

Within the next few days, a single piece of legislation could undo decades of careful investment in and stewardship of Indiana's top-notch public higher education system. Indiana's universities and colleges have remarkable value, attracting students and professionals from all over the world and adding to our cultural and economic vitality. Hoosiers can attend world-class institutions in their own communities at public school prices. Our colleges and universities are the envy of educators across the country and around the world.

This could all change with the passage of Senate Bill 202, "state educational institution matters," which will increase politicized interference and control on our public campuses. The bill increases the power of political appointees on university boards of trustees, greenlights chilling ideological surveillance of faculty and students in the classroom, undermines basic tenure protections for faculty—the long-term job security that allows educators to promote the free flow of ideas in the classroom without fear of retaliation, and defunds programs that make campuses more inclusive of diverse Hoosiers. Less obvious but just as concerning, the bill requires the creation of a huge bureaucracy to carry out the surveillance, policing, and ideological litmus testing it decrees.

The bill is presented as a means to promote "cultural and intellectual diversity," but it will promote neither. SB 202 will foster a culture of surveillance and suspicion that will pit faculty against faculty and faculty against students. It will stifle free speech and academic freedom. Its demand that faculty teach "diverse viewpoints" in *all* classrooms, even in subject areas (organic chemistry? mechanical engineering?) where such demands make no sense, will waste resources and confuse students. Precious classroom time will be spent on pointless both-siding of issues in fields of study where no such debates exist. This bill is evidence that educators, not legislators, should control educational institutions.

The bill expresses concern about threats to "free inquiry, free expression, and intellectual diversity" on Indiana campuses. Yet the Indiana Commission for Higher Education's own "Free Speech Report" of 2023 surveyed over eighteen thousand Indiana college students and found that most respondents perceived a high level of freedom of speech and intellectual disagreement on their campuses, regardless of the respondent's race, ethnicity, class, or ideological background. This bill is a solution in search of a problem.

On Monday, the Purdue Fort Wayne Senate, which includes faculty and administrators at PFW, passed a resolution opposing the bill. Such actions are important, but alone they will not change the minds of legislators. It is imperative that citizens who have benefited from a public college or university in Indiana or anyone who values the benefits these institutions bring to our communities should contact their legislators as well as Governor Holcomb to demand that this bill be stopped and our precious public colleges and universities be protected. Do not stand by as this single piece of legislation dismantles Indiana's public university system and denies future Hoosiers the benefits of what is still one of the greatest cultural assets in our state.

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