

Brian Hall

Testimony: Ohio Senate Bill 1

February 11, 2025

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Higher Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Brian Hall, and even though I am a proud member of the English faculty at Cuyahoga Community College, I am here representing myself and am speaking in opposition to Senate Bill 1: Enact Advance Ohio Higher Education Act.

My concern is the bill's language on controversial issues and intellectual diversity and how the reporting and compliance structure will limit educators' willingness to effectively teach argumentative writing and critical thinking out of concern for being reported.

I teach mostly college composition classes. The outcomes within these classes include writing compositions that use appropriate rhetorical strategies, such as persuasion and argumentation. When teaching these strategies, the students and I explore the arguments and persuasion that is occurring every day because students are interested in these examples. We, as educators, know how important it is to lean into the interests of the students, interests that mirror the concerns of most Americans. When the interest is high, we know that students will have meaningful engagement in the class.

The process of evaluating arguments focuses on developing critical thinking skills. In teaching these skills, students learn how to research topics and evaluate the credibility of sources on both sides of the issue. This is why using current topics is beneficial because there are more perspectives available to analyze and possibly cite in their work.

At first, this process can be uncomfortable for most students because, for many, it is the first time they have been provided an opportunity to reflect and do research on a topic that they may only know by what they have seen or read on social media. Because this process is new to most students, students may feel that because of this bill, they can challenge and report faculty for using a controversial topic and not upholding intellectual diversity.

Because of the bill's definition of controversial topics and intellectual diversity and because of the consequences for not following the bill, this will cause educators to avoid using arguments that shape our American life for fear that we will be reported if someone misunderstands or misrepresents the outcome we are trying to achieve, which is writing an effective argument using credible sources.

Finally, I believe that in institutes of higher education, you, the committee, want faculty to guide students through how to critically analyze and respond to the most controversial issues because analyzing these arguments will help develop critical thinking skills that students will need throughout their college life and their professional careers. For this to happen, we, as educators, need to be able to use the arguments that we hear every day without worrying that we will be reported for violating this law.

I ask you to please consider this testimony and vote no on this bill.

Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions.