

Testimony of Angela May Mergenthaler, Ph.D.
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
May 23, 2025

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the Finance Committee:

My name is Angela May Mergenthaler, and I am Associate Professor of Germanic Languages and Literatures at Ohio State University, where I have been teaching for over sixteen years. I do not represent Ohio State University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to H. B. No. 96. I am submitting testimony as an interested party; I am strongly concerned about and opposed to four aspects of the bill that address Higher Education.

1. The bill completely eliminates shared governance at public universities between faculty and the administration (Sec. 3345.451, line 63858 ff.; Section 381.270, line 137178 ff.); 2. It gives the Centers for Civics an exceptional status and full autonomy, in stark contrast to the rest of the university, and politicizes the centers as they are only accountable to any current government of Ohio (See for instance the section on the Salmon P. Chase Center at Ohio State University, Sec. 3335.39.) 3. It asks the centers to create centralized programs for all of Ohio's public universities, going against the idea of pluralism of ideas, and academic freedom (section 381.415, starting on line 137 491); 4. It introduces requirements for general education that may threaten the educational mission of Higher Education (section 381.750).

1. The bill completely eliminates shared governance at public universities between faculty and the administration (Sec. 3345.451, line 63858 ff.; Section 381.270, line 137178). Who are the experts when it comes to their disciplines? How can the board of trustees be given the sole authority to determine the curriculum, for instance, in Astronomy? Or Linguistics? How can they possibly check the thousands of syllabi designed by faculty, not to mention their frequent updates to reflect the changes in science, and to improve delivery of the materials and knowledge?

2. Why does the bill give sole authority over all aspects of higher education, from hiring to curriculum, to the new centers for civics, culture, and society, while taking away any such authority from the 'rest' of the university, in fact, the center of the university? Does that not go against the very principles of democracy that are supposed to be taught at those institutes? (See for instance the section on the Salmon P. Chase Center at Ohio State University, Sec. 3335.39.)

3. How does asking the new centers for civics, culture, and society to distribute their programming to other state institutions of higher education align with the foundational principles of the United States, with the ideas of democracy, plurality and a free market of ideas? You don't need faculty if you have one or a few centers developing the curriculum concerning "civics, culture, and society" for the entire state. You may as well establish a mandatory online program. Such a structure does not allow for the education of independent thinking for the promotion of the "intellectual diversity" that the centers are supposed to promote. (section 381.415, starting on line 137 491)

4. The proposed bill suggests that the board of trustees of each state institution of higher education "shall consider adjusting the general education curriculum in the following areas:"

(1) Civics, culture, and society, including United States and Ohio history, the foundations of American representative government, how to disagree in a civil manner, and the principles of civil discourse;

(2) Artificial intelligence, STEM, and computational thinking;

(3) Entrepreneurship and the principles of innovation;

(4) Workforce readiness, including fundamental skills necessary for Ohio's graduates to gain employment in in-demand occupations.

While I embrace (1)-(2), and understand the usefulness of (3)-(4), I am concerned that these suggestions miss one of the major aspects of general education in the United States, which traditionally had as its mission to educate well-rounded citizens that are able to fully participate in a democracy, which requires knowledge in a variety of fields of global human interest, e.g., world history, literature and politics; economics; or sustainability; to name just a few of the areas covered by the GE program at the Ohio State University, which has just been revised a few years ago to reflect students' desire for a slimmer and more focused GE program.

I ask you to consider my testimony and reconsider the sections discussed in my testimony. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'May Mergenthaler', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

May Mergenthaler