

Opponent Testimony for Senate Bill 1
Ohio Senate Higher Education Committee
February 9, 2025
Ingrid Emch, Professor

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

Thank you for considering my testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 1. As a long-term, full-time faculty member at an Ohio community college and a former professional in multiple large Ohio companies, I am writing to strongly oppose Senate Bill 1 (SB1). The educational expertise of the faculty and management at Ohio colleges and universities as well as the perspectives and educational successes of many of our students will be undermined by this legislation, resulting in unnecessary labor and costs and an adversarial rather than collaborative learning environment.

Creating unnecessary labor and costs: This legislation creates unnecessary hurdles for both faculty and managers at the institutions. Syllabi that identify course calendars and assignments are for students, not the public. Requiring the publication of so many documents, with the ability to search them by key word on a platform that requires enough server space, is unnecessary, labor-intensive, and costly. Gateway courses taught at large universities likely have hundreds of unique syllabi used by hundreds of faculty teaching the courses. Education is not a mass production line where each syllabus is the same. One course may be offered in a variety of modes (face-to-face, web, or hybrid) and in varying numbers of weeks, by many different instructors, and sometimes for unique cohorts of students. Materials/readings may be revised or added due to current events, student interests, and student challenges in any given class. Posting syllabi publicly will certainly increase cheating, an expanding challenge along with the use of artificial intelligence tools. There are curriculum review processes as well as student complaint mechanisms already in practice at each institution, which are common policies and procedures that are required for accreditation of higher education institutions.

Another cost of this legislation is the negative effect on some students reaching completion milestones (degree or certificate completion; course completion) due to the elimination of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, which this legislation bans but does not define. Ohio's State Share of Instruction (SSI) formula for community colleges allocates subsidies for some designated at-risk student groups, including African American, American Indian, and Hispanic students as well as Pell-eligible students, students who are age 25 or over when they enter a college, and students unprepared for college-level mathematics. Students of color are more likely to be identified as "academic at-risk" based on remedial course taking or ACT scores. Institutional data reveals that initiatives focused on student diversity, equity, and inclusion help to increase course completion for African American students. Degree completion means a more educated Ohio workforce, and Ohio's SSI formula incentivizes efforts to help our most at-risk students.

Undermining educational expertise: Higher education faculty have credentials in various disciplines, from business and STEM to health and social sciences, to criminal justice and

paralegal studies, as well as many other technical fields that represent employment and career destinations for Ohio students. College faculty and management are not working to indoctrinate students; they are working to help students attain credentials that will lead to a higher quality of living.

Professional judgment about foundational tenets of an academic discipline is critical to preparing students for the knowledge and skills required in their career fields. This legislation does not adequately acknowledge the importance of challenging students to differentiate between facts and opinions. For example, if students in health fields are learning about vaccines, infectious disease, and climate changes to inform their professional practice caring for Ohioans, this legislation presents a distraction of “controversial topic” and implies potential indoctrination while also prohibiting training on relevant topics related to diversity but demanding “the fullest degree of intellectual diversity.” This is illogical, and the intent seems to be a silencing of objectivity and certain perspectives. Higher education professionals want to facilitate the development of critical thinking in our students.

Another method by which this legislation could undermine faculty expertise is the use of student evaluations with required questions such as: Does the faculty member create a classroom free of political, racial, gender, and religious biases? This invites biased feedback because everyone has bias, and students with differing perspectives may identify even the discussion of any opinion different than theirs as bias. In addition, counting a student evaluation as 25 percent of an annual teaching evaluation is not reflective of the quality of instruction as the responses will differ depending on the subject matter, course difficulty, student readiness, and student motivation to learn. In addition, the metrics will differ depending on the number of responses received, which depends on the number of students in a class and the evaluation return rate, which is affected by many variables. These concerns identify issues outside of faculty control. Research studies have also shown that male instructors are rated higher than female instructors, revealing an implicit gender bias in student evaluations. The overall effect of these student evaluation policies will be grade inflation.

Undermining student perspectives and learning: There have been many employer surveys that reveal the most-desired employee skills are “soft skills” like collaboration, listening, communication, and complex problem-solving. This legislation implies an out-of-control phenomenon of faculty indoctrinating students and advocating for one side of various controversial topics. My teaching experiences reveal that more commonly is the situation when students come to a classroom with strong opinions about controversial topics and expect their peers to share those opinions. So, the educational exercise becomes more about developing listening, communication, and critical thinking skills, and the faculty member is facilitating that discussion, managing disagreements, and creating a safe space for discussion and disagreement. However, banning training on topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion does not promote an open dialogue about controversial issues, and it does not prepare faculty to engage in the difficult task of facilitating open discussions. To help students develop the key skills that employers seek, the

learning environment must be collaborative rather than adversarial, and diversity and inclusion are key elements of that process for students, faculty, and management.

Undermining collective bargaining processes: This bill undermines collective bargaining processes, such as negotiating working conditions, salaries, benefits, and other employment terms. This will reduce faculty retention and job satisfaction and create a less stable environment for students. This bill imposes rigid workload and evaluation policies that should be developed and negotiated within each unique institution to best meet the needs of their respective employees and students.

As a participant on multiple faculty bargaining teams and faculty/management contract committees during my career, I can attest to the benefits of a collegial process with both faculty and management, resulting in improved policies and procedures, workplace morale, and student success. Better learning conditions for students is directly correlated to better working conditions for instructors. Removing the ability for institutions to negotiate the unique aspects of fair working conditions specific to their environment and disrespecting the years of service and professionalism that are recognized by seniority, tenure, promotion, and fair retrenchment policies and systems unique to an institution is bad practice. There are systems already in place at institutions to address under-performing or unethical employees. Management at any organization is already empowered with the ability to address those types of performance issues.

I urge you to vote against SB1 and instead support policies that avoid unnecessary resources and costs, respect faculty expertise, protect collective bargaining rights, and effectively help students to attain educational credentials and skills that will lead to a higher quality of living.

Sincerely,



Ingrid Emch