

Testimony of Keita Moore, Ph.D.
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
February 8, 2025

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

My name is Keita Moore, and I am an assistant professor of East Asian Languages and Literatures at the Ohio State University. I do not represent OSU but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

I oppose S.B.1 because it is at best unnecessary: faculty are already helping students to “formulate their own conclusions.” At worst, it devalues university education for all involved. It will make Ohio public university graduates less competitive in the job market and therefore has significant economic ramifications as well. Ultimately, I fear that it will stop OSU and other public institutions from doing their mandated duty to improve the lives of Ohioans.

My concern starts with the bill’s vagueness concerning what constitutes a “controversial belief.” This wording stipulates nothing about the question of controversial from whose perspective. We are at a historic moment wherein a vocal minority finds practically everything to be controversial. Take, for example, the belief that the earth is flat. Are we to teach that the roundness of the globe is a controversial issue, when satellite imagery, scientific data, and common sense dictate otherwise? Are we to teach conspiracy theories *as if* they were scientifically verifiable, simply because someone finds the scientific data controversial? Where does it stop? The dangers of this bill are precisely that they can rob higher education of its ability *to* be an intellectually diverse space and instead transform it into a Reddit or YouTube comment section.

This then leads me to my second concern: that the bill endangers the future of Ohio university students. OSU is the flagship public institution of higher learning in the state. Its goal is to provide excellence in education to best serve the population of Ohio, and its graduates are among the best and brightest the state has to offer.

What if the bill passes, however? Imagine you are an employer, looking for a college graduate, faced with the choice between an OSU student or a privately educated one. Would you take the former seriously, knowing that their “intellectually diverse” education has exposed them to unscientific knowledge, even to conspiracy theories? Or, conversely, would you choose the privately educated student, who has formed their own opinions in dialogue with the guidance of experts in their field? I do not see a situation wherein OSU students would maintain their marketability, should the bill pass. On the contrary, I believe that the bill will deeply undercut the value of a public university education.

Finally, I oppose the bill because it will have a deleterious effect on my own classes. As a subject-matter expert in modern and contemporary Japanese culture, my goal in the classroom is to teach critical literacy of Japanese culture; that is, to give students the intellectual tools to make

historical, intellectual, cultural, and sociological sense of media produced in Japan. These media are relevant to my students lives not only due to their omnipresence in American media diets, but also because they prompt students to think deeply about their own experiences. By looking at the United States from the perspective of Japan, students are prompted “to reach their own conclusions.” From this perspective, the bill is unnecessary because I am already encouraging free and independent thought—as, I believe, are all professors.

If we cannot have meaningful discussion about students’ own conclusions—which may be “controversial” themselves—how are we to help critical thought thrive? This is precisely the problem: the bill prevents meaningful discussion and student reflection in the classroom, as it can stop faculty from giving any feedback about what students think. How are we to grade tests and essays when we are unable to take a position about anything that *might* be “controversial?” How does such forced silence on the part of faculty serve the students? The simple answer is that it doesn’t.

As a teacher, my first loyalty is to my students. I want to see them thrive, and design syllabi accordingly. I invite students to see how I and other members of my field understand and interpret things and attempt to teach them to replicate the process—not unlike a scientific experiment. At no point, however, do I demand that they also accept my results as their own beliefs. Simply put, I lack that power. Students bring their own backgrounds, their own ideas, into the classroom as young adults. They are already independent individuals, and they frequently ask questions and challenge faculty based on their own conclusions.

I cannot, in good faith, support a bill that either wastes taxpayer money to force faculty to do what they are already doing, nor one that may significantly harm the Ohio populations that public institutions service. For this and other reasons, I strongly encourage the committee to throw it out.

Sincerely,

Keita Moore, Ph.D