

Testimony of Annie McGhee, MA
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
February 11, 2025

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

My name is Annie McGhee, and I am a graduate student in the department of Sociology at the University of Cincinnati, where I have taught for 6 years. I do not represent the University of Cincinnati, but rather, am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

Senate Bill 1 has several provisions that would not only dismantle higher education but would inhibit 'intellectual diversity.' I address several portions of the bill that are particularly harmful for educators and students. In order, I elaborate on the ban on diversity, equity, and inclusion; the prohibition on controversial beliefs; and the requirement to post syllabi online.

First, the bill prohibits Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in higher education but does not actually provide a definition for DEI. Contrary to common belief, DEI is not indoctrination or censorious. DEI is an intentional effort to welcome and support all students. DEI efforts are founded upon equitable treatment and in some cases, assist those who have systemically marginalized. I have served on the graduate student DEI Committee at the University of Cincinnati for two years and have developed numerous events and instruments aimed at supporting student mental health and cultivating welcoming spaces for all students. For instance, DEI supports veterans¹ on college campuses. This group may struggle with transitioning to civilian life, navigating financial and educational benefits, managing their physical and mental health, and being socially isolated from peers. DEI assistance serves to provide resources and aid in integrating veterans into the college community. Veterans, like many others, have unique challenges in receiving an equitable education. Our DEI Committee has developed initiatives to: provide students with information sessions on graduate student health insurance and retirement plans, to bring dogs to campus to reduce mental health strain during exam week, and assess whether and how university services (e.g. transportation services or stipend pay) supports students. That is to say, DEI aims to foster fairness, representation, and belonging for all students. These initiatives are not predicated upon exclusion at all.

Additionally, DEI improves universities. More cultural diversity creates a more diverse and innovative learning environment,² that centers critical thinking, promotes robust dialogue, encourages empathy and collaboration, and fosters community. Furthermore, faculty are more likely to publish higher quality work in these environments,³ and higher rates of publication

¹ McCoy, Q. (n.d.). *When Diversity Hiring Initiatives Acknowledge the Veteran Population*. Retrieved February 10, 2025, from <https://www.higheredmilitary.com/news/articleDisplay.cfm?ID=3463>

² Strum, S., Eatman, T., Saltmarch, J., & Bush, A. (2011). Full participation: Building the architecture for diversity and community engagement in higher education.

³ Christensen, C. M., Horn, M. B., Caldera, L., & Soares, L. (2011). Disrupting college: How disruptive innovation can deliver quality and affordability to postsecondary education. *Innosight Institute*.

increase faculty retention.⁴ Thus, DEI efforts position universities to receive more funding, retain students and faculty, and benefit Ohio. Removing DEI does a great disservice to our local and state community.

Second, the bill describes that higher education institutions are not to take a position on any “controversial belief or policy” on topics like climate, foreign policy, DEI, marriage, abortion, or any other topic that might be the subject of political controversy. Discussions of controversial topics are an integral part of critical thinking and progress. “Intellectual diversity” is fostered by – not inhibited by – academic debates. Controversial topics enhance communication skills, boost critical thinking, improve academic performance, and build students’ confidence and ability to assess, question, and challenge information. In my classroom, the most formative and productive conversations arise from disagreements or confusion. Students become independent thinkers when they hear dissent, contemplate it, and respond to it with evidence and reasoning. By eliminating difficult topics – like those brought about when we foreground DEI – we encourage students to be single-minded and limit their potential.

Below, I include some quotes from my students from a discussion on Senate Bill 1’s prohibition on controversial topics.⁵

“I am really grateful my teacher brought this topic into class today, seeing how it will directly affect my studies. I feel very strongly about this issue for a few reasons, my Jewish upbringing and the act of limiting education. I am a Jewish American and I attended a private Jewish elementary school, Rockwern Academy. In the 7 years I had been there, I learned detailed history of the Holocaust...Even as an elementary student, I understood the complex severity of this history and learned that history tends to repeat itself. The beginning of the occupation started with censorship just like this. This attempt to restrict education in "the land of the free" is disgraceful. Being able to talk about controversial topics is a crucial part of gaining a higher education. I hope you all understand the true consequences of this action. As my father would always say, "Adult actions have adult consequences." I hope you keep this in mind while you vote away the education of all Ohioans.” – Student A

“As a first-generation college student from immigrant parents, education has been my pathway to understanding not only my own history but also the history and experiences of those around me. The opportunity to learn about different perspectives, cultures, and societal issues is not just an academic privilege—it is a fundamental right that should not be restricted... [This bill] suppress[es] knowledge and erase[s] history. My education has given me and my siblings access to ideas, discussions, and truths that we might never have encountered otherwise. If this bill passes, it will not only limit our ability to learn about important issues but will also send a dangerous message: that some truths are too

⁴ Aguirre Jr, A. (2000). Women and Minority Faculty in the Academic Workplace: Recruitment, Retention, and Academic Culture. ERIC Digest.

⁵ Though I received permission to include my students’ names, I refrain from using them in order to protect their FERPA rights.

inconvenient to be taught... Education should empower, not restrict. It should encourage critical thinking, not DICTATE what is deemed “acceptable” to discuss.” – Student B

This legislation not only impacts my schooling and future profession but has drastic effects on undergraduate education. These students foreground the importance of controversial topics and academic freedom. They emphasize how necessary and formative these in-class discussions are for their understanding of the world and educational development.

Lastly, I would like to address the requirement to post syllabi online in a format that is accessible to the public. I cannot emphasize enough how *dangerous* this provision is. While my email is available on our website, to publish information regarding my class’s location and time as well as my office and office hours puts my students and me at risk. The public could intrude on my classes, stalk⁶ or harass my students and me, and even be motivated to dox⁷ me. This requirement jeopardizes our physical and emotional safety. This could dissuade students and professors from joining Ohio’s higher education system. Even if revisions of the bill protect instructors’ private information, the time and energy required to publish and revise (to account for, for example, cancelled classes due to inclement weather) syllabi may inhibit professors from completing their other duties and drain their time, energy, and resources.

Again, I urge you to vote in opposition to Senate Bill 1. This bill harms our campuses, endangers students and instructors, and impedes the ‘intellectual diversity,’ it claims to encourage.

Thank you for your consideration.
Annie McGhee

⁶ According to the Department of Justice, those who are between 18-24 are at the highest risk of being stalked. <https://www.justice.gov/archive/ovw/docs/bjs-stalking-rpt.pdf>

⁷ Doxing means to publish private/identifying information about a person (e.g. their private address or phone number), usually with malicious intent. This could lead to intimidation, harassment, identity theft, threats, or physical harm.