

Testimony of Martin Ponce, Ph.D.  
Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee  
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair  
April 18, 2023

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

My name is Martin Ponce, and I am a professor of English at The Ohio State University. I do not represent OSU, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83. My areas of teaching and research focus on Asian American, comparative U.S. ethnic, and LGBTQ literature, culture, and history. Having taught courses in these areas at OSU for some 17 years, I object to the insinuation that my classes try to “inculcate” (line 218) any of the ideas listed in Sec. 3345.87 division D 1-9 (lines 659-682). It is grossly misleading to suggest that courses dealing with race, ethnicity, gender, and/or sexuality promote the idea that “An individual, by virtue of his or her race or sex, is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously” (lines 661-663), or that “Fault, blame, or bias should be assigned to a race or sex, or to members of a race or sex because of their race or sex” (lines 680-682).

These baseless presumptions seem designed to sound a false alarm and create an emergency situation that does not exist in order to justify this extraordinary attempt at government intervention into higher education. Whether during in-class discussions or through anonymous feedback, I have never heard a student say that they felt “oppressed” by engaging with such materials (line 198). Nor have I heard a student say that the course content made them feel “guilt” or “anguish” because of the accidents of their birth, upbringing, or status (line 674). On the contrary, students who found that the materials resonated personally for them were excited and affirmed to encounter literature that expressed cultural experiences typically absent from their previous education. Conversely, students who did not self-identify as racial or sexual minorities often noted that their understanding of our complex society, and the history which brought us here, had been clarified and enhanced by the materials assigned in my classes. They most certainly did not come away with the notion that “One race or sex is inherently superior to another race or sex” (lines 659-660), or that “An individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment solely or partly because of the individual’s race” (lines 664-666). In fact, courses focused on social diversity and their DEI counterparts seek to do the exact opposite: they challenge preconceived notions regarding racial and sexual superiority, and they attempt to eliminate discrimination based on race.

When introducing the bill, Senator Cirino states that SB 83 would “guarantee Ohio’s university and college students get the outstanding education they deserve.” Providing students opportunities to engage critically with how systems of power operate is a crucial part of the education they deserve. Our students also deserve not to be infantilized as oblivious or *oppressed* automatons who cannot think for themselves and who need to be rescued from *oppressive* faculty by politicians in Columbus. The courses on race, ethnicity, and gender that I

and my colleagues teach are designed precisely to encourage such critical thinking. We would not expect or demand anything less from those who enter our classrooms.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Martin Ponce