



Ohio Faculty Council

*Chair, Laura Luehrmann, Wright State University
Vice-chair, Ben Givens, Ohio State University
Secretary, Leanne Petry, Central State University*

To: The Honorable Scott Wiggam,
Chairman, State and Local Government Committee

From: [Ohio Faculty Council](#)

Re: Substitute House Bill 327

Date: September 21, 2021

We, the elected faculty leaders at Ohio's 14 state-supported universities, uphold the importance of expertise and academic freedom. As such, we strongly oppose Substitute House Bill 327 as it currently stands. We appreciate the work that you and all the members of the State and Local Government Committee do on behalf of all the citizens of the state of Ohio and welcome the opportunity to work with you to provide the best educational experiences for all of our students, as that is our shared goal.

The students enrolled in our universities rely on faculty to convey our expertise in ways that are understandable and applicable to the very real problems that they are attempting to confront, not only in their classes and fields of study, but in their chosen careers. Faculty classroom expertise has been developed across our professional lives; it is the result of rigorous training in research methods, grounded in the aggregate scholarship of a disciplined academic community, and substantial processes of peer review of our scholarship and our teaching. Sub. HB 327, in its attempt to restrain the academic freedom of experts to teach concepts and theories without political interference, threatens to undermine our work in classrooms, laboratories and field sites, and will undermine the educational mission of our universities.

College teaching is not driven by personal agendas, but rather by the conventions within academic disciplines. Defining particular terms, points of view, and even stages of history as "divisive" risks arbitrary and biased application. Significant insights and critical thinking skills are gained by serious consideration of all points of view, even those that some consider "divisive." Entertaining an understanding of a competing worldview does not equate to adopting it. On the contrary, individuals refine their understanding by considering a point of view that challenges their assumptions and ways of seeing the world. This is the nature of inquiry that serves as the bedrock of the learning enterprise. Universities should model robust and civil discussion of uncomfortable topics. The practical difficulty in determining whether a divisive concept is "taught about" rather than "promoted," along with lack of clarity in the meanings of "inherently" and "fundamentally"

contained in the bill, will lead to widely uneven application and discourage the teaching of critical topics altogether. Quality of education will suffer as a result, degrading Ohio's ability to compete in the educational arena.

If this legislation were to pass as it currently stands, it would have a chilling effect on Ohio colleges' ability to attract students and to hire and retain employees. Threats to the employment of faculty members for perceived violations would substantially damage the credibility of our system of higher education. Students would not want to enroll here—we would be losing the potential to keep young people in our state—and faculty would not want to work here. This bill would ultimately damage the economic interests of our communities by dissuading innovative professors from making their careers in Ohio. On top of this, HB 327 would undermine colleges' accreditation status. Faculty regularly submit course materials—including syllabi and evidence of teaching effectiveness—to accrediting bodies, including, but not limited to, the Higher Learning Commission. Even the appearance of political interference in laboratories, classrooms or curricula would jeopardize the successful accreditation of our programs and universities.

In addition to the review of our programs and faculty by accrediting agencies, our faculty, courses and curricula are analyzed by students, faculty and administrators on a regular basis. Results of assessment, program review and student evaluation of instruction inform decisions about staffing and curricular changes. We believe it would be more effective for faculty leadership to continue working together with administrators at our home institutions as well as across the state and beyond to utilize these structures and respond to concerns in ways that preserve the integrity of our programs and the expertise of our faculty.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to our students. We believe that together we can continue to promote excellence and fortify the integrity of higher education in Ohio.