



IOWA HIGHER EDUCATION COALITION

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Iowa Higher Education Coalition Opposes Bills Targeting Public Universities

Bills Emerging from National Conservative Groups Would Censor Faculty, Limit Student Learning

The Iowa Higher Education Coalition, an organization representing faculty and graduate students at the University of Iowa, Iowa State, and the University of Northern Iowa, urges the legislature to reject a number of bills that threaten to undermine the quality of Iowa's three public universities and the education they provide.

Legislature members introduced nearly two dozen bills earlier this year affecting higher education in the state. Among them are bills that would erode free speech in the classroom, reduce student choices for courses of study, and eliminate university communities from having a voice in the selection of university presidents. We urge the legislature to reject the radical politics of these bills, whose [ideas, and sometimes the exact wording](#), come from national conservative groups outside of the state.

"It's disheartening to see the [legislature try to impose an extremist national political agenda](#) on Iowa's public universities. Iowans didn't ask for this," said Christopher Martin, communication and media professor and president of United Faculty – AAUP/AFT, the faculty labor union representing more than 500 faculty at UNI.

"The public universities add [\\$18 billion](#) in value to Iowa each year. These bills would censor faculty and take away shared governance, at great risk to the standing of each university and their ability to recruit and retain students and faculty," Martin added.

Among the bills that would *most damage* Iowa's great public universities are:

[HF 2487 and SF 2303](#) – These bills would require the Board of Regents to "review" required core undergraduate courses for any mention of diversity, equity, inclusion, or critical race theory, and direct the institutions to remove such courses.

These bills very clearly propose censorship by the state government over the speech and materials of university faculty. Not only would such a law erode educational quality and limit student course options, it would also violate Iowa state law ([Iowa Code, section 261H2](#)) and the Board of Regents' [own policies](#).

Predictably, it would be challenged by First Amendment lawsuits, wasting taxpayer dollars on the defense of an unconstitutional law.

[HF 2361](#) and [SF 2232](#) – These bills mandate the creation of core requirements in US history and government for all three universities. They empower the [Center for Intellectual Freedom](#) at the University of Iowa, the Center for Cyclone Civics at Iowa State, and the Center for Civic Education at UNI to “designate courses” at their respective institutions that satisfy this mandate.

The Iowa Higher Education Coalition supports civic education, and notes that all three universities *already* have university core courses that address civic education. This bill bypasses shared governance – the longstanding principle that university faculty with expertise in relevant subject matter should be responsible for curriculum development. Instead, this bill hands authority over these courses to new centers, which have never been part of the course development process, and risks turning these courses into narrow indoctrination. (Moreover, in the case of UI’s Center for Intellectual Freedom, the center is not part of the University of Iowa’s administration, and answers directly to the Board of Regents.)

A fiscal note from the nonpartisan Legislative Services Agency concluded that this law would [cost \\$890,000 annually just at the University of Iowa, and have a nearly \\$2.1 million impact each year](#) for all three regent universities.

[HF 2245](#) and [SF 2359](#) – These bills would close university presidential searches and restrict faculty participation in the selection process to one non-voting member.

State law already provides that the Iowa Board of Regents has the final say on hiring public university presidents. These bills undemocratically remove any substantive faculty, staff, and student input from the nominating process for university presidents. The legislation enables regents to cherry-picked political nominees for the job without substantive campus input or public oversight, making the process much more political and secretive.

For decades, Iowa’s public universities have had presidential search committees with a broad representation, including members of the Board of Regents, faculty, students, union leaders, community members, and alumni. The most recent presidential searches valued input and illustrate this inclusive approach:

- In 2016, UNI had a 21-member search committee
- In 2020-2021, U of I had a 21-member search committee
- In 2025, ISU had a 12-member search committee

These bills propose that presidential search committees consist only of five voting members of the Board of Regents, and make their work completely secret. The search committee – five members of the Board of Regents – would recommend a candidate to the entire nine members of the Board of Regents. Since the search committee already has the majority vote (5 of 9), only those five people really matter in the entire process.

All of these bills are *not* ideas the people of Iowa asked for; instead, they are strategies to wrest control of Iowa’s public universities in service of a narrow national political agenda. In the long term, this is a dangerous path for the state’s most vital economic and cultural institutions.

“The University of Iowa, Iowa State University, and the University of Northern Iowa are huge economic engines that continue to help drive Iowa’s economy forward,” said [Robert Cramer, president of the Iowa Board of Regents](#).

Similarly, [Regent Kurt Tjaden](#), the President Pro Tem of the Regents, said that Iowa’s three public universities “are among some of the best in the country and quite frankly our most valuable assets in the state.”

We agree with Regents Cramer and Tjaden on the enormous value of the universities to the state of Iowa.

The bills, quite frankly, give away Iowa’s independent control of our most valuable assets in the state – the three regent universities.

The Iowa Higher Education Coalition includes the following organizations:

- Iowa State AAUP (American Association of University Professors)
- UNI United Faculty, AAUP/AFT Local 6752
- University of Iowa AAUP
- UE Local 896 – COGS (Campaign to Organize Graduate Students), University of Iowa
- Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO

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