

Joshua Ferry -  
HB 394 Opposition Testimony  
April 24, 2024  
OHIO HOUSE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Chair Young, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Miller and members of the House Higher Ed Committee. My name is Joshua Ferry. I'm a junior at Cleveland State University studying political science. I am testifying in opposition to House Bill 394.

According to the analysis done by the Ohio Legislative Service Commission the bill would prohibit employees, potential employees, and students to all "affirmatively ascribe to specific beliefs, affiliations, ideals, or principles concerning political movements or ideology". At no point in my college education have I witnessed direct indoctrination. As you know, while university plays a big role in shaping somebody's ideology, it is not the only factor. Students and faculty typically already have certain views before working at a university. However, if you have ANY evidence that proves otherwise, please let the public know. It also states that institutions are not allowed to evaluate students or faculty based on their ideology. However, I've never been judged on my academic work based on my ideology. While I'm a political science major, and as so have to take a lot of political classes, even in those classes, ideology does not play a factor into grading. Most of the classes I've taken though are not ones that political ideology would play a big role. You'll be lucky to find 1,000 students on each campus with rigid political beliefs. I'm an outlier in that I know where I stand on most issues, but I never take that into consideration in my academic work. I cannot speak about faculty, so if you have ANY evidence that this is happening, please bring it forward. We're waiting.

The next part of the bill states what is **NOT** prohibited—it's pretty dangerous. For example, faculty members have "academic freedom" and "the ability to research or write about specific beliefs, affiliations, ideals, or principles concerning political movements, ideology, or social action". This can lead to dangerous and fringe research based solely on conspiracy theories. While most academic work has to be edited and checked multiple times, without these barriers of what faculty can and cannot research, they can make their work sound like facts. Also, if universities are not allowed to take stances, does this mean that no political figure can be used as commencement speaker? For example, a couple years back Cleveland State had former HUD secretary Marcia Fudge speak, but with this draconian bill, would that redact them from ANY political figures from speaking?

Finally, the last point of "A state's institution's authority to establish a mission statement or statement of values" is contrary to this bill's main goal. Most mission

statements are loosely tied to certain ideologies, so by banning universities to take certain stances, it makes rules confusing on what and what cannot be done.

Overall, this bill is very confusing and condescending. The vagueness and length is not only dangerous, but also conflicting. While universities should not have to declare themselves as 'political', there are limits to that—like when an important event happens where a statement might be needed (ex. when there's a shooting on campus, universities should be required to condemn it ), as well as boundaries on what faculty are able to research. If faculty and students want to do research, the department chairs and deans should have to approve it.

There are many actions you can take when it comes to helping college students and higher education institutions. Below will be a list of them

- Making college more affordable
  - Lessen the burden on students
- Student forgiveness incentive programs (ex. Work programs)
- Campus Safety

Ex.

Banning the use of guns and other weapons from college campus'

Having ways to keep students safe from pedestrians who might be wandering around campus'---this is especially important for the urban campus' like Cleveland State, where there tends to be a high homeless population circulating, sometimes even entering the campus

- Better security beyond policing
- Improving transport services for students who don't feel safe walking from one side of campus to another.
- Improving healthcare for students
  - This goes beyond physical healthcare and includes mental health, as well as vision and dental health.
- Retention programs:
  - Keep Ohio students in Ohio once they graduate, and encourage non Ohio students to stay in Ohio via internships and other work programs

These are just some of the many actions that can be taken.

I encourage vote **NO** on HB 394, and instead focus on these actions.

Thank you for your time,  
Joshua Ferry