

No. 22-13992 & 22-13994

LEROY PERNELL, ET AL.,
Plaintiffs-Appellees,

v.

BRIAN LAMB, ET AL.,
Defendants-Appellants.

ADRIANA NOVOA, ET AL.,
Plaintiffs-Appellees,

v.

BRIAN LAMB, ET AL.,
Defendants-Appellants.

**Brief of *Amicus Curiae* Academic Freedom Alliance
in Support of Plaintiffs-Appellees**

On Appeal from the United States District Court

Certificate of Interested Persons and Corporate Disclosure Statement

Amicus Curiae Academic Freedom Alliance, a nonprofit corporation organized, hereby states that it has no parent companies, subsidiaries, or affiliates and that it does not issue shares to the public. All parties have consented to the filing of this *amicus* brief. *Amici* certify that the following persons have an interest in the outcome, as required by Federal Rule of Appellate Procedure 26.1 and Eleventh Circuit Rule 26.1:

1. Almond, Russell, *Plaintiff-Appellee*
2. American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Florida, Inc., *Attorneys for Plaintiffs-Appellees*
3. American Civil Liberties Union of New York, *Attorneys for Plaintiffs-Appellees*
4. Academic Freedom Alliance, *Amicus Curiae*
5. Austin, Sharon Wright, *Plaintiff-Appellee*
6. Azis, Jacqueline Nicole, *Attorney for Plaintiffs-Appellees*
7. Ballard Spahr LLP, *Attorneys for Plaintiffs-Appellees*
8. Benjamin, Aaronson, Edinger & Patanzo, P.A., *Attorneys for Plaintiffs-Appellees*
9. Blankenship, Katherine, *Attorney for Plaintiffs-Appellees*
10. Boaz, Timothy L., *Defendant-Appellant*
11. Burgess, Tiffani, *Attorney for Plaintiffs-Appellees*
12. Callahan, Sandra, *Defendant-Appellant*
13. Carrere, Michael, *Defendant-Appellant*

14. Cerio, Timothy M., *Defendant-Appellant*

34. Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, *Attorneys for Plaintiffs-Appellees*
35. Frost, Patricia, *Defendant-Appellant*
36. Gabadage, Nimna, *Defendant-Appellant*
37. Gary S. Edinger & Associates PA – Gainesville, FL, *Attorney for Plaintiffs-Appellees*
38. Greubel, Greg Harold, *Attorney for Plaintiffs-Appellees*
39. Griffin, Michael, *Defendant-Appellant*
40. Haddock, Jr., Edward Ellis, *Defendant-Appellant*
41. Hinger, Sarah Ann, *Attorney for Plaintiffs-Appellees*
42. Horton, Oscar, *Defendant-Appellant*
43. Johnson, Alexis Marie, *Attorney for Plaintiffs-Appellees*
44. Jones, Kenneth, *Defendant-Appellant*
45. Jordan, Darlene Luccio, *Defendant-Appellant*
46. Lamb, Brian, *Defendant-Appellant*
47. Leckerman, Jason Allen, *Attorney for Plaintiffs-Appellees*
48. Lee, Jin Hee, *Attorney for Plaintiffs-Appellees*
49. Leftheris, Julie, *Defendant-Appellant*
50. Levine, Alan, *Defendant-Appellant*
51. Lubin, Catharine E., *Attorney for Plaintiffs-Appellees*
52. Lydecker, Charles, *Defendant-Appellant*
53. Mabatah, Isiuwa Jacqueline, *Attorney for Plaintiffs-Appellees*
54. Mateer, Craig, *Defendant-Appellant*
55. McLaurin, Charles, *Attorney for Plaintiffs-Appellees*

56. McNamara, Caroline Andrews, *Attorney for Plaintiffs-Appellees*
57. Michael, Deanna, *Defendant-Appellant*
58. Monbarren, Luran, *Defendant-Appellant*
59. Moraff, Laura Beth, *Attorney for Plaintiffs-Appellees*
60. Morris, Joshua (“J.T.”), *Attorney for Plaintiffs-Appellees*

oS2

78. Steinbaugh, Adam, *Attorney for Plaintiffs-Appellees*
79. Stermon, Kent, *Defendant-Appellant*
80. Sykes, Emerson James, *Attorney for Plaintiffs-Appellees*
81. Tilley, Daniel Boaz, *Attorney for Plaintiffs-Appellees*
82. Tobin, Charles David, *Attorney for Plaintiffs-Appellees*
83. University of Central Florida Board of Trustees, *Defendant (Dismissed on Nov. 22, 2022)*
84. University of Florida Board of Trustees, Defendant (*Dismissed on Nov. 22, 2022*)
85. University of South Florida Board of Trustees, *Defendant (Dismissed on Nov. 22, 2022)*
86. Volokh, Eugene, *Attorney for*

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Interest of *Amicus Curiae*¹

This *amicus curiae* brief is being filed on behalf of the Academic Freedom Alliance, a nonprofit organization whose members are dedicated to protecting the rights of faculty members at colleges and universities to speak, instruct, and publish without fear of sanction or punishment. Members of the Academic Freedom Alliance come from across the political spectrum, and are united in their commitment to truth-seeking scholarship and in recognizing that an attack on academic freedom anywhere is an attack on academic freedom everywhere.

Alliance members' experience as university professors, the range of subjects they teach, and the range of their ideological beliefs, gives them a special perspective on the dangers that the Florida Act poses to candid and comprehensive class discussion. Based on that experience, AFA has published a statement criticizing policies such as the one being challenged in this case. Academic Freedom Alliance, *Academic Freedom Alliance Statement on "Divisive Concepts" Policies*, Jan. 6, 2023, <https://perma.cc/43PX-LJTN>.

¹ No party or party's counsel has authored this brief in whole or in part, or contributed money that was intended to fund preparing or submitting the brief. No person has contributed money that was intended to fund preparing or submitting the brief, except that UCLA School of Law paid the expenses involved in filing this brief.

Statement of the Issues

Whether the Stop W.O.K.E. Act's restriction on the expression of certain viewpoints in university teaching violates the First Amendment.

Summary of Argument

I. The Florida Act bars professors from “espous[ing], promot[ing], or advocat[ing],” Fla. Stat. § 1000.05(4)(a), a wide range of “concept[s]” that appear in debates at the heart of many university courses. These include discussions of important policy proposals that are constantly in the news, in court, and in legislatures: affirm-

merits of same-sex sports teams might be seen as “endors[ing]” the views that men “should be discriminated against” (by being excluded from women-only teams) “to achieve diversity, equity, or inclusion” for women athletes. § 1000.05(4)(a)(6). And if the Act is upheld, that will set a precedent for other legislatures banning the expression of still other views, whether pro-capitalist or anti-capitalist, pro-environmentalist or anti-environmentalist, pro-affirmative-action or anti-affirmative-action, and more.

For all these reasons, the Act is unconstitutionally vague and overbroad, and the decision below should be affirmed.

Argument

I. The Act prohibits speech that is integral to class discussion, and therefore cannot be justified under *Bishop*

This Court’s *Bishop* precedent calls for a balance between the University’s having “some authority over the conduct of teachers in and out of the classroom” and the “strong predilection for academic freedom as an adjunct of the free speech rights of the First Amendment.” *Id.* at 1074. In *Bishop*, this Court upheld a university’s “demand[ing]” “the separation of [a professor’s] personal views from his professorial duties.” *Id.* at 1076 n.7. “Dr. Bishop’s professional views” and “his religious beliefs,” this Court held, “have to be conceptually separated for fair analysis,” and the university must have “the authority . . . to request that [Bishop] sequester the personal from the professional.” *Id.*

In contrast, the Florida Act applies to speech that is central to serious debates in a wide range of classes, such as history, law, sociology, criminology, anthropology, philosophy, and more. For example, the Act prohibits instruction that “advances” the “concept[]” that a “person, by virtue of his or her race, color, national origin, or sex, should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment to achieve diversity, equity, or inclusion.” Fla. Stat. § 1000.05(4)(a)(6). Yet that concept, whether one agrees with it or not, is central to many defenses of affirmative action based on race, ethnicity, and sex. This means that law professors seeking to discuss the Supreme Court’s affirmative action cases would be sharply limited in their ability to discuss one of the key arguments on one side of the debate.

Likewise, reparations for slavery are a controversial subject—but one that is constantly in the news, and that would indubitably arise in many serious classes that touch on modern race relations. Under the Act, professors would be unable to can-

whether people generally—or members of specific groups in particular—are especially likely to engage in subconscious bias. Yet professors are in peril whenever they discuss these arguments, because the arguments may be seen as stating that “A person, by virtue of his or her race, color, national origin, or sex is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously.” § 1000.05(4)(a)(2).

That Bishop’s personal views on theology could be excluded from a university class on physiology thus cannot justify upholding the Act: The Act restricts the free and frank discussion of questions that are a central to a class’s subject matter, not just of distant tangents. It thus fails the First Amendment test set forth in *Bishop*, for reasons discussed in more detail in the Brief of Appellees Novoa et al. at 34-39.

II. The “savings clause” does not actually save the statute

To be sure, the Act purports to allow professors to “discuss” the prohibited eight concepts, so long as they do so “in an objective manner without endorsement of the concepts.” § 1000.05(4)

that side. Yet all these choices could be perceived by some students as betraying a lack of “objectiv[ity].”

And of course sometimes a professor may need to set forth the best argument for a particular side because the students are not adequately grasping the argument. The professor may only be seeking to explain the argument to the students, and may even disclaim any attempt to endorse the argument. But some students might nonetheless view this as a non-“objective” discussion.

Observers may also perceive what they view as a lack of “objectiv[ity]” in matters such as a professor’s tone or emphasis. They might see a professor’s responses to some students as dismissive, patronizing, or even sarcastic, while other observers may view the same remarks as thoughtful and balanced. Likewise, they might think that the professor is offering only a straw man argument for one side, while providing a much stronger argument for the other.

of objectivity on the part of professors simply because they disagree with the professors' views.

Second, sometimes the professor will have expressed a particular view outside class, whether in scholarship, public commentary, litigation, or any other exercise of the professor's First Amendment rights. If a professor is known as a supporter of affirmative action, for instance, many people will perceive even a balanced in-class discussion of the arguments for affirmative action as "espous[ing]," "promot[ing]," or "advanc[ing]" those arguments, rather than as being "objective."

Aware of this risk, careful professors may reasonably avoid discussing the perilous arguments altogether, rather than relying on an uncertain protection for supposedly "objective" 11 So. 3d 1047 (Fla. 1st DCA 2011) (quoting Hynd v. Tnd 184 Fed. Cl. 106 (2013)) (10467250

thus cause the very sort of “pall of orthodoxy over the classroom” that “the First Amendment . . . does not tolerate.” *Id.* at 603.

Finally, sometimes students may ask professors for their personal, non-“objective” opinions. “OK, we’ve heard your presentation of the arguments for and against affirmative action, professor; but what do *you* think?” This is a normal exchange to have in a university context, especially in a small seminar that is supposed to be a conversation among fellow scholars.

Yet under the Act, professors would be unable to express their honest views on the subject, for fear that any such expression—and perhaps all the other expression that came before it—will be seen as not just “objective” “discuss[ion]” of certain ideas, but as forbidden “espous[al],” “promot[ion],” or “advance[ment]” of those ideas. Indeed, the professors might not even be able to respond, “I’m afraid I shouldn’t answer, given the Florida Act,” because that itself may betray their views. After all, if their views were consistent with the Florida Legislature’s, they would be free to answer; the Act would only forbid the expression of their views if the

cannot flourish in an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust.” *Sweezy v. N.H.*, 354 U.S. 234, 250 (1957) (plurality opin.). Such inquiry and scholarship likewise “cannot flourish in an atmosphere” of legislatively mandated “no comment.” The First Amendment cannot tolerate such “governmental intrusion into the intellectual life of a university,” which causes “grave harm” to the marketplace of ideas. *Id.* (Frankfurter, J., joined by Harlan, J., concurring). Again, this chilling effect that the Act imposes on professors’ speech further shows that the Act is unconstitutionally overbroad, and is not saved by the vague “objective” “discuss[ion]” provision.

III. The Act affects the First Amendment rights of speakers across the political spectrum

The Act would of course be unconstitutional even if it limited only the speech of the “woke,” as the initial name of the Act—Stop W.O.K.E. Act—suggests. But the Act is vastly broader than that.

Consider, for instance, the proh224 T99.5 (oul)1n (po t)xS.1 (e)3 ()TJ4 0.016.99 0.019 Tv

The Act would thus bar arguments that transgender athletes should not be allowed on women's teams. But even beyond that, it would bar a defense of the well-established position that those athletes who are undisputedly male should be excluded from women's teams.

Likewise, the Act prohibits university classroom speech that “advances” the “concept” that “Members of one . . . sex . . . should not attempt to treat others without respect to . . . sex.” § 1000.05(4)(a)(4). Of course, many religious, cultural, and moral traditions take the view that men should treat women differently because they are women. Indeed, throughout human history, this view has seemingly been the norm.

This view is still commonly acted on by people in family life, social life, and religious life even in modern America, where discrimination in employment and other contexts based on sex is generally banned. Theorizing that such a view is sound, because men and women really are different in important ways, would thus be forbidden.

And the Act would also forbid arguments that some facets of modern culture may have gone too far in erasing sex differences—for instance, that the military may have erred in allowing women in combat roles, or that boys should be raised to take a more traditionally “chivalrous” view towards women. Yet such arguments are of

course fundamental to important debates about law, social organization, moral philosophy, religion, and more.

Criminology or psychology classes may also need to discuss the reality that, in our own society and throughout the world, men tend to be more violent than women, and thus that women tend to be less violent than men. Yet statements that “advance[]” this “concept” would be forbidden on the theory that they suggest that “[m]embers of one . . . sex are morally superior to members of another . . . sex.” § 1000.05(4)(a)(1).

Classes that deal with comparative politics or economic development also have to confront the reality that some countries are much more politically and economically successful3.9 ()0.-1.1 (c)3 (c)-.1 (l)1o.011 Tw 0 -2Td[(c)3 (a)2.9r Tw -1.2.8 (mo[lb4 (l)18.

A statement such as, “Germany does better economically than Spain because Germans tend to be less corrupt in business and government” would thus be forbidden by the Act.² Likewise, statements such as, “The success of Chinese immigrants in many societies stems in large part from their greater commitment to education” would be forbidden as well.³

The Act also prohibits teaching “that a person’

Respectfully Submitted,

s/ Eugene Volokh

Attorney for *Amicus Curiae*
Academic Freedom Alliance
First Amendment Clinic
UCLA School of Law
385 Charles E. Young Dr. E
Los Angeles, CA 90095
(310) 206-3926
volokh@law.ucla.edu

Certificate of Compliance

This brief complies with the type-volume limitation of Fed. R. App. P. 32(a)(7)(B) because this brief contains 3,543 words, excluding the parts of the brief exempted by Fed. R. App. P. 32(a)(7)(B)(iii).

Dated: June 19, 2023

s/ Eugene Volokh

Attorney for *Amicus Curiae*

Certificate of Service

I hereby certify that I electronically filed the foregoing Brief *Amicus Curiae* today with the Clerk of the Court for the United States Court of Appeals for the Elev-