

Lessons from Florida

In February 2023, Florida House Bill 999 threatened to hit the state's public college and university system with the force of a category 5 hurricane. Students, faculty members, unions, and professional organizations, including the MLA, mobilized to oppose this attack on academic freedom and shared governance in Florida, denouncing the "ideological uniformity" the bill sought to create ("Joint Statement"). While local and national outrage prompted removal of some of the most egregious elements of HB999, the bill that eventually passed the Florida legislature, SB266, is immensely damaging and intensifies a two-year surge of political assaults on education in Florida.

In the name of "viewpoint diversity," programs that support diversity, equity, and inclusion have been eliminated ("Chapter 2023-82" 10). To prevent instructors from "distort[ing] significant historical events" in their classes (11), the law embeds a profound distortion in Florida's general education curricula: courses cannot be taught if they are "based on theories that systemic racism, sexism, oppression, and privilege are inherent in the institutions of the United States" (11). When hiring new faculty members, the university administration is now explicitly authorized to ignore faculty input and "is not bound by the recommendations or opinions of faculty" (5), undermining shared governance and attacking the very notion of professional expertise. To stymie faculty and graduate student labor organizing, a companion law, SB256, requires public sector unions—with the

exception of police and firefighters—to achieve sixty percent membership or lose their collective bargaining rights.

In May 2023, a committee of the American Association of University Professors investigating Florida public higher education released a chilling, comprehensive (albeit provisional) report on the flood of authoritarianism directed at faculty members and students by the gover-



nor and the state legislature since 2021: "This onslaught, if sustained, threatens the very survival of meaningful higher education in the state, with the direst implications for the entire country" (Jafar et al. 1). Unless we collectively, successfully oppose this dismantling of one of the very best public education systems in the United States, "what is happening in Florida will not stay in Florida" (17). State legislatures in Texas and Ohio have already approved similarly authoritarian

higher education bills, most notably SB17 in Texas, which abolishes all DEI offices in state universities as of 2024.

Florida's governor, Ron DeSantis, and his supporters specifically target Black studies and gender and sexuality studies while at the same time claiming to promote "the classical mission of what a university is supposed to be" (qtd. in Kumar). SB266 mandates a general education curriculum in which students learn "literature, history, art, music, and philosophy" in classes that "must include selections from the Western canon" but that strip those works of their cultural and historical context and impede honest discussion of their aims and impact ("Chapter 2023-82" 12). We must reject a model of the university as the mastery of a list of great books that is frozen in past notions of what *great* means. Decades of vibrant humanities scholarship have demonstrated that the best education includes rigorous study of the scholarship of race, gender, and sexuality.

The larger campuses of the Florida university system won't be remade in a few months, but DeSantis and his allies are more than willing to move fast and break things, as shown by the thorough, rapid attack on the tiny New College of Florida, with the explicit goal of establishing authoritarian control over public higher education. We are now seeing attempts to weaponize the accreditation and financial aid

(continued on p. 3)



PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Mapping Possibilities: The Poetics of Queering Blackness

Comment on this column at president.mla.hcommons.org.

My silences had not protected me. Your silences will not protect you.

—Audre Lorde
The Cancer Journals

Our silence has been long and deep. . . . In canonical literature, we have always been spoken for. Or we have been spoken to. Or we have appeared as jokes or as flat figures suggesting sensuality. Today we are taking back our narrative, telling our story.

—Toni Morrison
“Keep Your Eyes on the Prize”

IN LATE 1984, *ESSENCE* MAGAZINE

published a conversation between Audre Lorde and James Baldwin entitled “Revolutionary Hope.” I begin with Baldwin’s words:

One of the dangers of being a Black American is being schizophrenic, and I mean “schizophrenic” in the most literal sense. To be a Black American is in some ways to be born with the desire to be white. It’s a part of the price you pay for being born here, and it affects every Black person. . . . Du Bois believed in the American dream. So did Martin. So did Malcolm. So do I. So do you. That’s why we’re sitting here.

Although this may seem familiar—Baldwin speaks here about a desire to be white, or to be a part of the American dream and double consciousness à la Du Bois—Audre Lorde is not convinced:

I don’t, honey. I’m sorry, I just can’t let that go past. Deep, deep, deep down I know that dream was never mine. And

I wept and I cried and I fought and I stormed, but I just knew it. I was Black. I was female. And I was out—out—by any construct wherever the power lay. So if I had to claw myself insane, if I lived I was going to have to do it alone. Nobody was dreaming about me. Nobody was even studying me except as something to wipe out.

Because of her gender and her sexual identity, Lorde has experienced different dreams and desires. Her clarity about this is astonishing. Grappling with how, or even if, her Black body is able to be a part of the American dream, she makes a crucial statement: “I don’t, honey.”

Lorde has had to create her own dream, which is a question of language. How do people—and perhaps particularly women—with queer, Black queer bodies talk about themselves if they are not part of the essential conversation of the American dream? Is there an epistemology of queering blackness, a language, a new tool of reflection for a new grammar for a queer Black woman?

Through her resistance to the seduction of a dream, Lorde opens possibilities for a language that can articulate the experiences of Black LGBTQIA2S+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, asexual, and Two-Spirited) in-

dividuals. Today, we must imprint the possibility of this new language in a way that changes its grammar for future generations.

Our true stories as Black women are not the American dream. Within that dream, it would be impossible for Lorde to imagine her own narrative. Her future was sacrificed by the narrative of the master. She simply did not exist. Or she existed for a buried history, a servile history, a coolie history, one without autonomy or the truth to free her from social domination.

We cannot underestimate the power of Lorde’s stance: “I don’t, honey.” She spoke for herself. She came to this statement, this clarity, through her work. To tell her story, she knew that it must come from inside. And by starting with herself, she made philosophical inquiries and important critiques about how to construct

“The power to shape our stories lies in becoming conscious of our history.”

a canon. Indeed, her “canon” was without precedent for queer Black women. It focuses on two facets of their sexuality: a process of self-actualization and the need to invent concepts so as to improve self-understanding and the reappropriation

tion of the self by *the self*. Black women have to underline an interiority that is shaped by marginality, as well as trajectories marked by the absence of paths to follow in their self-development.

The moment Lorde articulated who she was as a queer Black woman, she existed for herself and for others outside the American dream and American narratives. She opened possibilities for a queer Black woman to be represented as such. The power to shape our stories lies in becoming conscious of our history. Let us never underestimate what that can create.

Frieda Ekotto

WORK CITED

“Revolutionary Hope: A Conversation between James Baldwin and Audre Lorde.” *Essence*, Dec. 1984. *Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts*, mocada-museum.tumblr.com/post/73421979421/revolutionary-hope-a-conversation-between-james.

(continued from p. 1)

infrastructure of the federal Department of Education in support of far-right goals.

What can MLA members do? First, recognize that they must stand up to management’s control of curriculum and governance. Let’s read and learn from some of the core texts of the opposition to Florida authoritarianism: sticky notes with slogans like “Listen to the students,” “#blackstudiesmatter,” and “Education not indoctrination” attached to the front doors of a central administration building by the students and faculty and staff members who attended the large #FreeFIU protest on the campus of Florida International University in Miami in April 2023 (Gregg). MLA members and their allies must make academic freedom a *practice* rather than a loosely held principle.

WORKS CITED

“Chapter 2023-82.” *Laws of Florida*, [laws.flrules.org/2023/82](https://www.flrules.org/2023/82).

Gregg, Elise. “FIU Community Protests HB999 and Administration Complacency.”

PantherNOW, 13 Apr. 2023, panthernow.com/2023/04/13/fiu-community-protests-hb999-and-administration-complacency/.

Jafar, Afshan, et al. “Preliminary Report of the Special Committee on Academic Freedom and Florida.” *American Association of University Professors*, 24 May 2023, www.aaup.org/file/Preliminary_Report_Florida.pdf.

“Joint Statement Denouncing Florida HB 999.” *Modern Language Association*, 27 Feb. 2023, www.mla.org/Resources/Advocacy/Executive-Council-Actions/2023/Joint-Statement-Denouncing-Florida-HB-999.

Kumar, Divya. “DeSantis Signs 3 Bills Bringing Major Changes to Florida Universities.” *Tampa Bay Times*, 15 May 2023, www.tampabay.com/news/education/2023/05/15/desantis-new-college-higher-education-sb266-christopher-rufo-critical-race-theory-gender-major-changes-legislation-indoctrination/.

Pamela K. Gilbert is the Albert Brick Professor in the Department of English at the University of Florida. Tim Watson is a professor and the director of undergraduate studies in the English Department at the University of Miami.

Resources for Responding to Challenges to Academic Freedom and Shared Governance

MLA Executive Council Statements

The MLA has issued joint statements condemning the erosion of academic freedom and shared governance in Florida, including statements on HB999 and on the ousting of leadership at New College of Florida. [mla.org/EC-Actions](https://www.mla.org/EC-Actions)

CAFPRR Report on Academic Freedom

Created by the MLA Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities (CAFPRR), the report documents legislative attempts to restrict what’s taught in college classrooms and what’s at stake. [mla.org/CAFPRR-Current-State](https://www.mla.org/CAFPRR-Current-State)

Tool Kit on Academic Freedom

CAFPRR’s tool kit provides background on the history of academic freedom, identifies why it’s important, and provides recommendations for further reading. [mla.org/Academic-Freedom-Tool-Kit](https://www.mla.org/Academic-Freedom-Tool-Kit)

MLA Resources on Collective Action

The MLA supports workers’ freedom to organize and has collected resources—including relevant organizations, publications, and event recordings—to support these efforts. [mla.org/Collective-Action](https://www.mla.org/Collective-Action)

AAUP Resources

AAUP’s Political Interference in Higher Education pages include a guide to making the case against political interference in curricula. You can also sign on to the joint AAUP statement against HB999. www.aaup.org/issues/political-interference-higher-ed

PEN America Resources

PEN America’s Educational Censorship microsite features an educational gag orders tracker and a tip sheet for how to combat educational censorship. [pen.org/issue/educational-censorship/](https://www.pen.org/issue/educational-censorship/)

Korean Language Study Continues to Grow

The Modern Language Association recently completed its twenty-sixth language enrollment census, of enrollments in fall 2021. The full report on the census will be published in November 2023 on the MLA enrollments web page (mla.org/Enrollment-Report). Analysis of the data by the MLA staff members Natalia Lusin, Terri Peterson, Christine Sulewski, and Rizwana Zafer showed that, despite overall declines in enrollments in languages other than English between fall 2016 and fall 2021, enrollments in Korean, American Sign Language (ASL), and Biblical Hebrew increased.

It is encouraging that, in the face of declining enrollments, Korean enrollments increased by an astonishing 38.3% (ASL increased by 0.8%, and Biblical Hebrew grew by 9.1%), or 5,334 enrollments, from 13,936 in 2016 to 19,270 in 2021.

Anecdotal evidence points to the popularity of K-pop as a major factor in driving Korean enrollments. But Korean has been consistently growing for decades—it has not shown a decrease in enrollments since 1974—so the growth predates K-pop and has to be attributed to other causes as well. Immigration may be a factor: the Korean immigrant popu-

lation in the United States increased from 290,000 in 1980 to 1,000,000 in 2019 (*Korean Immigrants in the United States*, 14 Apr. 2022, Migration Policy Institute, www.migrationpolicy.org/article/korean-immigrants-united-states).

Enrollments in Korean show a 74,015% increase across the sixty-three-year span of the MLA census, from 26 enrollments in 1958 to 19,270 in 2021, the highest percentage change among the fifteen most commonly taught languages. Korean advanced above Russian in the 2021 census and is now the tenth most commonly taught language.

Korean enrollments increased significantly at two- and four-year institutions between 2016 and 2021, by 20.3% at two-year schools and 37.8% at four-year schools, continuing a strong and steady upward surge over the historic course of the census. The study of Korean at the graduate level rose by 217.7%, from 198 enrollments in 2016 to 629 in 2021.

Since the peak of language enrollments in 2009, only two languages have had an increasing number of institutions reporting enrollments: Korean and ASL. The number of institutions teaching Korean increased at all institutional levels,



and 8.8% of responding institutions reported enrollments in Korean. The Korean program at the University of Kansas, for example, has been particularly successful and is highlighted as a model in the forthcoming MLA report.

In the face of widespread declines in language enrollments, Korean enrollments are encouraging; Korean seems to be immune to current trends in language study. The MLA is responding to the growing interest in Korean by, among other initiatives, publishing a number of volumes on Korean works in its Texts and Translation series, including the forthcoming *A Century of Queer Korean Fiction* (www.mla.org/Queer-Korean-Fiction).

Change in Korean-Language Enrollments, 2016–21



The *MLA Newsletter* (ISSN 0160-5720) is published four times a year (Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter) by the Modern Language Association of America, 85 Broad Street, New York, NY 10004. The *MLA Newsletter* is edited by the executive director of the association, Paula M. Krebs. The managing editor is Anna S. A. Chang. The cost of an annual subscription is \$8. The subscription price is included in the dues of all members of the association. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. All news items and letters should be sent to the *MLA Newsletter* at the above address. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *MLA Newsletter*, 85 Broad Street, New York, NY 10004. MLA and the MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION are trademarks owned by the Modern Language Association of America.

Using Student Work Ethically

Guidelines for using student work ethically aren't limited to the sciences. What does ethical use of student work in humanities research and teaching entail? A professor and graduate student answer questions about institutional review boards (IRBs), informed consent, and more.

Why does this matter?

Following ethical practice when using student work in research and teaching is important: we want to model and maintain respect for students' intellectual property and privacy as well as respect for the collaborative learning and mentoring relationships between students, instructors, and researchers.

That is why institutions have an institutional review board (IRB). The IRB serves as a third party in the research process, allowing us to take steps to ensure the safety of researchers and research subjects. Additionally, using an IRB prevents legal and ethical complications that could compromise the integrity of research and the credibility of host institutions.

What is an IRB?

An IRB is an administrative body established to protect the rights and welfare of human research subjects who have been recruited to participate in research activities conducted in connection with an affiliated institution. Every IRB has the duty to review research involving human subjects; to protect the subjects' rights, wellness, and privacy; and to approve, decline, exempt, or require changes to research submitted to it.

Where do I start?

It sounds obvious, but an important first step is deciding what student work you want to draw from—and to what end. Do you want to use student papers in your teaching or mentoring of other students?

Or do you want to learn from student survey responses in research that might lead to a conference presentation or article?

Do your best to know exactly what data you need from each student, and, if possible, go through some of that data to understand what information may accompany it. For example, student papers probably come with at least the student's name if not also the instructor's name and the course and section number. Although you may not need all the accompanying metadata for your research, there may not be a way to ensure deletion of such data before you get it. For the safety of your participants, you'll need to understand the implications of receiving that data before you complete the IRB process. In another example, you might want to use student reflections for professional devel-

in research or teaching, we should share with students how we will use their work and should get their consent and preferences regarding anonymity.

It's common to speak in general terms about what students have struggled with and done well with, but more particular uses of student work should have consent.

What if all I want to do is use student work in my teaching? Does that require an IRB?

The IRB reviews research involving human subjects. Thus, if your only goal is to be able to use work by current students with future students, and you know that will not change, then you need students' informed consent but do not need to go through an IRB.



What if I've been using students' work for years but never asked them?

To follow ethical best practice, try to find a way to reach out to students whose work you have been using. If you are unable to do so, collect new student work so that you can ask for informed consent and preferences regarding anonymity.

opment meetings or for workshops with faculty members or graduate students.

There is no right or single answer. But ascertaining up front what student work(s) you want to use and to what end(s) can save a significant amount of time and effort. It will help you determine the necessary procedures for ensuring your use of the work is ethical and compliant with relevant regulations.

What kinds of uses of student work require consent?

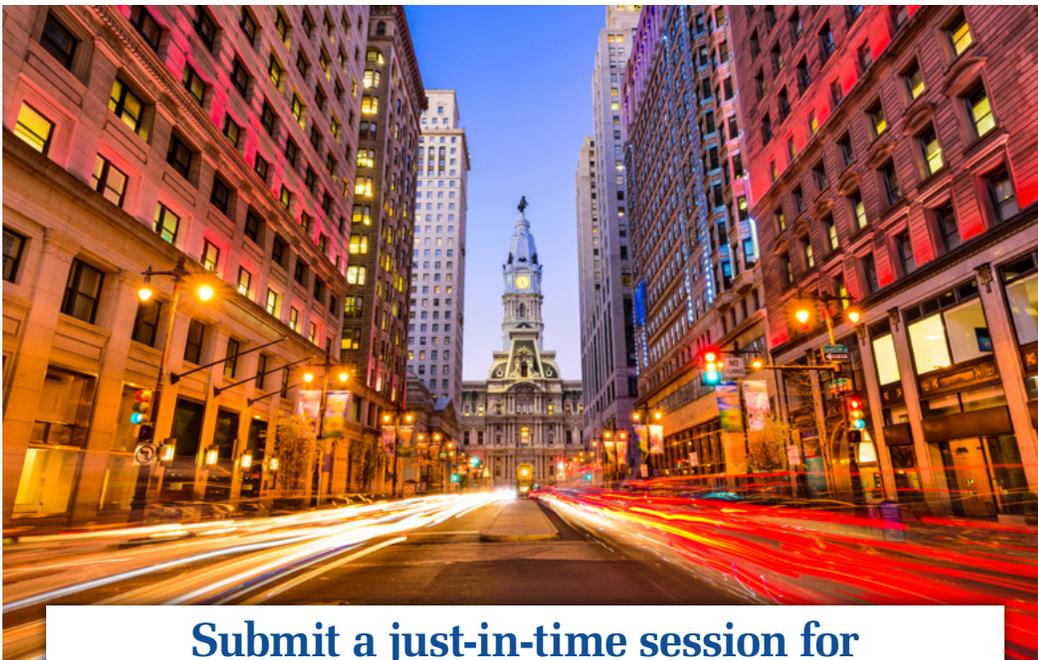
The short answer: anything. For any intellectual work by students that we use

Laura Aull is associate professor of English and writing program director at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Jason Godfrey is a PhD candidate in English and education at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and a strategic data fellow at Harvard University's Center for Education Policy Research.

Read more from Aull and Godfrey about how to use student research ethically, including a list of resources and details of how to get IRB approval, in the extended discussion forthcoming in Profession.

Volume 55
Number 2
Summer 2023

MLA Newsletter



**Submit a just-in-time session for
the 2024 convention in Philadelphia!**
Deadline: 22 September • www.mla.org/Just-in-Time

IN THIS ISSUE

- 1 Lessons from Florida
- 2 President's Column:
Mapping Possibilities:
The Poetics of Queering
Blackness
- 3 Resources for Responding
to Challenges to Academic
Freedom and Shared
Governance
- 4 Korean Language Study
Continues to Grow
- 5 Using Student Work Ethically