Report to Senate via Faculty Council

Committee on Academic Freedom and Responsibility

The Ohio State University

2 November 2026

According to a pair of documents shared with faculty by Professor Meg Daly (on behalf of the University-Level Advisory Committee on General Education) on 25 Sept 2026, The Ohio State University is considering revising part of its General Education (GE) requirements. More specifically, OSU is considering revising the "Themes" requirement currently entitled "Citizenship for a Just and Diverse World," and the "Foundations" requirement currently entitled "Race, Ethnicity, and Gender Diversity."

Since "GE courses are meant to provide a broad baseline of learning"[1] and many departments fine-tune their curricula to teach material within the GE framework, changes to these requirements have far-reaching consequences for teaching on our campus.

This report argues that the most plausible understanding of the proposed revisions is that they are being pressed by political appointees and motivated by partisan political concerns. The GE requirements are central norms by which Ohio State is to be assessed, in its goal of providing a general post-secondary education. The attempt to revise these norms in response to such pressure is a proposed change that would adversely affect academic freedom at Ohio State.

## CAFR's mandate

The Committee on Academic Freedom and Responsibility (hereafter: CAFR) is charged to "study all conditions which may affect the academic freedom or responsibility of the faculty of the university."[2] If the committee finds "that any such condition or proposed change adversely affects academic freedom, responsibility, or tenure, it shall report that find promptly to the [University S]enate for its review." This document constitutes such a report.

CAFR understands academic freedom as the freedom of all those engaged in research and teaching for Ohio State University to research, to seek to publish and otherwise disseminate their research, and to teach, as they judge is appropriate. The Ohio State University recognizes "the freedom of faculty to teach" and specifically to "discuss in classrooms, in their own manner, any material that is relevant to the subject matter as defined in the course syllabus."[3]

This freedom is secure only when:

- its exercise is promoted and protected by both the stated content and actual application of university policy;
- its exercise is not threatened, in policy or effect, by the broader politics and policies that surround the university.

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[1] https://artsandsciences.osu.edu/advising/general-education-requirements/new-ge-requirements
[2] Ohio State Rule 3335-5-48.9, Committee on Academic Freedom and Responsibility, §B.1.
[3] https://trustees.osu.edu/bylaws-and-rules/3335-5

**The stated rationales for the proposed changes**

a) The stated rationale for the proposed revision to the Citizenship for a Just and Diverse World theme is to "broaden" the scope of the theme, to a "more open-ended 'Education for Citizenship' or 'Citizenship'" theme. The rationale continues that the revision aims for a theme that "…retain[s] current offerings, which emphasize the implications of citizenship for justice and place these ideas within the context of complex and diverse global viewpoints, while making space for courses that emphasize other rationales, perspectives, and implications of citizenship (economic, legislative, bureaucratic, etc.)."[4]
b) The stated rationale for the proposed revision to the *Race, Ethnicity, and Gender Diversity* foundation requirement is similar: to broaden the ambit of the requirement from its three titular dimensions, to include (e.g.) age, class, religion, and disability.[5]

In both cases, the revisions appear to be made at the direction of the Board of Trustees.[6]

**Salient features of the proposed changes**

The most striking substantial feature of the proposed changes is not the expanded scope for the themes mentioned in the rationales. Rather, it is that the revisions consistently revise away terminology that has recently been the object of partisan political animus. This is apparent in the proposed renaming of these themes:

a) from "Citizenship for a Just and Diverse World," to "Education for Citizenship" (with the alternative name, "Citizenship", also offered) and
b) from "Race, Ethnicity, and Gender Diversity" to "Human Experiences."

The renaming removes the following terminology: "Race", "Gender", "Diverse", and "Diversity". This pattern appears consistent with recent legislative and political efforts to shift intellectual discussions away from social categories such as race, class, gender, diversity, inclusion, and so on.

This pattern continues in the descriptions of the Expected Learning Outcomes (hereafter: ELOs). Consider the following list of terms and phrases which appear in the current description of the "Citizenship…" theme and its ELOs, but which have been deleted in the proposed revision:

- 'diverse'
- 'equity'
- 'inclusion'
- 'global citizen'
- 'constructed'
- 'intercultural competence'
- 'advocacy'
- 'structures of power'
- 'change'

[4] Both quotes are from the document entitled "Shareable Citizenship Revision DRAFT Sept 25"
[5] This rationale summarizes part of the second paragraph of the document entitled "Shareable REGD Revision DRAFT".
[6] Based on "Shareable Citizenship Revision DRAFT Sept 25" (para 1) and "Shareable REGD Revision DRAFT" (para 2).

Each of the above terms is a locus of sustained academic inquiry and deserving of scholarly consideration.[7] And none of these deletions are warranted by the ostensible rationales for the revisions. That is, one could easily and naturally broaden the scope of each of the themes in accord with the ostensible motivations for the revision, without deleting the mentioned terminology. The unifying pattern of these proposed revisions is that terms that are disliked in certain political circles are being expunged in the guise of "expanding the scope" of the themes.

**Implications for academic freedom**

By virtue of defining a set of themes and concepts which shape our curricula, the GEs contribute to shaping the "material that is relevant to the subject matter" taught in many courses on campus. The documents outlining the proposed changes to the General Education requirements suggest that these requirements – which were crafted by expert educators – are at risk of being edited at the behest of political appointees to delete language that is unpopular in partisan circles. This editing of central norms which structure the education being offered at Ohio State would constitute a profound threat to academic freedom.

**Findings**

1. CAFR finds grounds to believe that the proposed changes to the GE are being driven by partisan political interests, rather than by expert faculty judgment.

2. CAFR finds that the proposed changes to the GE constitutes a threat to academic freedom at Ohio State.

3. CAFR issues this report to the University Senate with the recommendation that the Senate constitute an ad hoc committee, drawing principally upon faculty expertise, with the mandate to:
    a) clarify the genesis and current status of the proposed revisions, and
    b) issue recommendations on both the proposed revisions and the development of mechanisms to protect fundamental norms including the GE Goals and ELOs and the principles of academic freedom.

[7] Consider, for instance, the concept of race. There is an abundant scholarly literature examining how the concept of race contributes to the reproduction of social structures. On what is arguably the consensus view within this literature, races are best understood not as (e.g.) biological categories, but as historically-evolving social structural phenomena. The existing language concerning "Race…" in one of the ELOs asks students to assess, among other things, how certain categories like race shape "perceptions, individual outcomes, and broader societal, political, economic, and cultural systems." This language is at least compatible with the above scholarly views. I.e., racial categories could "shape" societal systems in the constitutive sense: they could be part of what it is for a social structure to have the shape it does. By contrast, the proposed replacement language asks students instead to assess how "human experiences and identities" shape these same objects. The problem is not only that "experiences and identities" are inherently subjective: rather, by this shift of language one of the fundamental lessons of much of the literature about race, gender, class, etc. — i.e., the significance of these forms of difference for the constitution of social structure — has disappeared from the ELO.