

March 7, 2023

UCLA Writing Programs
Letter of Concern Regarding Florida HB 999

The undersigned faculty and staff in Writing Programs at UCLA write to express our concern over the proposed legislation in Florida, HB 999, which seeks to ban gender studies and critical race theory majors and minors, as well as ban EDI initiatives and the use of diversity statements in hiring processes.

As a writing program at a public university, we are concerned about the proposed legislation for several reasons. First, it would curtail the efforts that programs like ours have been making to diversify our curriculum, faculty make-up, and pedagogical practices in meaningful ways. Efforts to promote educational justice and equity grow out of the core mission of any writing program, which is to teach critical reading, thinking, and writing skills. For many instructors, this involves teaching students that reading and writing are inherently social acts shaped by systems of power, privilege, and ideology regardless of academic discipline, and that these systems must be evaluated and critiqued. Second, and by extension, this bill would curtail academic freedom. Currently, the curricula for composition courses are based on faculty's expertise and knowledge of the needs of the students they teach. According to the proposed bill, writing courses, as part of general education curricula, must promote "the values necessary to preserve the constitutional republic" through "traditional, historically accurate" coursework, relegating content seen as "based on unproven, theoretical, or exploratory content" to elective courses. Taking the work of defining what "values" and what "historically accurate coursework" should be taught out of the hands of educators threatens to undermine our efforts to ensure that our classrooms are sites of inquiry. A 2022 survey published by the Rand Corporation already shows the chilling effect that such political interference can have. The researchers found that "about one-quarter of teachers reported that limitations placed on how [they] can address topics related to race or gender have influenced their choice of curriculum materials or instructional practices." HB 999 foreshadows the same outcomes in higher education.

Writing classes offer some of the smallest teacher/student ratios in public universities. As such, they are places where students with a variety of experiences and viewpoints come together. Our task as educators is to create an atmosphere in which students can express and examine their views, empowering them to enter ongoing conversations in an informed and honest way. Free and informed expression is at the heart of our work as writing instructors. Because this bill threatens this core mission, we vigorously oppose it.

In Solidarity,

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The statements in this letter represent the views of the undersigned Writing Programs faculty and do not necessarily represent the views of the University of California, UCLA, or its Chancellor.