



The Executive Committee of the United Faculty of Florida-State College of Florida chapter support a campus environment that demonstrates a welcoming spirit not only with words, but with the actions of its faculty, staff, and administration. **This is why we are speaking out against the actions of the SCF administration that resulted in the cancellation of the scheduled “Embracing Our Differences” art exhibit organized by Embracing Our Differences, a non-profit arts organization that State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota has had a partnership with for over a decade.** Embracing Our Differences (EOD) refused to censor their exhibit, and as a result, SCF will no longer host the exhibit on campus.

The SCF administration requested the removal of the artwork due to the appearance of the words “diversity,” inclusion,” “justice,” and “equality” in the image or in the adjacent text. The college’s Associate Vice-President of Communications also said that the rejected works “may have been found offensive and not embraced.” The three specific works singled out by SCF are:

[“Body & Voice”](#) [“Good Trouble”](#) [“Being Different Gives the World Color”](#)

These works are viewable on the Embracing Our Differences website. Notably, the first piece does *not* include any of the words SCF attempted to censor but rather refers to women’s voices being heard regarding their own bodies. Moreover, in the Sarasota Herald-Tribune, it was reported that the college rejected a 5th grader’s use of the words “diversity” and “inclusion” in another work because it gave an individual perspective. Of course, it does- that of the writer! As educators, we believe in the expression of individual perspectives and the tolerant, attentive listening to them to foster civil discussion. Art exhibits are about engagement with perspective.

With this in mind, we would like to know *whose* criteria was used to judge these works as potentially “offensive,” since, as educators, we aim to expose our students to a large world of ideas and to develop their *own* criteria coupled with critical thinking skills. SCF leadership is instead sending our students a message that their exposure to perspectives should be controlled. Frankly, it is a chilling prospect that the word “justice” in a work of art is cause for administrative alarm.

In a general press release on Jan. 18th, SCF President Probstfeld and the other Florida College System presidents wrote they “remain committed to developing campus environments that uphold objectivity in teaching and learning...and that welcome all voices...” **However, UFF-SCF asserts that *personal subjectivity*, not objectivity, was used to determine what “may have been found offensive.” Clearly, the attempted censorship shows that not all voices are welcomed on campus despite what was said in the letter.**

State College of Florida recently defended their action saying, "We also took into consideration the values of the college, the recent vandalism of EOD's display and current threats of violence on school campuses," **a statement which warrants further examination.**

“The values of the college:” SCF has four [Institutional Values](#) including **“Inclusivity.** SCF is an open access institution where all are welcomed and supported as part of the SCF college community.” The attempted rejection of art which included the word “inclusivity” is in direct opposition to a fundamental pillar of what the College stands for in its own words.



“The recent vandalism of EOD’s display:” The piece that was vandalized in the Bayfront Park exhibit was *not* one rejected for exhibit by SCF. Was the administration not concerned about a piece that had been proven to be “offensive” to someone?

“Current threats of violence on school campuses:” Although campus violence in the United States is horrifyingly recurrent, SCF is no more or less at risk than other colleges. Artistic expression and viewpoints should not be pre-emptively banned *just in case*.

Unfortunately the students of SCF and the SCF Collegiate School have lost an opportunity to view this acclaimed international exhibit on their own campus and grow from the discussion it would have engendered. Ironically, one of the works targeted for removal by SCF, “Good Trouble,” was created by an SCF graduate who said, “SCF is a diverse school, and I think it is damaging to censor such a powerful exhibit intended to bring people together. It’s not the message SCF should be sending such a diverse student body.” We, the Executive Committee of the UFF-SCF, agree.

Signed,

Executive Committee of UFF-SCF Chapter

