

RFUF Statement re HB 999

The Board of Directors of the Retired Faculty of the University of Florida is deeply disturbed by proposed Florida HB 999, which tries to alter major aspects of postsecondary education in the state. As retired faculty members, we take great pride in our contribution to the University of Florida having helped elevate it to its current high ranking and national prominence. A university's standing and the quality of education it offers depend critically on faculty quality. The provisions of HB 999 will seriously threaten both faculty recruitment and retention and will reduce the aggregate quality of the UF faculty. This would seriously diminish the reputation of the university and the quality of education it provides.

There are three specific elements in the bill that are profoundly harmful to the future of UF and the entire State University System: (1) aiming to dictate what the faculty can and cannot teach; (2) vesting ultimate faculty hiring decisions in the politically appointed and largely not academically qualified Board of Trustees; and (3) giving this Board dominant authority over faculty tenure. These are further discussed below.

(1) The bill mandates what is to be taught by requiring a “curriculum that promotes citizenship in a constitutional republic,” the vagueness of which could promote questionable requirements for instructional content in numerous areas. It then more explicitly dictates what cannot be taught by requiring that the university “remove from its programs any major or minor that is based on or otherwise utilizes pedagogical methodology associated with Critical Theory, including, but not limited to, Critical Race Theory, Critical Race Studies, Critical Ethnic Studies, Radical Feminist Theory, Radical Gender Theory, Queer Theory, Critical Social Justice, or Intersectionality, as defined in Board of Governors regulation, or any major or minor that includes a curriculum that promotes the concepts listed in s. 1000.05(4)(a).” Censorship of the curriculum in such a manner is not only a violation of academic freedom, but also undermines freedom of thought and speech – a fundamental pillar of American citizenship.

(2) The faculty members of a department, immediate supervisors, and other expert faculty are best qualified to assess the professional credentials of prospective hires and the granting of the tenure. In the twenty-first century knowledge is often highly specialized, and its advancement depends critically on peer review. But the proposed bill has the potential to politicize hiring decisions and undermine or eliminate faculty input into the hiring process. The bill states: “Each state university board of trustees is responsible for hiring full-time faculty for the university. The president of the university may provide hiring recommendations to the board...The president and the

board are not required to consider recommendations or opinions of faculty of the university.” This would vest ultimate hiring decisions in a largely academically unqualified board and threatens the principles and practices through which institutional excellence is achieved and maintained.

(3) Equally concerning is the bill’s statement on faculty tenure: “Each state university board of trustees may, at the request of its chair, review any faculty member's tenure status.” This unprecedented stipulation would undermine the basic concept and practice of faculty tenure and instill a climate of uncertainty throughout the university. That will both deter potential high-quality faculty from accepting a position at UF or any Florida university and will induce those who are already here to accept offers from institutions in other states.

In sum, through its assault on academic freedom, on hiring, and on tenure, the approval of HB 999 will have major negative impacts on the quality of the faculty, the quality of education, and the national and international standing of UF and other state universities throughout Florida. It will certainly undermine the ability of the University of Florida to maintain its very high current ranking among public universities. The decline in the university’s ranking and reputation that would result from adoption of this bill is likely to be far more rapid and precipitous than was its long ascent. We strongly urge you to reject this bill.

Signed:

President, Saeed R. Khan, College of Medicine; Incoming President, Barbara McDade Gordon, CLAS; Past President, Carmen Diana Deere, LATAM; Secretary, George Hochmuth, IFAS; Treasurer, Richard H. Davis, CLAS

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