

# Intellectual Diversity

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The Advance Ohio Higher Education Act (SB 1) does not prohibit controversial issues from being discussed in classes but requires the university to “ensure the fullest degree of intellectual diversity” in courses and allow students to reach their own conclusions around controversial issues. To identify these protections for students and to support faculty in structuring classroom instruction appropriately, a group faculty, staff and students representing multiple disciplines, colleges and units developed a standard required syllabus statement and a series of FAQs around what is and is not permitted under the law.

## Required Intellectual Diversity Syllabus Language

“Ohio State is committed to fostering a culture of open inquiry and intellectual diversity within the classroom. This course will cover a range of information and may include discussions or debates about controversial issues, beliefs, or policies. Any such discussions and debates are intended to support understanding of the approved curriculum and relevant course objectives rather than promote any specific point of view. Students will be assessed on principles applicable to the field of study and the content covered in the course. Preparing students for citizenship includes helping them develop critical thinking skills that will allow them to reach their own conclusions regarding complex or controversial matters.”

## What impact does SB 1 have on teaching, classroom discussion, and debate?

SB 1 requires instructors (including faculty as well as staff and graduate students serving in instructional roles) to support intellectual diversity in class and to allow students to reach their own conclusions on “controversial beliefs and policies” without “indoctrinat[ing] any social, political, or religious point of view.” SB 1 defines “intellectual diversity” as “multiple, divergent, and varied perspectives on an extensive range of public policy issues.” Likewise, SB 1 defines “controversial belief or policy” as “any belief or policy that is the subject of political controversy, including issues such as climate policies, electoral politics, foreign policy, diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, immigration policy, marriage, or abortion.”

In short, while SB 1 does not limit the content that instructors may address in an academic course, instructors must ensure that students are permitted and encouraged to express a range of perspectives in discussions and to form their own conclusions about controversial issues as part of the course and its learning outcomes. This requirement aligns with the university’s motto of “education for citizenship”; preparing students for citizenship includes fostering critical thinking skills so that students can reach their own conclusions rather than teaching them to adopt any specific point of view. Required syllabus language outlining these commitments is [available here](#).



## Do the SB 1 intellectual diversity requirements limit an instructor's ability to set learning objectives appropriate for the course, to assess student performance or to progress through discussion topics?

No. While instructors (including faculty as well as staff and graduate students serving in instructional roles) must support intellectual diversity in their courses, they retain the right to assess student performance according to curricular goals and to address relevant learning objectives. Further, while instructors must not prohibit students from expressing their own perspectives in discussions or reaching their own conclusions on controversial beliefs and issues, students are ultimately responsible for mastering the material for courses in which they have enrolled.

Instructors have the right and responsibility to ensure that course time is used effectively to achieve the course goals, and as such can determine when and how to advance through the topics and materials detailed in the syllabus. SB 1 also provides that instructors have the right to exercise professional judgment about how best to accomplish intellectual diversity within their discipline as long as they do not exercise that judgment so as to “constrict intellectual diversity.” Further, SB 1 does not limit instructors' abilities to address **classroom conflict and disruptive incidents** in their courses in accordance with existing university protocols.

### Additional resources for faculty:

- Faculty may also consult with the **Office of Faculty Affairs** and the **Faculty Ombudsperson**.
- Graduate students are strongly encouraged to meet with their faculty advisor and/or course director with specific questions about their courses, and can also contact the **Graduate School** for additional support.
- Graduate and professional students may likewise consult with the **Graduate and Professional Student Ombudsperson** regarding other concerns.
- Throughout the fall semester, the Office of Faculty Affairs will hold a series of open office hours for faculty and instructors to answer questions on a variety of issues, including SB 1-related topics. Each session will include representatives from Faculty Affairs, the Drake Institute for Teaching and Learning and the Center for Ethics and Human Values. These sessions are open to all faculty and instructors, including graduate teaching associates. More information is available on the **Faculty Affairs website**.
- The Center for Ethics and Human Values has also created a **guide** for Facilitating Civil Discourse in the Classroom as a resource to ensure that classroom discussions with students reflect the mission of the university by being open, rigorous and constructive.

