

Testimony of Katherine Borland, Ph.D., 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 Workforce and Higher Education Committee:

My name is Katherine Borland, and I am a Professor of
Comparative Studies at OSU, where I have taught for 26 years. I do not
represent The Ohio State University. Rather, I am submitting testimony
as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

I am against this bill, as I believe it will substantially weaken the
university system in Ohio, harming the state, its citizens, our economy
and our cultural flourishing. This bill will drive young Ohioans seeking
higher education out of our state; it will deter out-of-state and
international students from applying to Ohio universities. All features of
this bill work to make our state legislators the arbiters of what counts
as knowledge, stifling innovation and excellence. I speak in my capacity
as an expert in humanistic pedagogy. The bill stands counter to the land
grant mission of Ohio State University to democratize higher learning.

First, the requirement that syllabi be posted outside of our course delivery systems and be accessible to anyone within three clicks of a university's main page, violates the intellectual property rights of professors and the university. Our syllabi can and will be poached if we are forced to publicly share materials that should only be accessible to students who are registered for our classes. Moreover, this requirement will enable anyone to examine our materials out of context. Given the recent spate of book bannings by people who are accessing online lists of supposedly dangerous books without even reading the books that they request to be removed from libraries, I fear that my ability to select the materials I deem relevant for instruction may be challenged by unthinking agitators intent on shutting down intellectual diversity in higher education.

I assure you that my pedagogical approach to teaching college-level humanities is to provide a space for intellectual diversity by fostering a learning community in which students feel safe to express their developing understanding of the materials we engage. In my classes students are active learners. *They* generate the questions that we take up in class, and our discussions work to broaden and deepen their understanding of the material by incorporating into their own readings the perspectives and insights of their peers. This discussion-based approach to learning has been a staple of humanistic

education since Socrates hosted conversations with young Athenians. It is threatened by the proposed legislation's prohibition against discussing controversial topics. In my classes students explore the unintended effects of global heritage regimes on cultural practices, objects and knowledge. We learn that UNESCO attempts at protection of minoritized cultures inevitably leads to dispossession—a situation that presciently echoes your current good faith efforts to guard against an undemonstrated harm. Controversy is at the heart of every article we read. The point is to recognize multiple, conflicting perspectives and develop our own positions.

Moreover, mandating which historical documents constitute an appropriate education in “civics,” ignores the historical inequities in our system that have led to the silencing of women's, among other, perspectives. Our history clearly shows an ongoing struggle of minoritized voices to be included in and at the same time alter the conversation around how to balance individual rights and civic responsibilities to the whole.

Moreover, the proposed elimination of DEI as a legitimate part of the university's mission fails to acknowledge the profound inequality that exists in our world. I urge you to read the Ohio Department of Development's definitions of Diversity Equity and Inclusion publicized in a recent Columbus Dispatch article (2/5/25), and to recognize that

these programs work to ensure that people from ALL backgrounds feel welcomed and accepted in their workplace. In the 1980s, I participated in a pipefitter's training program. I know first-hand the effects of workplace harassment on one's ability to stay the course when one is perceived as an intruder in the existing workplace culture because of one's gender. If I had been better supported, I could have had a much more lucrative career in pipefitting than I was ever able to attain as an academic.

To conclude, an undergraduate general education without a humanities core designed by humanities professors will yield graduates with technical skills perhaps, but students in Ohio universities will be robbed of the kind of intellectual preparation required of leaders in a complex and ever-changing world. Students and their parents know this and will look for their academic formation outside Ohio if this bill is enacted, a loss not only for OSU but for the future of our state. I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this dangerous bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.