

# THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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ACADEMIC FREEDOM

## Florida's Colleges Must Administer 'Viewpoint Diversity' Survey. Don't Take It, Faculty Union Says.

By *Chelsea Long*

APRIL 4, 2022

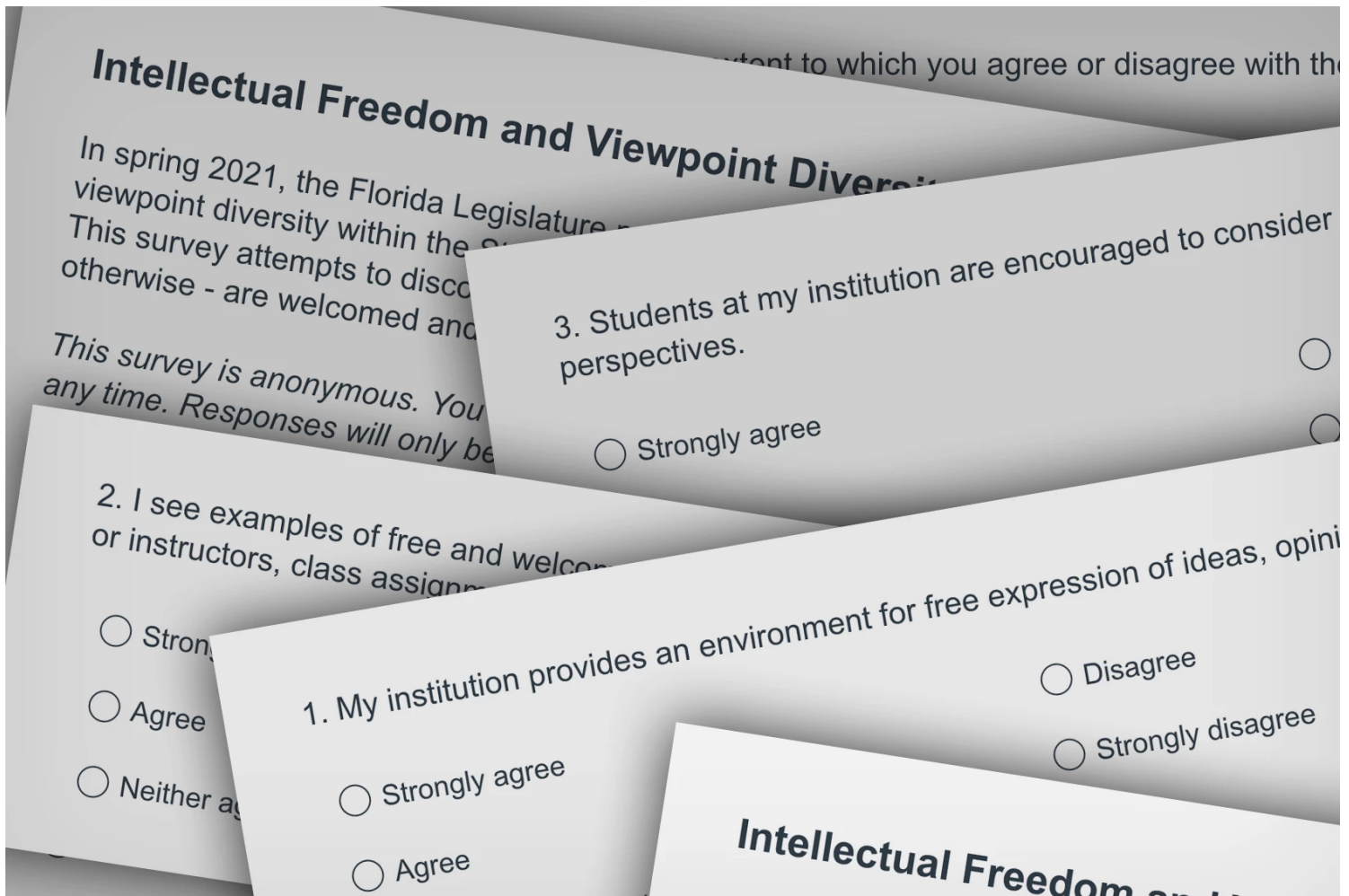


ILLUSTRATION BY THE CHRONICLE

After a federal judge denied an emergency request to stop an intellectual-diversity survey from being given at public colleges in Florida, a union representing faculty called for instructors, staff, and students to simply ignore it.

Last year, Florida's Republican Legislature passed a bill requiring all public colleges to distribute an annual survey of political beliefs in order to "assess the status of intellectual and viewpoint diversity" on campuses across the state. The measure was motivated, in part, by conservative beliefs that institutions of higher education favor a liberal ideology. "It used to be thought that a university campus was a place where you'd be exposed to a lot of different ideas," said Gov. Ron DeSantis, a Republican, at a news conference where he signed the bill into law. "Unfortunately, now the norm is really, these are more intellectually repressive environments."

A copy of the voluntary survey obtained by *The Chronicle* includes 24 questions. Among other things, it asks how welcome free expressions of ideas, opinions, and beliefs are on campus. Faculty are asked if they “inject their own political ideas and beliefs” in the classroom; whether they think their ability to obtain tenure is tied to their political beliefs; and whether they think their institutions support “research, publications, dissertations, etc.” that span liberal and conservative ideologies. Information including race, gender, political affiliation, and academic department are also included in the survey. The 21-item version for students asks similar questions.

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In a news release, the United Faculty of Florida called the the survey an infringement on the right to free speech, freedom of association, and the basic right to privacy. “Florida’s government has no right to know the thoughts, feelings, or political or religious beliefs of anyone, including the higher education community,” the group’s statement reads. “Privacy is the bedrock of democracy and a safeguard against autocratic control.”

Candi Churchill, executive director of the union, has said the survey is a surveillance tactic and part of a larger pattern of attacking academic freedom in Florida. “During the committee process when this law was a bill there was not one complaint, there was no evidence of any kind of suppression on campus. Yet the governor and politicians said this was necessary because faculty are trying to repress students.”

Sylvia Hurtado, a professor of education in the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California at Los Angeles, stated in [a court declaration](#) that the survey is flawed.

“Because the educational purpose of these surveys, and thus the potential benefit of participation, remain unarticulated, subjects will have no clear benefit to weigh against the potential harms,” her statement said. “This is likely to result in the surveys’ responses comprising a sample that will lack representativeness as a basis for projections regarding the total population.”

She said faculty and staff members who believe they are being targeted by the survey are likely to abstain from taking it, while those who do choose to participate may do so because they see a benefit in influencing the data one way or the other for political reasons. “This inevitable self-selection will further ensure that the responses are not representative of views found in the total population,” Hurtado said. “The few who do participate may skew the aggregated data, undermining the integrity of the survey results.”

Hurtado’s expertise was solicited by the plaintiffs in a case that sought to stop the administration of the survey. In an opinion dated Friday, Mark E. Walker, chief judge of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Florida, [denied](#) a motion by the plaintiffs to issue a preliminary injunction against the state, allowing the survey to go forward.

The law calls for its results to be published by September 1.

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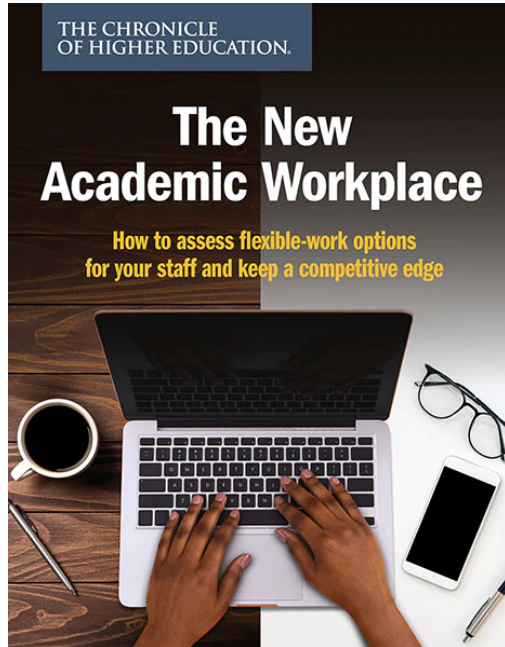
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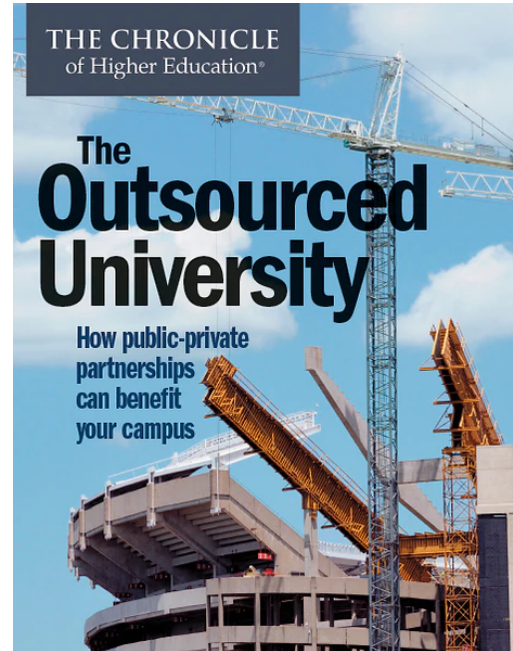
**Chelsea Long**

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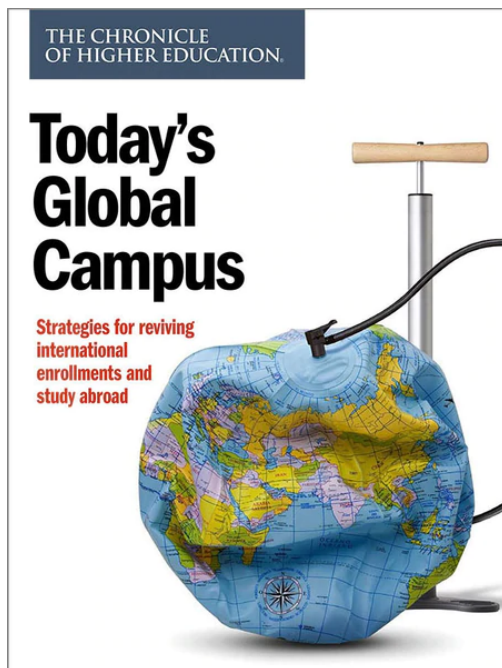
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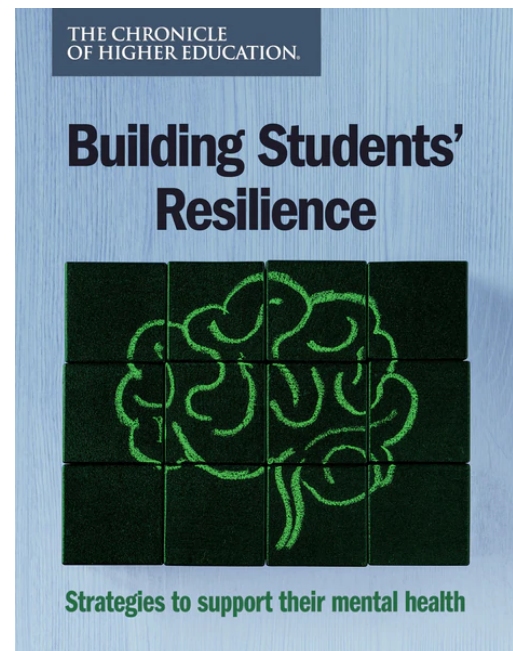
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