

Opponent Testimony of Rebecka Campos-Astorkiza, Ph.D.
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee

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

My name is Rebecka Campos-Astorkiza, and I am a professor of Hispanic Linguistics in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at The Ohio State University, where I have taught since 2007. I am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

While there are many aspects of SB1 that I find worrisome, unfounded, and unnecessary, I will focus on the elements that pertain to bans on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) training and teaching and oversight of curricular approval and course offerings. First, I want to talk about training on inclusive teaching and learning, something that this bill would ban (Sec. 3345.0217: Prohibit all of the following: Any orientation or training course regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion), even if it had a “different designation”. When I read SB1, my immediate reaction is that the writers and co-sponsors of the bill are not familiar with what we do at Ohio State, in general, but particularly in relation to the inclusive diversity practices that we have at OSU. Vice Chair Cirino in his sponsor testimony suggests how detrimental DEI can be for our students. However, this assessment is not warranted if one examines the DEI training being done at Ohio universities and colleges, and the positive impact that it has on our students, including preparing them to join a global workforce. Let me elaborate on this and give some examples from my experience as an educator at OSU. We know that students’ sense of belonging in the university is a strong predictor of their success in college.¹ We, as educators, play an important role in helping students develop this connection and feel part of the university, but to do our best, we need to know and understand our students’ backgrounds and unique experiences. DEI training equips us with the tools we need to achieve this. For example, in my classes I strive to create an inclusive space where all students can participate and be listened to with respect and curiosity. To accomplish this, I use strategies that I have learned through DEI training. I encourage discussions where students examine different ideas and examples and use the critical thinking and analytical skills learned in class to develop their responses and reactions. In my class, students are invited to use their experiences and knowledge as a point of departure and from there, and based on the course material, expand their horizons and understanding of the topics we discuss. In this way, students can see the value of what they bring to the classroom and also learn that their lived experiences are not the only way to look at certain problems – other experiences, oftentimes coming from people with different perspectives and backgrounds, can enrich our analyses. I regularly witness this realization in students when they express their wonder at learning about other cultures to their own and being able to see a given situation from a new angle. This is what DEI work is about; it allows us to better prepare students, who become more adaptable and able to see issues from a big-picture perspective. In fact, this is what employers are looking for, as trends in companies and corporations show, and banning DEI work from our campuses would have detrimental consequences for our students, placing them at a disadvantage, as they join a highly globalized workforce. I also encourage you to read the language on inclusive teaching and learning that we

¹ See, for example, Terrell Stryhorn (2019) *College Students' Sense of Belonging: A Key to Educational Success for All Students*. Routledge.

can add to our syllabi to better understand “the importance and value of diversity of people and ideas” at OSU.² As you will see, within this diversity, we include intellectual diversity or diversity of ideas, something that SB1 implies is missing from Ohio college campuses.

There is no course at OSU that all students have to take. We are not a high school; we believe that students come to the university to get training to become skilled workers and engaged global citizens, and to develop their critical and analytical skills in general but especially in their chosen field of study. College students make their own decisions as to what courses they want to take, and their agency in this process is crucial for their personal and academic growth and for their success. Requiring a three-credit hour course on American civic literacy for all students runs counter to this and it would be an overreach of the government is dictating what specific course students need to take in college. At a time when General Education (GE) have been revised and updated to allow students greater opportunity to focus on their majors and minors (as the OSU recently updated OSU GE program reflects³), including a required course for everyone goes against this path to give students all opportunities to take courses of their choosing that they think will provide them with the knowledge, skills and connections that want to pursue for their careers. Such course impositions would have a detrimental effect on the Ohio public colleges recruitment efforts. Although I should note, that if any student is interested in learning more about the texts included in the SB1 required course (Sec. 3345.382), they can do so at OSU since there are offerings in different departments that include them. A further problematic provision of SB1 is its infringement of faculty’s governance when it comes to curriculum matters. The bill would have the chancellor approve the plan to offer the course mentioned above, having the power to ask for changes to that plan. As the senators may know, OSU has a thorough and notoriously long process to get approval for a new course or program change.⁴ Faculty, who are not only experts in their fields but also experienced educators, formed the committees that oversee this approval process. All courses offered at OSU are evaluated and revised according to best practices in course design and curriculum development. Faculty governance is central to any university and curriculum oversight is an integral tenet of that governance – professors do not take this process lightly and to see it discuss in this way, like a process that can be subject to government interference, would just shed doubt into the rigor and unbiased design of such a course.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on SB1. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

² Number 20 in <https://ascas.osu.edu/submission/development/submission-materials/syllabus-elements>

³ <https://ugeducation.osu.edu/general-education-information-students>

⁴ <https://oaa.osu.edu/policies/academic-organization-curriculum-and-assessment-handbook> and <https://ascas.osu.edu/submission/development/submission-materials/asc-operations-manual>