

Testimony of Dr. Elisabeth Hodges (Ph.D. Harvard University, 2002)  
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:

My name is Elisabeth Hodges and I am a professor of French and Film Studies at Miami University, where I have taught for twenty-two years. I do not represent Miami University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83. I've been proud to make my career at a public institution for over two decades of my life and to devote myself to training generations of students from Ohio and elsewhere to become effective communicators, researchers, and to develop a global knowledge base that has allowed them to thrive and succeed in their chosen careers after graduation. Part of the work of excellent pedagogy is teaching student to question received ideas and to learn to engage with issues of complexity with civility and open-mindedness to train individuals to become global citizens capable of thriving in a complex human world.

New ideas, as well as difficult and challenging issues facing human societies impact all aspects of human life, including art, literature, different cultures, science and knowledge throughout the world. Consider, for the example of Galileo Galilei, the great Italian Renaissance thinker, who, in 1633, was charged with heresy and placed under house arrest for making daring claims about heliocentrism precisely because an institution found such concepts divisive.

I strongly oppose SB83 because it will prevent innovation and Ohio will no longer produce generations of thought leaders in our country and the world.

I strongly oppose SB83's extreme restrictions to free and open discussion of difficult concepts and ideas for several reasons. It is in conflict with our mission to educate the next generation of global citizens to prohibit and disallow discussion of critical issues that impact humanity both in the distant past and today. Were this bill's interdictions to freedom of speech pass, they would impact future generations of students who would graduate from Ohio Universities with significant learning gaps that would prevent them from joining today's workforce, in which there are expectations that individuals are respectful of and value a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusivity. Think of cost to the State of Ohio when corporations with longtime or new headquarters based in Ohio, like Intel or Proctor & Gamble, will not employ graduates of Ohio institutions because of significant learning gaps that would incapacitate learners' ability to discuss current and difficult issues in human society due to the extremist restrictions to free speech of SB83.

I strongly oppose SB83 because it constitutes an unfounded overreach and torturous interference in our education mission for political ends. Not only will it harm future generations of students and their ability to thrive in the workplace, but Ohio universities will lose students, at a time when enrollments and revenue generated from tuition is an absolute necessity to the financial stability of higher education in the State of Ohio.

I strongly oppose the intensive oversight, scrutiny, and interference proposed to surveilling faculty workload and performance. The composition of faculty workload is complex at institutions of higher education with variable, balanced, and equitable loads that align with differential jobs responsibilities (for example teaching and/or research-intensive faculty). Department Chairs and Upper Administrative review all faculty (including those with tenure) annually and provide regular performance evaluation and feedback. What SB83 proposes is totally unnecessary and duplicates work that is already done at tremendous added expense that our universities cannot afford. This would be tantamount to a disastrous level of fiscal irresponsibility that the proponents of this bill impose on the citizens of Ohio.

I strongly oppose the requirements for publishing syllabi, faculty bios, and the results of a leading question added to student evaluations that invokes bias rather than assesses it fairly. Syllabi and information about faculty's research and scholarship are available to the public. There is no need to duplicate what is readily available at public institutions. This is yet further evidence of a significant lack of research in SB83 and the fiscal recklessness of this bill that would add tremendous cost to public institutions in order to comply with its proposed required reporting infrastructure that is an unnecessary duplication.

I strongly oppose SB-83 because of the unfounded reasoning, the underlying racism and sexism, and the fiscal irresponsibility that the passage of this bill that would cost the citizens of Ohioans dearly. The passage of this bill would have disastrous and long-reaching consequences. The reputation of institutions of Higher Education in Ohio will be harmed irreparably. Universities will lose the ability to recruit the best talent both in terms of top-ranked researchers and the most promising students because of the dangerous restrictions to free speech and academic freedom. Faculty like me who trained at some of our country's finest institutions would never consider accepting a position or devoting decades of my life's work at a public institution in Ohio were my teaching and research to be subjected to the extreme restrictions SB83 proposes that violate both the foundations and mission of higher education and academic freedom.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Best,



Dr. Elisabeth Hodges