

HB 213 -- INTELLECTUAL DIVERSITY IN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

SPONSOR: Cunningham (86)

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "do pass" by the Committee on Higher Education by a vote of 5 to 3.

This bill establishes the Emily Brooker Intellectual Diversity Act, which defines intellectual diversity for reporting purposes at public higher education institutions. The Coordinating Board for Higher Education will require, as of December 31, 2008, an annual report describing steps taken by each institution to ensure intellectual diversity, which will be posted on the institution's web site. Students must be notified that measures are in place to promote intellectual diversity and how to report alleged violations of institutional policy.

FISCAL NOTE: No impact on state funds in FY 2008, FY 2009, and FY 2010.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that many students feel they must support a professor's political views in order to earn a good grade or fear reprisal for offering their own views. Professors should not require students to complete assignments that conflict with a student's conscience. Political viewpoints irrelevant to the subject matter of the class have no place in the classroom.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Cunningham (86); Emily Brooker; Gayle Brooker; Mindy R. Ellis; Stephanie Bell; Roland Meinert; David Wasinger; Craig Workman; and Jeremy Hagen, Missouri College Republicans.

OPPONENTS: Those who oppose the bill say that some students cannot tell the difference between being exposed to an idea and the advocacy of an idea. In professional courses, students are presented with a code of ethics to which they must ascribe in order to follow the profession. Most campuses already have procedures to handle bias complaints.

Testifying against the bill were Frank Schmidt; James Rigden, Concerned Missouri State Students; Jeffrey Runion; E. Rick Puig; James Glavin; Mark Buhrmester; Austin Case; Missouri National Education Association; Amy Lane; and American Federation of Teachers - Missouri.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill say mounting evidence shows a problem with viewpoint diversity, even in the face of policies designed to promote it. Civility springs from respecting the rights of individuals.

Testifying on the bill were Anne D. Neal, American Council of Trustees and Alumni; Alliance Defense Fund; and John Black, Missouri State University.