

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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University of Florida Faculty Leaders Speak out on DEI Terminations

GAINESVILLE, FL. (March 4, 2024)- Leaders and representatives of the University of Florida's United Faculty of Florida chapters have sent an open letter to UF President Ben Sasse sharing their disappointment in the continued attacks on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in Florida.

With the recent news that UF terminated 13 staff positions and halted DEI administrative assignments for 15 faculty members, it's clear that winning one-sided political arguments is more important to our state's leaders than ensuring our students can benefit from a world-class higher education.

Here is what leaders are saying:

Meera Sitharam, President, UFF-UF Faculty Chapter

"This action by UF goes against the core principles of United Faculty of Florida at UF, which traces its very origins to resistance against UF's actions during the civil rights era. The Board of Governors has summarily failed to uphold its autonomy, either due to political and ideological alignment or due to fear of the State University System purse strings being cut by the legislature which has recently failed to demonstrate any independence from the governor's office. The UF Board of Trustees has similarly shamefully caved in. Fear is a powerful tool in the totalitarian playbook. And anticipatory obedience is its desired response."

Eva Garcia Ferres, Co-President, UFF-UF Graduate Assistants United Chapter

"The Florida Board of Governors and the Florida legislature have worked nonstop to silence discussion and education around histories of oppression and marginalization. They do so under the premise of "anti-discrimination"; however, they purposefully ignore and obviate existing socio-economic power imbalances, rendering their "anti-discrimination" efforts a mere rhetorical tool to maintain said imbalances. The elimination of DEI is one of the moving parts in a concerted effort to create higher education programs that create unquestioning civilians in the face of rising fascism."

Jacob Fiala, Co-President, UFF-UF Graduate Assistants United Chapter

"UF voluntarily hired DEI professionals and funded DEI programs because they allowed its operations to be more successful. It was not forced to invest in DEI by some "woke" authoritarian boogeyman; on the contrary, UF feebly yielded to pressures to divest from DEI by "anti-woke" authoritarians. As of last week, UF has abandoned any pretense of care for the inclusion of marginalized voices in the academy. UF administration is not interested in fighting for sensible policies or the rights of its workers, it is interested in allying with neo-fascist ideologues to censor free thought. This will be yet another massive blow to the reputation and success of UF."

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

Teresa M. Hodge, President, United Faculty of Florida

“Repeated attacks on DEI by Florida leaders stem not from a misunderstanding of DEI, but from a purposeful misrepresentation and fear mongering campaign. Make no mistake, these attacks on DEI will continue, and they will not remain centered on our higher education systems. To the contrary, these attacks could move beyond the higher education space into spaces where citizens live, work and play. We already see this happening – look at the erasure of sociology as a core curriculum offering for Florida’s students and at the reticence of our legislators in allowing educators to teach a complete and honest history about our past. The effects of such decisions can go beyond the classroom and, perhaps as an unintended consequence, potentially produce an illiterate populous that could be easily manipulated due to their lack of knowledge or inability to think critically. Florida’s students deserve better. Instead of using our students as pawns toward political means, Florida’s leaders should be focused on providing them with an education system that challenges them and forces them to look at the world around them critically. That is the very least our students deserve and UFF will continue to work on ensuring that our faculty, graduate assistants, and students have the freedom to learn and to teach all the things.”

Andrew Spar, President, Florida Education Association

“The attacks on Florida’s higher education are sadly, not a surprise. Florida’s colleges and universities have branded themselves as leaders in the nation- they are award winning centers of excellence that Floridians should be proud of. But when leaders decide that some courses are simply too controversial because they don’t align with their political viewpoints, Florida suffers. We must continue to stand united and demand more from our leaders.”

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The United Faculty of Florida represents over 25,000 faculty at all 12 public universities, 15 colleges and Saint Leo University, along with graduate assistants at four universities.