

Testimony of George Kanieski, Assistant Professor
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 George Kanieski and I am an assistant professor of English at Cuyahoga Community College, where I have taught for 28 years in a full-time capacity. I do not represent Tri-C, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen...

I am writing to persuade you that SB1/HB6 will damage community colleges' ability to build the best learning environments for their students. PLEASE VOTE NO ON SB1/HB6.

As Faculty Co-Chair of the Distance Learning Steering Committee (DLSC), I wish to draw your attention to Cuyahoga Community College's recent Learning Management System (LMS) Review, through which we chose a more modern course-hosting software to replace the legacy Blackboard Learn Original that we have been using for 25 years and which the parent company (Anthology) is soon to sunset.

Our faculty contract, brokered by the CCC-AAUP (our local chapter of the AAUP), provides for a Distance Learning Steering Committee comprised of seven administrative members and seven tenured faculty. Together, we monitor emerging issues in the realm of academic technology and help guide Tri-C toward the best environment for our students.

During LMS Review, Tri-C supported 24 faculty to train in each of three LMSes (Anthology's Ultra, D2L's Brightspace, and Instructure's Canvas) to find the best fit for Tri-C students.

We gathered data from all faculty and a variety of other College stakeholders. In an open session of four hours, we filtered all data, invited institution experts in technology and instructional design to give opinions, debated, raised issues, and nit-picked over the data. By the end, after all views had been heard respectfully, we cast votes. That recommendation and our filtered data informed the College's decision to contract with D2L and adopt Brightspace as our new LMS.

None of this progress would have happened without our CCC-AAUP contract with the College that provides for the Distance Learning Steering Committee and provides a safe space for discussion. We enjoy an environment of mutual respect, and tenured faculty have the obligation to voice whatever concerns they have for our institution and its students without fear of reprisal. I can tell you personally that the expectation to speak out in contentious situations is a serious burden. I weigh every word knowing that my argument is never personal but professional and institutional. Our students' learning opportunities depend upon whatever we decide. Therefore, I know that remaining silent about a contentious issue is never wise. If faculty with such protections don't speak out, no one will.

As a result of our union contract and shared governance, Tri-C won a national award for its 18-month long LMS Review process. This March, we will be accepting the award "2024 Award for Excellence in eLearning" from the Instructional Technology Council.

Please do not desecrate this honor by claiming that shared governance is somehow flawed. On the contrary, shared governance is the only responsible position: growth through debate and opposition--the recognition that both faculty and administration working together can make a college campus viable. Without this healthy balance of debate over serious issues, our students suffer.

For these reasons, Ohio SB1/HB6 is toxic for Ohio Higher Education. Growth only comes through debate among honest, informed stewards of higher education. SB1/HB6 would allow isolated, sectarian legislators to dictate what is acceptable in Ohio's classrooms. Such surveillance oversteps America's long history of honoring the classroom as a crucible of democratic investigation and debate. All views--whether personal, public, right, wrong, feasible, or merely idealistic--are valued as part of the process of discovering what the future can be. SB1/HB6 denies this promise by creating an atmosphere of suspicion in which students are encouraged by sectarian legislators to report on faculty and faculty are pressured to avoid whatever might be considered sensitive topics.

Under such conditions, we become an autocratic state.

I urge the Ohio legislature to abandon the extremism of SB1 and HB6. In the form of SB83, these measures have been rejected. Continuing to push this envelope of broken glass merely wastes our legislature's time from more realistic problems.

Please reconsider the legacy you threaten to leave your people.

--George Kanieski