

# Proposed law threatens accreditation, funding of colleges, universities



## Your Turn

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Guest columnists

Ohio lawmakers are jumping on a critical race theory political bandwagon. Although House Bill 327 no longer uses provocative wording about divisive concepts, this poorly disguised grenade under the tent of higher education can explode with unintended consequences.

The bill violates national standards for higher education by connecting learning to political whim. It poses a serious threat to the future of Ohio, for the proposed law will impair our student's ability to get federal financial aid within our state.

As longtime advocates for excellence in Ohio higher education, we serve on the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Peer Corps. The HLC is one of seven accrediting organizations with the authority to determine whether colleges and universities in the United States are accredited, and HLC is the accreditor for higher education across the state of Ohio.

By law, the U.S. Department of Education relies on accrediting agencies such as HLC to determine an institution's eligibility for U.S. government assistance. Students must attend an accredited college or university to apply for and to receive federal student grants or loans.

The HLC criteria for accreditation are clearly apolitical. "The governing board of the institution is autonomous to make decisions in the best interest of the institution ... to ensure the institution's integrity." House Bill 327 violates the sensible HLC safeguard that, "The governing board preserves its independence from undue influence on the part of donors, elected officials, ownership interests or other external parties."

If we foolishly sacrifice accreditation from HLC, is there any hope to earn it from another accreditor? Every single one of the seven regional accreditors

maintain the time-tested balance between academic freedom and responsibility of each institution's faculty. Every accreditor clearly defines and supports integrity, some with even stronger requirements than the HLC.

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education's policy on "Political Intervention in Education" states "Teaching and learning require free and full exposure to information and ideas, the right to question or dissent, and opportunities to study, research, and debate, free of political pressure. The academy requires that inquiry and analysis must be guided by evidence and ethics, unfettered by political intervention."

House Bill 327 violates national standards for higher education by imposing a political agenda upon our classrooms, upon our instructors and, most sadly, upon our students. Learning the critical thinking skills required for global success is impaired by political prescriptions that neither treat nor cure.

Passage of this bill threatens the accreditation of every public college and university in Ohio — and loss of accreditation means the loss of federal funding, including the federal financial aid that so many students rely upon to access post-high school education.

This bill threatens the future of students and prospective students at our community and technical colleges, regional campuses and public universities. The proposed law will trigger economic and intellectual losses in Ohio as students seek education out-of-state. House Bill 327 is a foolish gamble with our children's future.

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