

Testimony of Chantal Wnuk, MFA
Before the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair
March 11, 2025

Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and Members of the Higher Education Committee:

My name is Chantal Wnuk, and I am a professor of fine art at The Ohio State University, where I also completed my master's degree. I do not represent OSU, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen.

The proposed oversight/censorship of syllabi and the slashing of DEI initiatives is extremely concerning to me - both for the intellectual future of the student body AND the economic effects to OSU.

I am a stage 4 cancer patient who is currently teaching an advanced level painting class (of both undergrad and graduate students) that focuses on ideas of figurative painting and health/disability. Under the guidelines of SB1 this class would not be approved in the future due to topics of disability justice, gender affirming care, reproductive rights, and health inequality. Over 20% of the OSU campus claims to live with a disability, and this class has shown me how important giving students a space to share experiences of disability apart from the general taboo and stereotypes connected to ableism.

Financially, and in terms of enrollment, recent restrictive laws and guidelines in Ohio have already effected The Dept. of Art at OSU. For example, the MFA program is well funded, has great facilities, and strong faculty, but applications for the program are getting smaller each year. Artists do not want to live in a state or go to a university that doesn't support minority groups in terms of gender, sexuality, race, etc. Art departments are always the underdog, but artists are most often an indicator of future ideals and actions. Artists are influential. Lower enrollment in an art department is a harbinger of lower enrollment overall - throughout all sections of the university. Less students equals less money. Less artists in Ohio equals less cool neighborhoods and creative spaces which draw other young professionals. The economic effects of SB1 might not be immediate, but they will be disastrous.

Only cowards want to censor teachers and students. Only cowards want to ostracize those most vulnerable. Don't be a coward. Veto SB1 to protect Ohio's future.

-Chantal Wnuk

