

Ohio House passes Senate Bill 1, potentially reshaping higher education

By **Laura Hancock**
Cleveland.com

COLUMBUS, Ohio - The Ohio House passed a sweeping, 76-page higher education bill that conservatives say will end liberal “indoctrination” at colleges but that professors and students believe will lower the quality of Ohio education.

Senate Bill 1 passed, 58 to 34, largely along party lines, despite hundreds of opponents testifying against it in the House, and only 25 proponents.

SB 1 now heads back to the Senate, which needs to review changes to the bill made in the House. If it agrees with them, it will send the bill to Gov. Mike DeWine.

The bill would apply to Ohio’s 14 public universities and 23 public community colleges.

Wednesday’s vote is the culmination of two years of Republicans trying to pass the bill amid strong opposition by students and unions. A similar bill last session, Senate Bill 83, passed the Senate but was never brought to the House floor for a vote.

SB 1 would prohibit faculty from striking, ban the topics of tenure and faculty evaluations from collective bargaining agreements, allow senior administrators to call for a post-tenure review of any professor who receives low marks on their annual evaluation or who has “a documented and sustained record of significant underperformance.”

For these reasons, non-education unions such as the AFL-CIO also organized against the bill. They are concerned SB 1 is the first legislative attempt to limit the power of unions. They fear lawmakers will attempt to kill unions through what one legislative leader has described as [“death by 1,000 paper cuts.”](#)

In addition to the anti-union provisions, SB 1 also generally bans diversity, equity and inclusion. However, the bill doesn’t define DEI.

But professors caution that classroom discussion could get derailed by students who have unconventional beliefs. Science professors, in particular, said they worry about having to give equal validity to theories that have been long disproven.

The bill requires schools to respond to each complaint about faculty who interfere with intellectual diversity rights. Professors worry that will lead to grade inflation as faculty try to avoid intellectual diversity complaints from students.

Schools would be required to create policies to cut programs, services and faculty to account for a decrease in student enrollment, overall funding or changing school missions, under the bill. They could generally lay off faculty without consideration of seniority.

Schools must eliminate undergraduate programs if they confer on average fewer than five degrees a year over any three-year period. Faculty warned of new degrees being cut before they have time to become popular among students.

The bill prohibits schools from taking positions on a “controversial belief or policy,” which includes “climate policies,” even though the scientific consensus is there’s evidence the planet is rapidly warming due to human activities.

Democrats in the Ohio House presented amendments to make the bill friendlier to labor and students Wednesday morning in the Ohio House Workforce and Higher Education Committee and later that afternoon on the House floor. The GOP supermajority rejected them all.

State Rep. Gayle Manning, a North Ridgeville Republican, presented an amendment in committee that passed. The amendment exempts some students from a requirement to study American history and read specific foundational documents, such as the U.S. Constitution and parts of the Federalist Papers.

Manning’s amendment would except students who have taken relevant Advanced Placement, College Credit Plus or other college-level courses covering this material in high school.

Manning’s bill also exempts from the DEI ban disability services required by law.

A Republican-sponsored amendment was rejected in committee.

State Rep. Josh Williams of suburban Toledo, who has been one of the most vocal proponents of the bill, tried to change the bill’s ban on minority or DEI scholarships. He wanted them to continue for four years before being phased out. The amendment

would have also required schools to submit a report in six years about their racial and gender makeup, to inform legislators about the effects of SB1.

Williams said he benefitted from a diversity scholarship in law school. He said he disagrees with Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost's interpretation of a 2023 U.S. Supreme Court case on affirmative action in college admissions. Yost believes the court's opinion also applies to scholarships, Williams does not.

That's the benefit of being a lawyer," he said. "We can read the same case and see it differently."

The committee did pass another Williams-sponsored amendment that allows schools to ask the Ohio chancellor of higher education for exceptions when DEI orientation or training is needed to comply with federal laws or regulations, to comply with professional licensure requirements or to obtain or retain accreditation.

On the House floor, state Rep. Tom Young, a Dayton-area Republican who chairs the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee, said that the meaning of DEI has changed.

"The original purpose was to break down barriers, ensure opportunity, create fairness in education and the workforce," said Young, who sponsored a similar bill to SB 1 in the House. "For decades it worked, but somewhere along the way, DEI changed. Instead of fostering inclusion, it has become a tool for division, enforcing ideological conformity rather than true fairness."

State Rep. Juanita Brent, a Cleveland Democrat, said everyone has bias. Implicit bias training that would be prohibited in the bill helps people to recognize their bias.

People "already come out with a bias, their own viewpoints, (about) people who are different from them based off their race, based off their city, based off their weight or their height or whatever it is," she said. "So we have to have diversity, equity and inclusion within our schools, if people want to talk about having unity and accepting people for who they are."