

Testimony of John Schaefer, PhD
Before the House Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair
May 17, 2023

Chair Young, Ranking Member Miller, and Members of the Higher Education Committee:

My name is John Schaefer, and I am an associate professor of anthropology and social and behavioral sciences at Miami University, where I have taught for 11 years. I am the proud father of two future Redhawks, 16 and 13. I do not represent Miami University, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Substitute House Bill 151.

I teach anthropology courses. One of the hallmarks of anthropology is intellectual diversity—we feel that political science, sociology, history, philosophy, etc. do not really teach intellectual diversity, because they tend to cover most closely the politics of literate societies. Anthropologists focus on nonliterate societies, prehistoric societies (prior to 5,000 years ago), nonhuman societies (typically primates), and the societies of people largely ignored and dismissed by other disciplines.

So I'm all in favor of intellectual diversity! Let's talk about Whigs, Royalists, Anarchists, Agrarians, and other political factions totally dismissed by the mainstream. Let's argue passionately in favor of banning modern technology and returning to the land. Let's focus exclusively on the colonization of Outer Space in our political debates. Let's say out loud the slogan of "The Rent is Too Damn High Party." Let's talk about chimpanzee politics.

What I'm concerned about, however, is the subsequent whiplash clauses that prohibit controversy, diversity, equity, and inclusion on our campuses. How can we be truly diverse without encouraging diversity? What would be the point of "inclusion" unless we were including something other than Democrats and Republicans (and, until 1860, Whigs) in our political diversity? What would political debate be without controversy? How can we justify equity in the presentation of diverse opinions if we are barred from justifying equity? Chimpanzee rights today could be seen as absurd and controversial. Perhaps they are similar to the rights of women or racial minorities were a couple of centuries ago. Are we truly going to ban controversy on college campuses? Really?

In short, please tell me: What am I supposed to teach, and how? My teaching style demands hands-on engagement. I hold regular public-facing events that highlight overlooked communities in SW Ohio, such as immigrants, Muslims and refugees. I don't check attendees at the door to determine that they are here to formally engage exclusively in "credit-earning classroom settings." It used to be seen as a positive for me to welcome members of the public to the campus events I program. But am I going to be prosecuted, or lose my job, for doing my job well?

With respect: Sometimes, when we are writing collaboratively, we can get so caught up in wordsmithing one section that it ends up contradicting other sections. It's happened to me, and it appears to have happened here as well. If we are in favor of diversity in public policy, let's just leave it at that, and scrap the attempts to clamp down on diversity at the same time. Let's allow our universities to remain a free market of ideas, without the government mandating how free that market should be. Thank you for your kind attention.