

Statement of RFUF Board of Directors

November 10, 2021

TO: President Kent Fuchs

The Retired Faculty of the University of Florida (RFUF) Board of Directors is concerned with reports of interference by state politicians and donors in the free speech of faculty as well as in university policy and hiring decisions. This has already resulted in substantial harm to the governance and functioning of the University, the good name of UF in the state and nation, and the wellbeing of students, staff, and the general public.

UF has recently been ranked in the Top 5 of US public universities, accomplishing this after years of dedication to quality teaching, research, and service. Perception that outside actors are manipulating UF's participation in ongoing discussions on health, elections, and civil rights and in faculty hires could certainly yield negative results for all.

While we appreciate that President Fuchs has rescinded the decision to ban professors from testifying in court on voter rights restrictions in Florida, and while we agree with the decision to activate an investigation into the issues, as retired faculty of the University, we question the decision-making process that led to this crisis about academic freedom and political interference. As a state institution, teaching, research, and service must be on behalf of all Floridians, whether or not it serves the specific interests and objectives of the state government or of powerful individuals and interest groups within the state.

Faculty members must have the academic freedom to conduct research, teach, and communicate to the public facts and ideas stemming from their academic explorations and there should be no political interference in university hiring decisions. We are concerned that the composition of the newly created task force to review UF's practice regarding requests for approval of outside activities is unrepresentative of broader faculty and university concerns, and we recommend that as a first step, the task force be expanded to include designees of the UF Senate president and the UFF president.

Carmen Diana Deere (IFAS), RFUF President, 2021-2022

R. Hunt Davis Jr. (CLAS)

John Foltz (IFAS)

Alison Gerencser (Law)

Abraham Goldman (CLAS)

George J. Hochmuth (IFAS)

Pushpa S. Kalra (Medicine)

Saeed R. Khan (Medicine)

James L. Kurtz (Engineering)

Richard Phillips (Libraries)

Robin Poynor (Arts)

Harry B. Shaw (CLAS)

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