

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Academic Freedom and Job Security at Florida's Colleges and Universities are Under Attack

On June 3, 2021, Lake-Sumter State College (LSSC) President, Dr. Stanley Sidor, terminated Dr. David Walton, a continuing contract Assistant Professor of Anthropology, elected leader, and bargaining team member of the UFF-LSSC chapter. The President's unjust and illegal actions were carried out without just cause or due process, and they are unprecedented among Florida colleges. These actions threaten the job security of every faculty member on continuing contract at Lake-Sumter State College.

There are college and state mandated processes for how faculty members can be terminated or laid off which were not followed in this case (refer to state rule 6A-14.0411: Employment Contracts for Full-Time Faculty and LSSC Admin. Procedures PRO 5-15 Faculty Contracts, PRO 5-16 Separation of Employment, and PRO 5-06 Reduction in Force). The faculty union is currently in a period of status quo while first contract negotiations continue; however, on June 21, 2021, the United Faculty of Florida filed a petition for an administrative hearing to rule on the validity of the facts proposed for this termination. This hearing must take place within 60 days.

At the Board of Trustees meeting on June 23, students and alumni spoke to the impacts this decision would have on current and prospective students of LSSC. Maria Ocando Monaco, Alumni of Lake-Sumter State College and current student in the Anthropology Department at the University of Central Florida, said to the Board of Trustees, "Dr. Walton's termination contradicts my notions of what the college stands for. This rash decision is not only an extreme overreach against the college's governance and values but an intrusion on the community's access to exceptional scholarships such as the one Dr. Walton brings to the Lake and Sumter counties. Shouldn't our communities have access to top-quality professors like Dr. Walton?"

Contrary to popular belief, tenure does not mean a "job for life." Tenure ensures there is a fair and just process for terminating faculty that does not rely upon the political beliefs of college and university administrators. When faculty members can lose their positions because of their speech, publications, or research findings, they cannot properly fulfill their core responsibilities to advance and transmit knowledge. Tenure provides the conditions for faculty to pursue research and innovation and draw evidence-based conclusions free from corporate or political pressure. These protections are why the threat to tenure is inextricably linked to academic freedom, free thought, and free speech on our campuses. Attacking tenure is not just bad for professors, it's bad for our democracy.

**The Higher Education Affiliate of Florida Education Association, National Education Association,
American Federation of Teachers, and AFL-CIO**

The United Faculty of Florida does not view Dr. Sidor's illegal actions as an isolated incident. The same week Dr. Walton was unjustly terminated, Barbra Feingold, a Board of Trustees member serving Florida Atlantic University, spoke in strong support of a proposal that would empower Trustees to constitute final action when awarding or denying tenure to faculty. Feingold said, "One paragraph doesn't tell us a lot about a professor, his viewpoints, his research, his political affiliations or potential donations...I'm concerned about tenure moving forward. I speak not just for myself but for the governor." Just weeks prior to these events, the state legislature passed House Bill 233 (HB233), mandating that faculty share their political and intellectual viewpoints with their employers and the state, and allowing students to record secretly in the classroom, without the consent of their instructors or their peers. HB 233 is a draconian measure that will have a long-lasting chilling effect on college and university campuses across the state.

These recent events, coupled with the legislature's efforts to decertify higher education unions, present a clear and coordinated attack on tenure and academic freedom by Florida legislators, Board of Trustees members, and now, college Presidents. "The United Faculty of Florida will fight for Dr. Walton, for our faculty across the state, and for the students we serve," says United Faculty of Florida President Andrew Gothard. "Our communities deserve a legitimate system of higher education where faculty are free to teach, experiment, and research without political interference. This freedom is what has made the US higher education system the best in the world, and we will not allow short-sighted administrators to harm our students by tearing that system down for their own ends."

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The United Faculty of Florida represents more than 20,000 faculty at all 12 public universities, 15 colleges and Saint Leo University, along with graduate assistants at four universities.