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United Faculty of Florida Update

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Union Busting at UF Attracts National Attention

Anti-union tactics reported in national higher ed news

The hidden agenda behind anti-union actions at the University of Florida (UF) is to strip faculty of collective bargaining rights and to eliminate the faculty contract, according to a report in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

The union-busting tactics used by the UF administration are described in detail in "Union Blues in the Sunshine State," an article in the April 2 issue of *The Chronicle*, one of the nation's oldest and most prestigious periodicals covering higher education news.

The publication has called national attention to the attempts by the university's Board of Trustees and administration to wipe out the faculty union, while claiming that they are pursuing excellence and acting on principle.

The faculty union, United Faculty of Florida (UFF), has been fighting to defend the faculty contract and collective bargaining rights since oversight of the state's 11 public universities went from a statewide body to local boards of

trustees on each campus nearly three years ago. That change forced the union to reestablish itself as the collective bargaining representative on each campus in order to continue negotiating faculty contracts.

More than two-thirds of the faculty across the state signed cards designating the union as the bargaining agent with the new boards of trustees. As a result, the boards on eight campuses voluntarily recognized the union, while the boards at two campuses forced elections to confirm the union as bargaining agent. Faculty on both campuses voted overwhelmingly for UFF representation (91 percent at the University of West Florida and 96 percent at Florida State University).

The University of Florida remains the only campus in the state to deny faculty rights by delaying a vote and pursuing an active strategy of decertification. All the while, the board of trustees has contended they are not running an anti-union campaign.

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UFF Defeats Proposal To Increase Health Care Costs for Faculty

Florida university faculty will not experience an estimated 25-percent increase in health care costs, thanks to the actions of the United Faculty of Florida (UFF).

UFF, the union representing Florida faculty for nearly 27 years, fought attempts by the Bush administration to impose a "cost shift" in the employee health benefit plan that would have increased premium shares, co-pays, co-insurance costs and deductibles for the second year in a row. Opposition from UFF and other state employee unions forced lawmakers to reconsider their plans during the 2004 legislative session. Health insurance costs will remain the same for faculty.

In another development, the Legislature enacted nonrecurring, one-time bonus payments of \$1,000

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Faculty Opposition Forces Board of Governors To Withdraw Standardized Testing Proposal

Tremendous resistance from faculty and the public to proposals to impose standardized testing in Florida's universities forced administrators to come up with a new plan.

And they have.

In yet another turn on the non-stop political roller coaster designed for Florida faculty, administrators will require "academic compacts" as a means of achieving so-called faculty accountability.

The Board of Governors dropped the idea of standardized testing and decided on the academic compacts instead at its April meeting.

What are academic compacts?

While the language defining what "academic compacts" are appears to be deliberately vague, the general idea is that individual departments and colleges must create a long list of skills, facts and theories that all students in a particular major are expected to learn before they graduate.

When students complete their majors after four years, departments then must certify that students have mastered every detail of the posted requirements.

This new demand that faculty prove that students have learned what they're supposed to learn after four years represents another layer of bureaucracy.

What are the consequences?

Universities with departments and colleges that do not meet this new criteria—once it is in effect—may lose up to 10 percent of their

funding as a result of failure to be accountable to state officials. This new requirement takes effect next year, officials say.

Ultimately, universities will have to prove that they deserve every penny the state provides. This is the response of Florida's lawmakers to the crisis in financing higher education in a state that ranks last or next to last in the nation in per-capita funding for the last four to six years.

Critics point out that this new, and time-consuming, requirement is not necessary. Departments already have elaborate requirements that make sense to those with expertise in the various academic disciplines.

Furthermore, programs are carefully evaluated by accrediting agencies that are equipped to measure success. What sense does it make to have accountability mean something different from the established measures?

Why should accountability mean insisting that some arbitrary set of skills and knowledge (taken out of context) should become the new standard by which academic life is evaluated and perhaps transformed?

Protests from faculty and students over the absurdity of standardized tests as an accountability measure forced the Board of Governors to back off. I'm sure it was embarrassing for Gov. Jeb Bush and his political appointees on the board to see the state's newspapers ridiculing the idea of a one-size-fits-all test that



Tom Auxter
UFF president

would determine whether the universities were succeeding. Yet, these officials still are committed to some form of disciplinary action that punishes the universities for what they want to believe is wrong with an education they do not fully understand.

What we are seeing is just the beginning of the meddling that politicians intend to do under the guise of accountability. Their motive is clear: they do not want to be accountable for the failure to adequately fund the universities, so they shift the focus and blame for problems to faculty.

The Board of Governors continues to duck its constitutional duties to approve programs and set priorities for the universities.

Only a strong collective bargaining contract can protect faculty from the evaluation nightmares that are coming. ■

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The Chronicle article provides details of the university’s strategy to decertify the union, which was outlined in a November 2003 e-mail from Michael V. Martin, UF vice president for agriculture. *The Chronicle* reported that Martin’s e-mail confirmed that the president of the university planned to “pack” the bargaining unit before the vote on certification with faculty members who have not had any experience with collective bargaining.

“He believes that, if IFAS (agriculture), the Law School, and the Health Science Center are included in a vote, the chances of rejecting the union are improved. . . So, President Young wants IFAS faculty to vote because he does not

want us or anyone else in the union,” the e-mail is reported to say.

The strategy, devised in consultation with the UF Board of Trustees, is to break the faculty union by expanding the bargaining unit to groups who have never expressed an interest in the union. The university then could call for a vote before full debate on the issue could occur.

The UF Board of Governors is comprised predominantly of conservative political appointees of Gov. Jeb. Bush.

The administration already has started a “captive audience” campaign in the new areas—visiting meetings faculty are required to attend and intimidating the audience with threats about what might happen if the union were elected.

“Their best hope is to stampede the faculty into a ‘no’ vote under conditions of confusion and intimidation,” said Tom Auxter, statewide UFF president and a UF philosophy professor. “But they’ve overlooked the fact the faculty have the power to react against being used as pawns in the game by the Board of Trustees and administration.

“Faculty members are angry about the union-busting strategy and are organizing to overturn the manipulation of the situation. The trustees and administrators seem to think we will be passive while they take away our rights and force us into a rigged election,” Auxter continued. “We are determined to resist their efforts and restore faculty rights at the University of Florida.” ■

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for eligible state employees. Part-time employees are entitled to a prorated bonus payment based on the full-time equivalency of their positions.

UFF is concerned, however, about the implications of the bonus payments, since they have no long-term impact on faculty salaries. As a one-time payment, the bonus does not affect base pay and will not be recognized for pension purposes.

Additionally, the union is apprehensive about how the bonuses will be implemented. It has been reported that the Bush administration plans to categorize nine-month faculty members as part-timers for the purpose of making prorated bonus payments.

As part of the budget adopted by the Legislature, tuition will increase

by 7.5 percent for in-state undergraduates. Tuition for out-of-state and graduate students could increase anywhere from 12.5 percent to 15 percent. The increase amounts will be determined by each board of trustees.

Also, state universities will receive an increase of more than 7 percent over funding levels for fiscal year 2003-2004. Funding for construction and renovation projects totaled \$316.5 million, an increase of approximately \$53 million over last fiscal year.

No funds have been earmarked specifically to address the long-standing faculty salary issues—such as market equity, compression, and inversion.

UFF will attempt to address the salary issue during faculty contract negotiations. On the one campus where agreement has been reached

to date, the union has succeeded at directing a portion of this funding increase to faculty compensation.

Finally, in the pension benefits arena, the most recent actuarial analysis of the Florida Retirement System revealed no need to increase employer contributions for fiscal year 2004-2005.

In other legislative news, the Carey Baker Freedom Flag Act requires all public K-20 institutions in Florida—including universities—to properly display in each classroom a two-foot by three-foot flag of the United States. The Act requires each principal, director, or president to purchase and install flags through donations or fundraising for a period of one year before requesting payment for the flags out of institutional revenue sources. ■

UFF Pushes Tax Reform Amendment To Help Fund Universities

The United Faculty of Florida and its state affiliate are supporting an amendment that would reform the state tax structure to generate revenue for public services, including university funding.

The FAIR (Floridians Against Inequities in Rates) Amendment would eliminate tax exemptions for special interest groups, which could generate an additional \$25 billion in sales tax revenue.

The amendment is seen as a solution to the state budget crunch, which may be difficult to perceive on first glance. But a closer look at our tax structure reveals the true state of our fiscal health.

A faulty system with loopholes, the state tax structure has not been reformed since 1949.

All public services have been affected by the state's insolvency. College and university tuition is on the rise, education growth and new programs are on the down-slide, and the Legislature continues to cut services.

Florida's economic well-being is tied to sales taxes, which should generate sufficient funds for state services. But special interest lobbyists have carved out some 440 sales tax exemptions for their clients.

Restoring the money lost in tax exemptions to special interest groups would go a long way toward

either plugging our budget holes or lowering taxes. But the special interest groups that benefit from tax loopholes have killed any attempts in the Legislature to create a fair tax system.

The FAIR amendment proposal is an attempt to force elected officials to make changes in Florida's tax law. If the FAIR Amendment campaign organizers are able to obtain the required number of signatures and the Supreme Court approves it, the amendment will be on the ballot in November 2004.

For additional information on this proposal or to obtain petition forms visit the web site at www.fairamendment.com. ■

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.

