

Dear Senate Colleagues:

Decent, well-intentioned people can propose misguided and poorly grounded law. I believe Senate Bill 202 is a victim of this dynamic. It is unwise and poorly grounded. Speaking as University Senate Chair to the Senate body and having taken in the thoughtful advisement from university Senators, their constituents, and other campus stake holders, I am comfortable registering that SB 202 is not only unnecessary, but pernicious. It threatens the high educational standards that are the Purdue University brand. In addition to faculty, our students stand to suffer if SB 202 passes.

Sponsors of SB 202 hold up dubious survey percentage talking points without the rigor of data clarity Purdue University requires within our campus community. I'm unaware of any meetings held with Purdue faculty by the bill sponsors to discuss pedagogical approaches. Had that happened, we might not have arrived at this moment.

Purdue University delivers an exceptional return on investment to the state of Indiana, and under the Chicago Rules, offers a wide platform for differing viewpoints.

At the 2/19 University Senate meeting, we will discuss SD 23-23. Before then and after, it is my urgent advice to the University Senate, which includes Purdue University administrators, to oppose SB 202 and to use whichever public or private channels to do so.

That's my statement.

At our next meeting I will, of course, preside with neutrality. Because of that necessity, apologies for sharing this personal note of bias. The passage of SB 202 will create a daily threat to my scholarship and by extension, allowing my family to thrive in Indiana.

For those interested in a summary of the input I received from Senators and their constituents, you are welcome to continue reading below my signature.

Brian Leung

Professor of English

University Senate Chair

What follows is merely a digest. I received dozens of responses both from individuals and aggregated by senators who reached out to constituents. Nearly all of these opposed SB 202 in thoughtful, analytical ways. I must report that one outlier suggested the bill could help us get away from a DEI focus in favor of “intellectual diversity.” One other split the difference, suggesting the bill seemed to support academic freedom, but suggested the route was problematic.

Still, by number and breadth, respondents against SB 202 were a near unanimous cohort. Respondents are widely dispersed amongst our university areas.

First, I report that there is one thing all respondents agreed on.

- Promoting Academic Freedom and intellectual diversity is important.

As you will see, it seems the considered opinion that SB 202 does not secure academic freedom and intellectual diversity nor support Purdue’s academic mission.

- The bill’s effect will limit academic freedom, not support nor expand it. (Upending our use of the Chicago rules and the “1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure”)
- Related the above, but distinct, the bill strikes against the fact that pedagogical practice, not to mention human relations, require that scholars incorporate examples and discourse not related precisely to their specific field.
- Purdue is already struggling to present itself as a career destination that naturally supports diversity and inclusion. Even when we make successful hires, retention is a problem. This bill will only exacerbate the situation.
- The bill feeds a culture of suspicion and creates the groundwork for a surveillance state.
- The bill demands on campus practice that does not reflect professional realities post-graduation. In other words, the bill proposes to insulate students from the real world.
- The bill converts the university from a site of professional and natural political debate and academic discourse into one that is controlled by the whims of state politics, and by those largely, or at least often, unfamiliar with pedagogical standards.
- Tenure is not a lifetime job guarantee. Faculty can and are fired for cause. The bill attacks the one safety check that tenure provides, and that is that a faculty member must be fired for expressing ideas which cause debate.
- The bill requires policing that will reduce the quality of student instruction.

Finally, as to the language of the bill itself—

- The bill is so ambiguously written and vague, that it invites tension, contest, and expensive litigation for almost any reason.

- The bill will save nobody an hour. It invites more bureaucracy, not less. It places an onerous and nearly impossible burden on the Board of Trustees.
- The bill appears unaware of the robust campus policies in place regarding promotion and tenure as well as the policies regarding free speech.

If you've arrived this far, a reminder, the list above is a digest only.

Brian Leung, MFA

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