

Senate Higher Education Committee
SB1 & HB6 Opponent Testimony
February 11, 2025

Chair Roegner, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I am Dr. Lynette Long, and I was born and raised in Ohio and recently moved back to my hometown. I have a PhD in rhetoric and communication studies - the academic "home" of free speech studies – and I bring to my opposition of SB1 & HB6 today nearly 30 years of experience teaching in public state universities and community colleges. I am opposed to this bill calling for authoritarian state policing of college professors and the institutionalization of virulent anti-DEI college campus culture for three primary reasons:

1. The justification for authoritarian state policing of Ohio college professors is based entirely on beliefs and persistent political dogma, not verifiable facts and credible evidence; it is simply untrue.
2. **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion** are non-negotiable core values for 83% of the Gen-Z traditional college students (including student athletes) you need to recruit and retain.
3. There are better, less adversarial ways to promote "intellectual diversity" on campus than this draconian legislation.

1. Conservative political attacks on higher education and allegations of "liberal bias" have a long history in the U.S.¹; they typically rely on extreme cherry-picked examples that are not representative of the whole to "prove" it exists and claim (without academically credible research and evidence)² that the most educated people in our country have willfully abandoned their sacred professional obligation as educators to teach students *how to think*, *not what to think* in favor of engaging in a nefarious political campaign of corruption and political "indoctrination" of students that must be policed and disciplined by the state.

This damning claim of student indoctrination was first leveled at Socrates in 399 BC for relentlessly questioning and teaching young Athenians to think critically about the eloquent self-serving promises of the Sophists who wanted to recruit them as paying customers. Socrates essentially put them out of business because once the students had stronger critical thinking skills, they were no longer interested in the shady Sophists who valued them for financial and other non-educational reasons but offered nothing substantial to the students in return. The infuriated Sophists took Socrates to court with trumped up charges of indoctrinating the youth, and Socrates' diehard commitment to truth-telling was no match for the Sophists who were willing to lie and engage in demagoguery to persuade the jury of Athenian citizens that Socrates was guilty. The Athenians, who were not skilled in critical thinking or wise to the rhetorical tricks of the Sophists, were persuaded to judge Socrates guilty and sentenced him to death, leaving behind a large, devastated group of students including Plato who founded The Academy, the first Western institution of higher learning, to educate young Athenian men. Plato hoped that by teaching students to value and seek truth like Socrates that they would be better equipped to evaluate arguments in the courts and the public forum³. Plato's student, Aristotle, however, believed that truthful knowledge alone would not be enough to help students evaluate public persuasive messages nor effectively communicate the truth to others, so he began teaching a class on rhetorical analysis, and his curriculum for this exists to this day as *The Rhetoric*⁴ and provides the foundation of ethical public speaking, composition, and argumentation courses. The study of rhetoric (persuasive messages) became one of the first 7 liberal arts taught in

Greco-Roman schools, which our Founding Fathers would later study in their own classical education. Today, public speaking and composition courses are required as core classes in nearly all US universities and colleges so that students are empowered to think critically and communicate effectively AND ethically in their civic and professional lives.

So, as we can see, as long as there have been professors and higher education in Western culture, there have been powerful, persuasive men falsely accusing them of indoctrinating the youth and fussing at them about their stubborn sacred commitment to teach students the fundamental academic value of pursuing truthful knowledge and empower them with critical thinking and effective and ethical communication skills they need to be successful in life. We teach these skills in college first so that students can take and apply them to their major classes as well as their new obligations as voters in a democratic-republic and their ongoing participation as ad-targeted consumers in a capitalist economy.

In my experience, the vast majority of state college professors take seriously their sacred professional and ethical obligations as educators to teach students *how to think, not what to think*. Compared to 30 years ago, grading in academia has become fairer and less prone to bias, typically involving a rubric that clearly indicates what is required to earn points on the assignment when it is given to students. On the second day in my classes, after explaining what free speech means, students create their own ground rules for civil discussion (with minimal coaching from me) to guide their exploration of controversial topics that are unavoidable in communication classes. This works beautifully to foster a supportive and inclusive forum for multiple points of view – no intrusive state legislation or authoritarian policing necessary!

I think it's awful that the sponsors of this bill are promoting a perception based on nothing but a longstanding partisan political belief and dogma that Ohio college professors are hopelessly unethical and incompetent corruptors of the youth who must be relentlessly policed and intimidated by the state. How many college professors do you even know on a personal basis? I'm guessing not many because the fact is most state college professors are politically moderate⁵. The gross disrespect of college faculty in this draconian legislation makes me wonder: what is it about Ohio that Republican state legislators assume corruption is a professional norm rather than a rare exception?

2. I've been working with college students for nearly 30 years, and I assure you most of this generation are not going to be rushing to virulent anti- diversity, anti-equity and anti-inclusion states for higher education. Anyone who tells you otherwise simply hasn't done their homework and is once again relying on belief and political dogma rather than truthful knowledge. *Forbes* magazine reported in September 2023 that DEI-positive cultures are non-negotiable values for Gen-Z, and 83% say they wouldn't take a job in an organization hostile to diversity, equity and inclusion,^{5,6} Presumably, prospective Gen-Z students (*including student athletes*) won't choose to attend universities and colleges that are hostile to their core values either. If you want to attract more students, you need to honor and support THEIR values and needs, not force them to adopt YOURS.

3. There are better, less adversarial ways to encourage and stimulate more "intellectual diversity" on campus than institutionalizing this proposed authoritarian state policing of professors. Former college president and Republican Senator Lamar Alexander told conservative students at the First National Academic Freedom conference who wanted Congress to pass a student bill of rights that legislation wasn't the answer⁷, and he's right.

If you really want to stimulate more diverse, robust and civil campus discussions, maybe you should invest in hiring more full-time rhetoric and communication studies professors who can teach effective discussion and inclusive classroom techniques and teach argumentation and debate classes. Provide generous funding for collegiate debate programs⁸ and tournaments in Ohio where students learn to do quality research and make ethical arguments supported by evidence, not political dogma (note: formal competitive collegiate debate is nothing like the faux debate we see every election). Volunteer to come to campus and participate in these formal debates with students in your districts – I promise you students would LOVE this! THAT kind of civic engagement is a win-win for ALL Ohioans.

In conclusion, I urge you to vote NO on SB1 and go back to the drawing board to collaborate with your Democratic colleagues, Ohio college professors, and college students to develop better, less adversarial and more respectful professor and Gen-Z student friendly solutions to champion your desire for "intellectual diversity" in Ohio higher education.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony.

1 Tyson, Charlie J, and Naomi Oreskes. "The American University, the Politics of Professors and the Narrative of 'Liberal Bias.'" *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 9, no. 8 (2020): 14–32. <https://wp.me/p1Bfg0-5gg>.

2 Tyson and Oreskes

3 Poulakos, John, and Takis Poulakos. *Classical Rhetorical Theory*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999.

4 Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (New York: Random House, 1954).

5 Sadeghi, Ahva. "Building a Diverse, Equitable and Inclusive Culture for Gen Z." *Forbes Councils*, September 5, 2023. <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbeshumanresourcescouncil/2023/09/05/building-a-diverse-equitable-and-inclusive-culture-for-gen-z>

6 Kratz, Julie. "3 Diversity Statistics You Need to Know When Hiring Gen Z." *Forbes*, September 12, 2023. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/juliekratz/2023/09/12/3-diversity-statistics-you-need-to-know-when-hiring-gen-z/>.

7 Alexander, Lamar. "Remarks at the First National Academic Freedom Conference." April 7, 2006. Accessed October 2023. <https://studentsforacademicfreedom.org/first-national-academic-freedom-conference/speech-from-senator-lamar-alexander/>.

8 National Communication Association. "Communicating Political Bias in the College Classroom." Accessed October 2023. <https://www.natcom.org/publications-library/communicating-political-bias-college-classroom/>.