

## **SOC 300 (003) Research Proposal: Chris Torres**

### **Introduction**

The topic I would like to research is censorship policies within Florida's public education system. Florida is governed as a Republican-majority, where the spread of ideologies in recent years targeting minority POC groups and members/identifiers of LGBTQ+ has led to curriculum changes in primary and higher education. I aim to ultimately uncover if the enactment of these policies limits or benefits the past and present student bodies—those who identify with said minority groups and those who don't—parents/guardians of them, and educators. While first only focusing on the literature aspect of censorship, broadening my scope was necessary to ensure my research speaks to the student population and those represented or affected by educational restrictions.

### **Purpose**

Throughout this study, I hope to inquire more about the short and long-term effects marginalized student/parent communities in Florida endure from these curriculum changing policies and censorship overall. We understand that these groups are the minority in society, and have been oppressed and silenced in other avenues besides education, but I want to learn exactly what steps are taken to accept or combat these changes in order to preserve their identities and right to education, at the macro and micro levels. Florida's current political sphere leans more right than many states in the U.S., led under Governor DeSantis and his anti-woke agenda—which I plan to discuss as well. The term “woke” essentially means the awareness of discrimination and prejudice prevalent in society—not turning a blind eye to the challenges racial, ethnic, and other minority groups face due to society's negligence to their history. One of the big questions I would

like to answer as I conclude my study is why does this governing body *not* want their student population to be aware of these social problems?

### **Literature Review**

Censorship policies affecting Florida's public education system, including but not limited to literature bans, are shown through research to affect student, parent and other affiliated populations of minority groups through the spread of right-wing indoctrination in schools. Research that has been conducted discusses prior (and future) measures taken by governance concerning student bodies, the current political climate, and societal implications/effects.

Florida's "Stop Wrongs to Our Kids and Employees Act" (Stop WOKE Act) was enacted in July 2022, with the intention of limiting and criminalizing the teaching of Critical Race Theory at public schools and universities (Bulut 2023). It is also referred to as The Individual Freedom Act of 2022 (Dallman 2024), intended to combat discrimination and prejudiced decision making within the K-20 sphere of public education at the student and employer level; in reality, this act silences the history of oppression to certain minority groups in America. Also in 2022, the Parental Rights in Education law (or "Don't Say Gay") was passed, which originally prohibited discussion or teachings of sexual orientation and gender identity in the classroom from grades K-3, and as of 2023 expanded to all levels of public education. Goldberg, Toomey, and Abreu followed this expansion by surveying 107 LGBTQ+ parents in Florida over 6 months to observe possible levels of "outness" (openly expressing their identity, involvement within their community) and likelihoods of moving out of state. Through a variety of open and closed-ended questions aiming to uncover concerns over safety and behavior from the laws 'stigma-induced stressors' among LGBTQ+ parents and their children, researchers found that 23% of the sample became 'less out' in their communities, and 68% voiced motives of moving

out of the state. The actual process of finding participants was based on the criteria that "a) they were an LGBTQ+ parent of at least one child under 18 and b) currently lived in Florida." This study was extremely informative to my research, because by combining inductive and deductive methods and ensuring the surveys digestibility, confidentiality, and expertise, the qualitative data presented speaks to the effects enacted policies have on these underrepresented communities.

One adjustment I plan to make to this survey would be to change the child age criterion to 'under 21' which will allow myself to examine how these policies also affect higher education.

Much of the prior research on this topic has to do with past legislation that censors content taught/represented in Florida public institutions, anti DEI-initiative funding or anti-science in general, from (Cottam 2024; Diechmann 2024; Herndl 2024; Rohrer 2024). These trends mainly skyrocketed after COVID-19, where "disaster capitalism" (Cottam 2024) influenced the spread of autocratic, neoliberal, and conservative ideologies across the corporate and U.S. education system. In a journal for European Review, Diechmann (2023) covers essays from scholars and scientists of how these shifting ideologies and new policy movements affect the merit of science in our country. In an interview with University of South Florida professor Diane Herndl, explains how the handling of the pandemic essentially made citizens wary of the government's power, which inspired fear mongering and anger towards the ones in power; "The right wing immediately realized that they could mobilize the kind of anger people felt at having to restrict their movements. And there was this divide, class divide, between people who could do their work remotely and those who couldn't, and we (university professors) were on one side of that divide, right?" (Herndl 2024) These articles help me understand the source of when exactly these ideologies started to drastically shift, which gives me a better understanding of how to study this topic: by uncovering the concerns of Floridian communities' right to education.

Noting how researchers used qualitative approaches to gather information from communities experiencing the impacts of educational censorship, utilizing content and discourse analysis of education curriculums, legal processes, and media in Florida while also conducting an online survey will aid me to uncover the effects of these spreading ideologies and practices in the state, and if it is beneficial or detrimental to their education system.

### **Methodology**

As I briefed in the literature review, this study will follow a mixed-method/mode procedure, or a combination of different techniques. Firstly, I will be conducting a content and discourse analysis on Floridian public education curricula, passed laws regarding censorship, local media/news outlets, and journals in which discuss the implications and circumstances regarding these processes. Content analysis is defined as the study of recorded human communication (Babbie 2017), while discourse analysis focuses more on the linguistic and contextual aspects of said communication. This unobtrusive method of research allows me to examine exactly how these ideologies are spread about the state without me actually being in Florida; by examining how reporters, journalists, politicians, and civilians converse for or against these ideologies, and how the governing body enforces them as well. The first sources I aim to examine are Florida's DOE (<https://fldoe.org>) and Senate (<https://flsenate.gov>) websites, which are government ran and include fully accessible, up-to-date curriculum layouts and information on laws/bills that have passed or are in motion. By having access to these resources, I will obtain the baseline of knowledge about what these policies may look like in real time, and what measures have been taken previously or are planned in the future to affect the education system. In the case of journal articles—some of which I presented in my literature review—I will be able to evaluate the populations I am targeting through previous qualitative and quantitative studies

(surveys, in-depth interviews), which include students enrolled in Florida's public universities, parents of children/students enrolled, professors and staff. These groups make up the education system at its core, which is why it is extremely important to understand this population and how government interference affects their daily lives. Observing how the information is controlled and contained in the state is important to my research as well, which is why analyzing the coverage of these policies and rhetoric by local media and news outlets will allow me to see this topic from a citizens perspective.

The second method I am incorporating is an online survey consisting of open and closed-ended questions, in which my target audience will be LGBTQ+ students and parents of LGBTQ+ students. I chose to focus on this group specifically because of how many of these censorship policies and ideologies directly impact and target this population, where their freedom of expression in many aspects is limited. This survey will be opened up to a restricted audience, that is if they qualify under one or more of the following categories: 1) currently enrolled in Florida public institution of higher education and identifies as LGBTQ+; 2) currently employed within the Florida public education system as a teacher, staff/board member; and 3) a parent of a child currently enrolled in a Florida public institution that identifies as LGBTQ+. The survey questions—more examples included in the appendices (pg. 8)—consist of open and closed-ended questions that aim to understand all perspectives of respondents; questions tailored to specific participant categories will include an “If applicable\*” message after starting. The anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents is guaranteed, and with the proper funds granted we will be incentivising respondents with \$20 Visa gift cards for the surveys completion. The main takeaway I hope to obtain from this survey is the real-time feelings and concerns of representatives from this population of Florida's changing education system that may affect their

own or others identity expression, learning and socialization, as well as possible actions taken for protection of the group identity. Understanding the perspective of whom the governing body is ‘serving’ will be another step in finding out why these changes are being made at this point in time.

As for ethical and conduct concerns, the confidentiality and anonymity of respondents is top priority, as their personality is not being observed within this survey. I am specifically looking for trends in the responses that will aid my understanding of the effects these policies and ideologies have on education, while remaining non-partisan. To ensure deception is debunked, the survey will include a short consent form briefing participants of their safety, exactly what questions and responses will require, the purpose of their voluntary participation, and any possible burdens the survey or its completion may have on participants, as it is centered around a social issue that may be sensitive or unlock repressed feelings.

### **Conclusion**

Uncovering the perspectives of the governing body of Florida, its educators, pupils, and the people they serve overall is crucial into understanding how the spread and implementation of ideological-driven policies affects education. While I cannot physically study this concept in Florida, conducting a comprehensive analysis of communication published in and regarding the state while having the chance to reach members of the population online are integral to ensure my conclusions are accurate. Right-wing ideology in America became substantially prevalent after the COVID-19 pandemic, in some states more than others; stemming from a distrust with the government’s handling of the situation and/or democratic procedures that may have affected large portions of the population. A majority of Floridians seemed prepared to ‘fight back’ against

the system, but does silencing the past and present really do more good for the people than it does harm? This is the ultimate question I aim to have answered through my research.

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## **Appendices**

1. **(Survey Q Ex. #1: to students identifying with LGBTQ+ // Open-ended)** What is the biggest challenge you face regarding your freedom of speech/expression in the classroom after the “Don’t Say Gay” law was expanded to all levels of education?
2. **(Survey Q Ex. #2: to parents of students identifying with LGBTQ+ // Closed-ended)**  
How satisfied are you with your child’s current learning curriculum?
  - ☐ Very satisfied
  - ☐ Somewhat satisfied



- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat dissatisfied
- ☐ Very dissatisfied

I. **(Follow-up question // Closed-ended)** Would you feel more comfortable about your child's education in a state without policies that restrict public education curricula?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Other (expand:)

3. **(Survey Q Ex. #3: to educators/employers within the Florida public school system //**

**Open-Ended)** In what ways has the implementation of policies such as the Individual Freedoms Act limited or benefited your day-to-day classroom environment?