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October/November 2003

# United Faculty of Florida *Update*

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## UFF, Faculty Win Big at Florida State

**By a margin of more than 22 to 1, professors and professional employees choose the United Faculty of Florida to represent them in contract negotiations**

In an overwhelming show of support, faculty members at Florida State University chose the United Faculty of Florida (UFF) as their bargaining agent.

After two days of on-site voting and the tallying of mail ballots, the Public Employees Relations Commission (PERC) announced Oct. 8 that 736 (95.7 percent) voted for UFF, while 33 (4.3 percent) voted for no agent.

"This overwhelming faculty vote for the United Faculty of Florida shows convincingly that the FSU faculty wants a strong independent voice in the terms and conditions of employment," said Jack Fiorito, the UFF president at FSU. "We look forward to working with the FSU administration and trustees."

UFF will represent professors and professional employees in contract negotiations with the board of trustees.

This victory comes after a long and difficult struggle for the FSU faculty to regain recogni-

tion of their rights under contract after administrative authority over universities was transferred from the statewide board of regents to local boards of trustees.

On all 11 campuses across the state—including FSU—more than two-thirds of the faculty signed cards last year authorizing UFF to continue to represent them for purposes of collective bargaining.

The boards on six campuses indicated that this overwhelming response was sufficient to convince them to extend voluntary recognition to UFF and begin bargaining over terms and conditions of employment.

The FSU board claimed that the union had no status whatsoever and that faculty had lost all rights they had under contract. Some FSU administrators allegedly threatened university employees with disciplinary action if they considered signing authorization cards for the union. UFF received an order from PERC to stop such actions.

FSU faculty members cited several reasons for voting for the protections of a contract, including the

guarantee of academic freedom, due process in personnel actions, input in decision-making, and assurances that pay raises cannot be withheld or rescinded.

"It's clear faculty want the protections of a contract to defend basic rights and to insulate themselves from political interference in the conduct of their professional lives," statewide UFF President Tom Auxter said. "Without a union contract, it's hard to defend the integrity of academic life in a politically charged environment like Florida."

The United Faculty of Florida is affiliated with the Florida Education Association, the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers and the AFL-CIO. ■

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## Standardized Testing: The Political Agenda

Florida politicians are intent on making universities and faculty more “accountable.”

For more than a decade, politicians have cut costs in education and social services, allowing them to give tax breaks to the special interest groups that support them.

One result: Florida now ranks 50<sup>th</sup> in per capita spending for higher education.

Politicians talk openly about running universities like businesses. They want to know how they can measure the efficiency of public universities so they can punish the least efficient with even less funding. This way, they can reduce taxes on the wealthiest Floridians and corporations.

The Florida Legislature took the first step towards making universities “more efficient” by tying funding to performance and accountability measures. Up to 10 percent of a university’s budget will depend on student performance. This enables legislators to “save” tax money by under-funding the “least efficient institutions,” as measured in terms of output. Then they can reward their friends with tax breaks.

What process is there for holding politicians accountable for undermining the universities? They will be further enabled to shift the blame to universities and faculty who are not “measuring up,” and therefore, deserve to be punished.

**“The ascendancy of the tax cutters in state politics that began in the 1990s has forced on us an ideology that has destructive consequences for higher education funding. Florida now ranks 50<sup>th</sup> in per capita spending for higher education.”**



**Tom Auxter**  
UFF president

They can rationalize cutting funds to the least productive—by business accountability standards—and divert attention from their own failure to be responsible for providing the funds to make higher education affordable, accessible and worthwhile for all citizens.

Floridians may remember a time when the dream of a democracy was alive and well in the state of Florida. In the 1980s, when Bob Graham was governor, Floridians actually made the commitment to move the universities into the top quartile of state funding. The rapid expansion of the university system during this period, together with a serious investment in developing universities, moved Florida from among the last in the nation in funding to somewhere in the middle of the pack in less than a decade.

That dream is gone.

The ascendancy of the tax cutters in state politics that began in the 1990s has forced on us an ideology that has destructive consequences for higher education funding. Universities suffered \$40 million in cuts this year.

Faculty are living with the results: frozen salaries, understaffed departments, too few courses for too many students, and reductions in all categories of support and in all types of benefits.

Conservative economic forces in Florida have organized to change the way higher education is funded and how we think of responsibility.

Performance-based funding is a method of solidifying the conservative agenda. In this new world, educators are blamed for the problems universities face, when politi-

cal irresponsibility and serious under-funding are the real culprits.

Introducing standardized testing into universities, in a manner similar to the way the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) has been in K-12, is the latest scheme for making universities accountable.

The governor, the education commissioner and the politically appointed board of governors that controls the universities (in conjunction with politically appointed local boards of trustees) have decided that accountability means outsiders (for-profit corporations) must test universities with something like the SATs to see if institutions are doing their jobs and deserve full funding.

Coincidentally, several of these political players also have financial ties to the companies that administer testing or coach students on how to pass the tests.

Although the specific idea of testing the universities by outside, for-profit corporations surfaced only recently during a Republican administration, the conservative economic agenda (cutting education to finance tax breaks for special interests) has in the past decade been backed by members of both political parties.

What is new and even more ominous, however, is that we are seeing special interest groups enter into the evaluation of universities. Also, we are seeing politicians use these tests—devised by for-profit corporations—to escape their own accountability for Florida's descent into last place in higher education funding. They're choosing to blame the universities and faculty who fail these standardized tests.

This economic agenda, advanced by conservative political forces, carries with it a racial agenda as well.

In the past withholding funds from the least "productive" has had a disproportionate impact on African-American institutions, which already are struggling to overcome historical injustices at the starting gate of any measurement system.

This means that institutions, like Florida A&M University, may suffer unfairly when politicians impose crude testing standards that ignore the circumstances created by

conservative political takeover of the public university system in his state. Because New York's governor needed to move towards the political center to win an election, he had to concede something to social conservatives to keep their allegiance, their dollars and their campaign energy.

He gave them the universities. He selected conservatives to a statewide board of trustees to oversee operation of the universities and gave that body permission to carry out their social agenda.

**"In this new world, educators are blamed for the problems universities face, when political irresponsibility and serious under-funding are the real culprits."**

historically-based segregation and exclusion from opportunities.

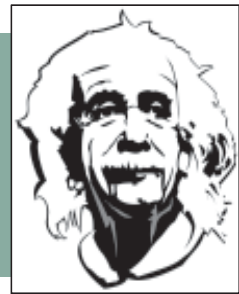
In recent years the Republican Party has turned into a marriage of country club Republicans and the religious right, to borrow a phrase from television producer Norman Lear. These two constituencies must be satisfied for Republicans to secure the money and campaign volunteers necessary to win an election.

During a recent visit to Florida State University, William Scheuerman, president of United University Professions in New York State—which represents 30,000 professional employees, described the

They wasted no time. After the election, the SUNY trustees forced on the universities a conservative general education curriculum that replaced, on many campuses, a more rigorous set of requirements already in place. The trustees specifically notified campus leaders that courses in women's studies, African-American history, labor history and others should not count for general education credit. Only generic survey courses would satisfy their conservative agenda.

The ideological takeover of the universities did not however, stand unchallenged.

*(See "Standardized Tests," page 7)*



## The Campaign To Preserve Faculty Rights: A Year in Review

Just more than one year ago, United Faculty of Florida leaders and organizers launched a campaign to protect faculty rights.

At the start of the 2002-03 academic year, UFF project staff circulated collective bargaining authorization cards on all 11 campuses. More than two-thirds of faculty affirmed their support for the union and the protections guaranteed by a contract.

As a result of that campaign, the administrations at seven of the 11 universities voluntarily recognized UFF, clearing the way for the union to negotiate a new faculty contract.

Faculty on two campuses, Florida State University and the University of West Florida, showed overwhelming support for the union and collective bargaining in decisive elections last spring. That means faculty at nine universities currently have collective bargaining representation.

Despite the progress made statewide to preserve faculty rights during the past year, there's still work to do.

"It's absolutely essential that we continue to increase UFF membership," said UFF statewide president Tom Auxter. "The union's ability to protect the rights we've won is tied directly to the strength of our membership."

### Here's What's Happening

## On your Campus

**University of Central Florida** became the first university to receive voluntary recognition last January. UCF has assembled a bargaining team and has begun contract negotiations.

**New College** was voluntarily recognized last February and may become the first university to reach a new agreement.

**University of North Florida** received voluntary recognition last February. Contract negotiations are ongoing.

**Florida Gulf Coast University** was voluntarily recognized last March. FGCU is holding its first formal bargaining session as the *United Faculty of Florida Update* goes to press.

**Florida A&M University** was voluntarily recognized the union last March. Bargaining has yet to begin at FAMU, due to internal disputes among the administration.

**University of South Florida** was voluntarily recognized last March and is in the midst of contract negotiations.

**University of West Florida** faculty showed overwhelming support for the union during a June election. UWF is involved in contract negotiations.

**Florida State University** reaffirmed UFF as the faculty union in a decisive election in October. FSU had an encouraging pre-bargaining consultation with the university president and administration. The parties may employ an interest-based approach to bargaining.

**Florida International University** is awaiting a decision from the Public Employees Relations Commission (PERC) on whether chairs will be included in the bargaining unit. Because voluntary recognition is expected to be granted when this issue is decided, the bargaining team has been preparing for immediate negotiations.

**Florida Atlantic University's** chapter of UFF is the newest university to grant voluntary recognition following the settlement of a dispute over the composition of the unit.

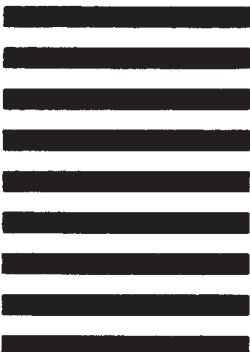
**University of Florida** faces several obstacles on the road to union representation. The administration seems to be doing all it can to frustrate, delay and stall bargaining, despite the fact that 70 percent of faculty supported the union during the card authorization campaign last year. The strategy of the outgoing president is to inflate the traditional unit by including faculty who have never been represented by UFF in hopes of undermining the union. Support is growing in those units as departmental representatives talk to their colleagues of the benefits of union representation.



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(“Standardized Testing,” from page 3)

Every chapter of the faculty union, side by side with every faculty senate in the SUNY system, passed a vote of no confidence in the trustees for taking this action, as reported in the *New York Times* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

This unprecedented show of faculty solidarity caused the board to slow down in implementing its agenda. After the no confidence votes, the faculty on each campus were consulted as to which courses were considered appropriate for the general education curriculum.

Unfortunately, the SUNY trustees didn't learn their lesson. They again are trying to impose university-wide standardized testing at SUNY that is designed to measure the “value-added” that students learn from their general education courses.

But faculty members don't buy it. They see this as an attempt to generate so-called “objective” data that could be used to identify (and take funding from) “failing” courses and programs. If this occurs, union and faculty leaders may again have to join together to teach the trustees that faculty members are the proper stewards of the curriculum.

New York faculty took a stand against a political agenda that was being imposed that threatened to change the nature of higher education and corrupt the nature of what universities do.

No university is opposed to testing or accountability by recognized accreditation agencies that are qualified to evaluate universities.

Universities are not avoiding authentic evaluation. On the con-

trary, Florida universities have done very well on these evaluations, in spite of the extreme shortage of essential resources.

Moreover, testing is a tradition in the universities. In fact, testing always has been used to help determine the quality of what universities do. Students who do not pass tests or who fail to produce something that is the practical equivalent do not go forward.

Traditionally tests are based on a specialized course of study designed by a professor with the expertise necessary to lead students (with whom the professor is actually in contact) through relevant material. Then professors examine students to see if they have reached a level of achievement that merits recognition and credit.

But the conservative political forces behind recent cries for accountability are seeking to introduce a different kind of testing than any of the examinations universities themselves devise.

University testing should be based on the expertise of professionals who have personal contact with the students and who are best qualified to determine what constitutes academic success.

Nevertheless, conservative political forces are moving to impose tests that come from outside of the

universities to determine whether the same resources will be fully allocated to universities in the future.

Is there a danger of a political takeover of the universities in Florida? If the board of trustees at a particular university does not like controversial theater performances, they can stop them directly. Otherwise, the Legislature may stop funding the budget (partially or totally) if a university continues to use resources to “promote” values contrary to what legislators believe is right.

Academic freedom is “a wasteland,” so said Education Commissioner Charlie Crist three years ago, and it is the responsibility of legislators to discipline academicians if they go outside of the bounds of decency.

Faculty across the nation who read about what's happening in Florida universities in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* will know that if they accept a job here, they have entered a danger zone for academic freedom. In Florida, politics rule.

There is an agenda behind the current move in Florida to introduce politically-charged governance and standardized testing into the universities. Faculty need to organize or be prepared to live with the results. ■

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Tom Auxter, UFF president

Charter member, AFT, Princeton, 1938

ALBERT EINSTEIN

"... to protect [our] own economic status and . . . to secure [our] influence in the political field."



For updates, documents and other UFF information, visit us online at [www.unitedfacultyofflorida.org](http://www.unitedfacultyofflorida.org)

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## How Does Collective Bargaining Protect You?

When significant budget cuts loom on the horizon, education funding becomes a target. In fact, there have been times when lawmakers proposed eliminating annual pay raises for faculty—those WHO ARE NOT protected by a collective bargaining contract.

In 1992, when lawmakers threatened to cancel pay raises although a contract was in effect, United Faculty of Florida took them to court.

The state Supreme Court ruled that

eliminating pay raises for employees under the protection of a collective bargaining contract was unlawful!

UFF believes it's wrong to balance the state budget at the expense of university faculty.

The collective bargaining agent for Florida's higher education employees for more than 25 years, UFF is committed to protecting your rights.

Protect your job, your family and your future. Join the United Faculty of Florida! We'll help you weather the storm.

