

Opponent Testimony for Senate Bill 1
Ohio Senate Committee on Higher Education
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Good morning, I am Jerry Yarnetsky, a web services librarian at Miami University, testifying on my own behalf in opposition to Senate Bill 1. My background includes a decade as a government reporter and 20 years as a librarian with stints in management as a library director and as an adjunct professor teaching online interaction design and development. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

In Senator Jerry Cirino’s press conference introducing SB1, he stated that this bill would help focus the mission of state universities to workforce development. Let’s look at where the workforce needs to be in the mid- to late-2020s.

A major disrupter in the workforce is upon us — artificial intelligence is developing faster than anyone imagined—

- In 2019, scientists predicted it would take 80 years to reach the human-like reasoning of Artificial General Intelligence. OpenAI CEO Sam Altman recently said he expects to accomplish the feat not in 2099, but in 2025.
- An industry survey concluded that jobs like tax preparers, bookkeepers, and paralegals, many professions taught in community colleges, would be replaced by AI with a certainly greater than 90 percent.
- Meanwhile, in customer service call centers, AI systems can now answer 65% of all customer questions within a month of implementation.

So, if AI will be taking all these jobs, what tasks will humans be left with? We’ll be left with all the messy, complicated jobs requiring an ability of evaluating multiple and conflicting sources of information while presenting results back to humans with an empathy that is difficult to replicate with AI. This is compounded by the fact that AI regularly hallucinates answers and invents sources. Where does this leave humans? We need to be able to assess when sources are reputable and based in reality. We need to suss out truth from fiction and news from propaganda. These are workforce core skills that come from a college education that SB1 will undermine.

Sec. 3345.0217, in its efforts to mandate students be allowed to reach their own conclusions, will instead tie the hands of professors by mandating they allow students to believe these hallucinations and disinformation as they form their academic work. Corporations across the nation are already exposed to ransomware because employees could not deduce reality in

phishing emails. Attorneys have already fallen prey to AI helping them create court briefs full of invented case histories. Again, students need to be able to recognize reality — even if it is messy and controversial.

I'll give you an example from my own course. Like every faculty member I know, I allowed my students to reach their own conclusions in their work. Indeed, the capstone project in my course was entitled “Passion Project” because students were free to follow their passions and choose their own topic and their own means of fulfilling the final project’s design criteria.

However, a problem I witnessed in my class parallels AI hallucination — some projects used propaganda/disinformation websites to prove their academic arguments. These sites were not simply conservative or liberal viewpoints. Biased sources, when you recognize the bias, have great value in broadly understanding all sides of an issue and I encourage their use. Rather these sites were created for the sole purpose of deceiving the reader. Based on made-up, deceptive evidence, their projects fall apart— just as the attorney’s case fell apart based on AI fabricated case study.

Thus, whether it’s verifying the sources used by AI or verifying information they find online, students need to have the wherewithal to determine whether the information was indeed based in reality and whether they truly have evidence to support the argument they want to make. This isn’t about freedom of thought, this is about recognizing deception. Just as the attorneys ran into trouble with judges, industry can face the ire of regulators or their stockholders if they are basing their work on faulty premises. These are all skills learned over years of a college education and it’s one professors and librarians teach on a daily basis.

A compounding issue in SB1 is (13)(c) of the same section allows any student or student groups at the university to harass professors when they disagree with anything from assignment grades to a topic being taught. For instance, the conservative professors being sought to teach in the new Salmon P. Chase Center for Civics, Culture, and Society at Ohio State could readily be harassed by any liberal student groups on campus. These professors deserve the academic freedom both to express their views and to be free from harassment this bill allows— like every other professor at the university.

These are just a couple of the issues with SB1— it is loaded with provisions that will result in unintended consequences. I recommend the entire package be voted down and to start from scratch to create a reality-based reformation of Ohio higher education. At the very least, take additional time to learn what your bill would do by talking with practitioners working in higher education, and drastically amend accordingly.

Thank you. Although I am unable to testify in person, I am happy to answer any questions or further participate in conversation about this legislation.

With Liberty and Justice for All,
Jerry Yarnetsky