

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

My name is Richard Finlay Fletcher, I am a British-born US citizen, Ohio voter, and associate professor at Ohio State University in the Department of Arts Administration, Education, and Policy.

In my testimony this morning, I want to speak in strong opposition to two dangerous supplements that the House made to the Governor's budget, included in HB 96 under consideration today. (For reference, these are the underlined passages in Sections **3345.451** (pp. 2215-2217) and **3335.39, 3339.06, 3344.07** (pp. 2203-2212)). Both involve general education curriculum, and both seriously undermine the role of shared governance at Ohio's public universities wherein leadership, administrators, faculty and staff work together through elected governance bodies to determine and oversee a shared university-wide general education curriculum. At the same time, the way in which both dangerous supplements work together continues a deeply troubling partisan political intervention in the state university system, ushered in by the creation of so-called 'intellectual centers' on several campuses via the 2023 budget, which in this year's budget act as Trojan Horses to reach an endgame of censorship, dictating what can and cannot be taught at our universities.

The section on 'General Education Requirements' (Section **381.750**), introduced in the Governor's version of the budget and maintained in this bill, requires a formal review of general education curriculum by the board of trustees at each state higher education institution. As part of this review, the bill stipulates that "the board shall consider adjusting the general education curriculum" in certain areas, one of which is:

Civics, culture, and society, including United States and Ohio history, the foundations of American representative government, how to disagree in a civil manner, and the principles of civil discourse;

At Ohio State, in 2022 we launched a new General Education curriculum, the first overhaul for over 30 years, and the culmination of 6 years work involving the whole university community. Although I am speaking today as a private citizen, I am proud to have played a role in developing and overseeing this new curriculum, not only as a member of the Arts and Sciences Curriculum Committee but also as a former chair of the Arts and Sciences Faculty Senate. As part of our general education curriculum, which is a distributed model comprising categories of both foundational and theme courses, our whole focus and our required capstone theme is called 'Citizenship for a just and diverse world'. Our curriculum is rigorously assessed and we know that it is already a success with students, so we are confident that any review would reflect that. We are also confident that we already meet the desired 'Civics' focus requirement.

However, the two dangerous supplements by the House I want to address today steer the governor's general education requirement into politically partisan territory in which the integrity and rigor not only of our general education curriculum but our whole system of university shared governance is dismantled.

The first dangerous supplement (**3345.451**, pp. 2215-2217) gives the board of trustees unprecedented power over the general education curriculum. Of course, currently the board of

trustees plays an important oversight role, but this bill not only gives them ‘final, overriding authority’ over all curriculum, including the general education, but also limits the role of the faculty and bodies of shared governance like the Arts and Sciences Curriculum Committee, a standing committee of the Faculty Senate of the Arts and Sciences, and the University Senate at Ohio State a mere advisory role, in which they can give ‘advice, feedback and recommendations’ to the board of trustees. This is simply not how the university works when it comes to curriculum in general, and the general education in particular. At Ohio State, our faculty rules stipulate that:

The specific structure and requirements for general education shall be defined by the faculty in accordance with faculty rule 3335-5-27 of the Administrative Code.¹

The administrative code gives the College of Arts and Sciences jurisdiction over its own general education program and ‘joint responsibility’, working in a ‘cooperative basis’, with other colleges on their programs, which would now include the new Salmon P. Chase Center for Civics, Culture and Society. Our new General Education curriculum navigated these requirements and resulted in a core university-wide curriculum, with flexibility for the needs of specific colleges. Our general education curriculum is developed through a rigorous faculty-led process in direct cooperation with staff and administrators, working together for the benefit of our students. We have assessable goals and learning outcomes for each general education category and all courses have to reviewed to determine if they meet them.

When paired with the Governor’s requirement to review the General Education, this dangerous supplement by the House basically limits that review to boards of trustees who, while they do important work for the university, do not have the expertise or capacity to determine the curriculum. However, it is with the second dangerous supplement that the politically partisan rationale for the first becomes crystal clear.

In sections **3335.39, 3339.06, 3344.07** (pp. 2203-2212), the House added the following sentence to the roles of the directors of three so-called ‘intellectual diversity’ centers created by the 2023 budget at Ohio State, Miami and Cleveland State. The existing language from the 2023 Budget – when these centers were founded - reads:

The director shall oversee, develop, and approve the center's curriculum

This makes sense, since like any teaching unit at a university, it is important that the faculty have control over what they teach (although we have already seen how that is undermined by the proposed changes to the role of the board of trustees!)

But the addition to this bill is truly disturbing:

The director shall oversee, develop, and approve the center's curriculum
including approval of the center's courses that meet the university's general education requirements.

The wording here is admittedly confusing. Does the director have the power to approve which courses can then be approved for inclusion within the general education program? That would be ok, although that would be like a dean of a college determining curriculum, when it should really

¹ <https://trustees.osu.edu/bylaws-and-rules/3335-8>

be left to a collective body of expert faculty within undergraduate and curriculum committees in individual departments or units. But the other interpretation invited by the confusing wording is that the director gets to approve their own general education courses, bypassing faculty rules and the administrative code, governing oversight of the curriculum currently in place – so the Arts and Sciences Curriculum Committee and its subcommittees.

The result of mixing these two dangerous supplements is that, on the one hand, the rigorous, cooperative process of general education curriculum development and oversight – a bastion of shared governance – is undone by bestowing a role on the board of trustees that they are unqualified for, on the other hand, the director of a center created by politically partisan legislation now has more power, not only than faculty members or shared governance bodies, but of the board of trustees themselves! When taken together with the astounding legislative overreach of Senate Bill 1, with its mandated Civics course already intervening in the curricular integrity of universities, it is clear that this Bill is part of a broader political agenda to control what can be taught to our students.

We faculty are tired of being accused of political bias – of being woke activist culture warriors hellbent on indoctrinating students – especially when what we are witnessing here in our own statehouse is nothing less than a form of gerrymandered thought policing that operates at the level of deep-seated structural changes to our universities, attacking the integrity and rigor of our curriculum, all of which can be traced back to Trojan Horses of literal indoctrinations centers imposed by the 2023 budget and wasting tax-payers money to solve a problem that doesn't exist. I implore you not to continue down this path and remove these dangerous supplements and, in doing so, stand up for our public universities in Ohio in maintaining a quality education for all students.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to take any questions you may have.