

Academic Freedom Victory at UF

College of Education Approves doctoral program “*Critical Studies in Race, Ethnicity, and Culture in Education*”

The following statement was written by Christopher Busey, a UFF-UF member and professor in the College of Education

“In the wake of the murder of George Floyd and the global response to the assault on Black lives in the Summer of 2020, various UF administrators released statements declaring their commitment to racial justice.

In the College of Education at the University of Florida, a group of students initiated efforts to ensure that the Dean’s declarations within his statement would eventually come into fruition. Their endeavors were supported by a larger collective of students, faculty, and administrators, including all Deans. One result was to expand and transform a thriving specialization within the college into a doctoral program titled “Critical Studies in Race, Ethnicity, and Culture in Education.”

In September 2021, after nearly a year of preparation to develop this new doctoral program, myself and several other faculty members were notified that our work had drawn the attention of state legislators in Tallahassee and moving forward with this curriculum would result in consequences.

After several more meetings with college level administration, faculty contacted our union, the United Faculty of Florida, and I filed a grievance that quickly garnered unanticipated national attention. During this time, the UF administration faced multiple violations of academic freedom, Alumni spoke out, students and faculty protested, and the university was under the national spotlight. In December 2021 the university approved the concentration, representing a major milestone in the battle for academic freedom and critical race studies against this fascist form of suppression.

Although the concentration was approved, university and college level administrators—who were the both perpetrators and judges in this case — refused to acknowledge that their actions undermined the principles of academic freedom, or violated the Collective Bargaining Agreement citing article 10.1, 10.2, 10.4, and 11.2.

Several faculty and administrators who attended those meetings have substantiated the veracity of the accounts; and yet, the provost, who presided over the second step of the grievance, based his decision on two conversations: one with the dean of the college of education, and the other with the associate provost who he found to be “credible”. No other individuals were interviewed. It was my word versus the dean and the associate provost.

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To be clear, the victory was in the struggle itself. I have been committed to carrying out race scholarship before 2020 and will remain committed to the collective work so long as racism endures and prohibits democracy from flourishing.

This is about more than one class or a single concentration. Now state congress' recent passage and the governor's impending signing of the anti-woke bill indicates that there is more work to be done to protect our academic freedom and our ability to foster open discussion about race and racism in the university setting. While we continue to fight for academic freedom, state congress has also earmarked \$3 million of funds through Senate Bill 2502 to create a Hamilton Center for Classical and Civic Education, or as Andrew Atterbury put it, a "a political think tank...The center was established in a 181-page education conforming bill accompanying the state budget, the same legislation that included new rules for enforcing Florida's new restrictions on teaching race in universities."

Elected officials have crafted a false narrative about Critical Race Theory which has played out on an international stage. Rather than uphold the principles of academic freedom and freedom of speech that promote open dialogue about race, university administration has caved to the political whims of these officials thus making their statements in 2020, along with slogans about the "greater good," questionable at best."

- Christopher Busey, UF Professor