

Testimony of Ann Elizabeth Armstrong, PhD
Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina D. Roegner, Chair
February 9, 2025

Dear Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking member Ingram, and Work Force & Higher Ed Committee members,

As an Associate Professor of Theatre at Miami University in Oxford Ohio, I am responding to SB1. I do not represent Miami University (where I have taught for 24 years) but I'm submitting testimony in opposition to SB 1. It is clear to me that the bill is vague, redundant, and misinformed in terms of how we conduct ourselves in higher education. Furthermore, if this bill was to pass, it would contradict the accreditation standards of our national accreditors and cause us to lose tuition and students to other universities. DEI programs and training already include many elements of the "intellectual diversity" that you are calling for. DEI programs are not just about race and gender. They include veteran status, religious belief, disability, and socioeconomic status. While we engage critical thinkers that look at all sides of controversies, we do not inculcate students in to "beliefs" or influence their votes. Indeed, we are NOT preoccupied with labels like "conservative" or "liberal" and the teacher-scholars at Miami (as well as my other colleagues in the state of Ohio) are thoughtfully engaging current events into the classroom to prepare our students to deal with multifaceted, controversial, complex, and difficult challenges of the 21st Century. Our programs thoroughly support FREE speech, but we cannot succumb to speakers who use HATE speech directed towards particular identity groups. We also have the highest of ethics in requiring our students to find and validate research and use evidence in thoughtful ways to dispel misinformation, fake news, and hate speech. Furthermore, as a teacher of theatre and the arts, we strive to recognize the common ground and the common good that we all share as we encourage our students to learn and grow by working with others from different backgrounds and experiences. Isn't this the very goal of higher education?

To share a few examples that you may not be aware of: At Miami, we recently hosted a group called Braver Angels, a nonpartisan/bipartisan group dedicated to dialogue across the political divide. This workshop would certainly be considered a DEI training/program based on the use of that term in your bill, but indeed THIS is the kind of program most needed in our society today. Perhaps you have heard of the annual Janus Forum in the Farmer School of Business that brings together national figures for similar debates, dialogue and discussion about the most complex and pressing problems in front of us today. Other programs share "intellectual diversity" by looking at problems from different disciplines, consider our programming on Freedom Summer and the Civil Rights Movement, the work of the Myaamia Center, and the Altman programming from the Humanities Center. Labels like "conservative" and "liberal" no longer have meaning when you consider the task of addressing a crisis like climate change or public health emergencies like the recent pandemic. We strive to show that dialogue between scientists and artists and political scientists can yield new insights even when

we find conflict. For example, in some of my research experiences, I've had the pleasure of working with anthropologists, community psychologists, public health professionals, and community members to address stories and statistics about infant mortality through community storytelling. Such work is not partisan. It is not about conservatives or liberals. It is about modeling for our students how we come together (despite political or disciplinary differences) to solve urgent problems and make Ohio a better place to live and work.

To support the faculty and students of Ohio, I urge you to vote against this bill. If this bill does move forward, I strongly suggest significant revisions to recognize policies and practices already in place. For example:

- Allow Boards of Trustees to modify existing evaluation systems. Universities already have post-tenure evaluation policies and it is more important to work within existing policies rather than impose new ones.
- Remove the section on degree program elimination, which contains arbitrary metrics, and replace it with a proposal to study the issue.
- Allow institutions to post sample syllabi that reflect curricula and do not burden administrators and faculty with onerous, unfunded, bureaucratic tasks that will be impossible to enforce and supervise.
- It is crucial to eliminate language in this bill that bans programs and services for underrepresented students. These programs are crucial to preparing ALL the students in Ohio for a strong future economy in Ohio. Otherwise, our most talented students will seek out-of-state institutions.
- Eliminate language that prohibits faculty from collective bargaining and speaking out against unfair treatment. Faculty should be able to advocate for fair working conditions.
- Revise language on "intellectual diversity" to clarify that faculty fully maintain academic freedom and are not forced to teach ideas about which there is no consensus within their academic discipline. Otherwise, the most talented faculty will leave Ohio. This pattern is already evident in other states where restrictive bills have passed.

Thank you for reading my testimony and rethinking this bill.