

NEWS RELEASE

Jan. 25, 2023

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UFF supports the rights of all Floridians to learn without authoritarian control and to exercise their constitutional freedoms as Americans

Today, the faculty and graduate students who make up the United Faculty of Florida (UFF) affirm our intention to stand in defense of **all** members of the higher education community in the face of extremist, authoritarian attacks from Florida's executive and legislative branches. Florida's students, families and communities deserve better than the lies and misinformation flowing unstemmed out of Tallahassee.

Since the start of 2023, a number of Florida's political leaders have escalated attacks on the higher ed students, faculty and staff who do not agree with the governor's agenda. These unethical and — in some cases — unconstitutional assaults have spread into programs, institutions and administrations across the state, including:

- [Demands from Gov. DeSantis](#) and [the Florida House](#) for information about the funding of race- and race relations-related programs at colleges and universities. Elimination of these programs can disqualify universities from receiving millions in federal support.
- [McCarthyist investigations to target trans students and employees](#) by demanding information that could potentially compromise patient privacy and discourage individuals from seeking medically appropriate care.
- A takeover of New College, Florida's honors university, by extremist ideologues in an effort to enforce conservative ideology on campus through authoritarian tactics.
- [A collective statement from the Florida College System \(FCS\) presidents](#) affirming their view that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives are harmful to higher education.
- [A pending regulation from the Board of Governors](#) that virtually eliminates tenure at Florida's universities.

Unlike Gov. DeSantis and his enablers listed above, **UFF supports the right of all Floridians to live free, to learn without authoritarian control and to exercise their constitutional freedoms as Americans.**

- We stand with our colleagues at New College and [their stated commitment to true viewpoint diversity and academic rigor](#).
- [We submit to the public a revised version of the FCS presidents' statement](#) — one where truth, hope and the value of a college degree are put before the desire to bow down to anti-democratic political pressures.
- We stand with, support and defend Florida's universities and colleges in their efforts to support DEI initiatives and programs, not just because those programs are vital to ensuring broad access to higher education, but also because they were established in response to [a 2020 Board of Governors regulation requiring them to do so, Florida Statue 1012.86](#), and the Florida College System (FCS) Equity and Inclusion Plan.

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

- We stand with all SUS faculty and students across Florida as we resist efforts to demolish tenure and assert greater political intimidation of and control over academic research and instruction. [Anyone can support this effort by signing our petition.](#)
- We affirm our commitment to fight in court against authoritarian control of our state's world-class higher education system, as we have done with [our case against the "Viewpoint Discrimination" law](#), heard in federal court in early January, and through our ongoing support of the case against the "Stop WOKE" Act.

Real defense of viewpoint diversity means defending the rights of **everyone**, regardless of their political or ideological beliefs, to live, work, teach and thrive in Florida's higher education system. At UFF, we are committed to a real defense of diversity, in every sense of the word, and we will not waver in that commitment, regardless of what shameful, partisan attacks continue to come down from some of Florida's elected leaders.

From UFF's leaders around the state:

Florida's higher education students, faculty, staff, families and communities deserve better than the constant stream of false attacks leveled at us by political leaders in Tallahassee. It is time to put an end to this political brinkmanship. At the end of the day, it is the futures of millions of students — and therefore the future of our state as a whole—that are being sacrificed for nothing more than political pageantry.

Andrew Gothard, Statewide President, United Faculty of Florida

It is vital that we use this crisis to publicly affirm our intellectual commitments to our students, our communities and our respective disciplines in Florida and beyond. The future of public higher education is at risk.

Paul Ortiz, President, UFF-UF

Many faculty and students are intimidated, afraid, and some are considering changing their teaching and curriculum to avoid scrutiny from Tallahassee. These efforts are infringing on faculty academic freedom and the ability to teach courses with challenging content with the purpose of debating and understanding multiple viewpoints on topics related to diversity, equity and inclusion.

David Hoppey, UFF-UNF

Diversity, equity and inclusion policies, programs and courses help make the university campus a place where ALL students, faculty and staff can find where they belong regardless of their group membership. Because of the escalating attacks on these programs, our best and brightest students are approaching faculty and asking if the classes they have elected to take will be canceled. These are the same students who have attended college utilizing their Bright Futures scholarships and have informed me that they will leave the state immediately upon graduation because they know the state does not value them. I am also saddened by the numerous faculty and staff who would rather be unemployed and live outside of Florida than continue their positions in a state where they are demonized for doing their jobs. Summed up, this anti-diversity, equity and inclusion rhetoric is actively harming higher education in Florida and costing the Florida taxpayer significant money.

Liz Brown, President, UFF-UNF

The governor and his acolytes are threatening to dismantle a Florida educational system that has been declared the best in the country. We teach STEM, business, medicine, law, arts and humanities. Imposing a political ideology in the classroom is antithetical to everything that system stands for. It will harm our ability to recruit both top faculty and students, and jeopardize years of work and collaboration between administration, faculty, students, parents and our elected leaders. Keep us on the road to success, not the road to division.

Matthew Lata, President, UFF-FSU

Governor DeSantis is attempting to instill a culture of fear in higher education, where students and educators are afraid to teach, learn and exist in their own identities. We will fight to maintain academic and personal expression freedoms on campus at all costs.

Bryn Taylor, Co-President, UF-GAU

By targeting trans people across the state, including in higher education, the current administration is making clear that they want to control what Floridians learn, what we believe and even who we can be. They are trying to intimidate and silence LGBTQ students and faculty, but if they had studied LGBTQ history, they would know that we have always resisted attempts to make us disappear.

Nicole Morse, UFF Government Relations Chair, UFF-FAU

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UFF is the higher education affiliate of the Florida Education Association (FEA) and represents more than 20,000 full-time faculty, including those at all 12 public universities in Florida, at 16 state colleges and community colleges, and at the private Saint Leo University. UFF also represents more than 8,000 graduate assistants at four public universities.