and citizens of their own as I have. Yet, this bill proposes something I have not encountered in my two decades in classrooms—the overreach of the legislative branch into the free speech of higher education. Higher education, which is the site of social intelligence and humanitarianism. Yet, no matter what side of politics you stand on, I have never encountered a situation in which a classroom has restricted the “intellectual diversity” that this bill proposes to protect for students.

Instead, there is an adamant assumption that inside Ohio’s public universities, a witch hunt for conservative thinkers is afoot. Senator Cirino—who has yet to don the role of student in decades, is convinced that there are prohibitions in place to restrict “rigorous intellectual inquiry to seek the truth.” That is contrary to what I have witnessed in my educational journey. SB 83 affirms that state institutions will not “endorse, comment on, or take action as an institution on current public policy controversies or controversial beliefs or policies”—where does the line begin and end? This bill's emphasis on seeking “truth” is opaque and noncommittal because it has been written as such. If climate change is now the barometer of questionable truth, how can we continue to invest in factual, proven science? It is not just the humanities at stake here when we attack scientific fact as a controversial belief.

Not only does this bill aim a censorship attack on our classrooms, but it requires teaching faculty to submit their course evaluation scores on the institution's website. The considerable issue with this bill section is that course evaluations of women and people of color are systemically scored lower than white men due to known and unknown biases. The bill also requires a new question be added to evaluations allowing students to rate their instructor’s creation of a bias-free atmosphere. Teaching is inherently political—educators are tasked with teaching the next generation critical thinking skills, investigative questioning, and comprehension of written bias. Those are intrinsically political. Without the skillset of uncovering if a source is reliable, our students will no longer be able to discern fact from fiction—belief from science.

Intellectual diversity is not at risk here— the next generation of critical thinkers and citizens is at stake. And when we start censoring higher education, we are setting our future up to fail. Truth is a privilege only allowed when all aspects of it are known and spoken without punishment, and this bill proposes a penalty to all Ohio Higher Educators. I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful and dangerous bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,
Claire Metzger