

Testimony of Ryan T. Skinner, Ph.D.
Before the House Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair
16 May, 2023

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

My name is Ryan Skinner, and I am a professor of Music and African American and African Studies at The Ohio State University, where I have taught for thirteen years. I do not represent Ohio State, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 83.

I would like to address two overarching issues that appear to motivate this legislation—“intellectual diversity” and “diversity, equity, and inclusion” (or “DEI”)—and argue that the underlying concerns are unfounded.

There is no shortage of intellectual diversity at the Ohio State University. A visit to a faculty meeting in any of our many units across the College would demonstrate this fact. As faculty, we often disagree, discuss, and debate issues pertinent to hiring, curriculum development, teaching. Some of these debates represent significant differences of opinion. This is part of the normal, and appropriate conduct of our profession. We work through our differences and make choices that we believe are in the best interests of our faculty and students. That is as it should be.

As such, the underlying animus of this bill—that “intellectual diversity” is lacking, that “conservative” viewpoints are silenced, that faculty are “inculcating” their students—is wildly off-base. In classrooms too, faculty members encounter students from all walks of life. We present our topics with care and rigor, anchored in years of study and research, with an openness to student inquiry and exploration. We are not teaching them “what” to think, but, rather, “how” to think more cogently and critically—to be better equipped to marshal their own knowledge and study to more fluently address a topic, issue, or problem.

Regarding “DEI,” This bill impugns DEI programming on the grounds that such work and forms of affinity are either controversial or otherwise harmful to the institution and the community it encompasses. But there is nothing controversial about social and cultural pluralism. These are clear and present realities of the society in which we live!

Further, the purported harms attributed to “DEI” are misguided. DEI initiatives do not advantage or disadvantage people, nor do they segregate our communities. Just the opposite. DEI programming (including faculty trainings) and associational life (including student groups), exist to ensure that everyone (students, faculty, administration, and staff alike) may live, grow, learn, work, and ultimately thrive in our institutions. DEI initiatives emerge from the simple, but

vital recognition that we are, in fact, variously different, and that there is value in embracing and nurturing such difference within community.

I ask that you consider my testimony and vote NO on this misguided and harmful bill. Thank you again for this opportunity to testify.

Ryan Skinner, Ph.D.