

RFUF Statement re Florida House Bill 999

The Board of Directors of the Retired Faculty of the University of Florida is deeply disturbed by proposed Florida HB 999. We take great pride in our contribution to the University having helped elevate it to its current high ranking and national prominence. HB 999 will seriously threaten both faculty recruitment and retention, thus seriously diminishing the university's reputation and the quality of education.

The detrimental elements are: (1) dictating what the faculty can and cannot teach; (2) vesting ultimate faculty hiring decisions to the politically appointed Board of Trustees and (3) giving this Board dominant authority over faculty tenure.

(1) The proposed bill mandates a "curriculum that promotes citizenship in a constitutional republic," the vagueness of which could promote questionable requirements for instructional content in numerous areas. It explicitly dictates that the university must "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 constitutional right.

(2) 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 has the potential to politicize hiring and undermine or eliminate faculty input, thus leaving hiring decisions to an academically unqualified board and threatening the principles and practices through which institutional excellence is achieved and maintained. The professional credential of prospective hires is best evaluated by those who have the most experience and knowledge in their fields through peer review.

(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 tenure and instill a climate of uncertainty throughout the university, potentially deterring high-quality faculty from accepting a position and encouraging current faculty to accept offers from universities in other states.

Through its assault on academic freedom, hiring, and tenure, the passage of HB 999 will negatively impact the quality of the faculty and of education and the national and international standing of UF. It will certainly undermine the ability of the university to maintain its current ranking. The decline in the university's ranking and reputation resulting from adoption of this bill is likely to be far more rapid and precipitous than was its long ascent.

Signed by Board Members, Retired Faculty of the University of Florida:

President Saeed R. Khan, President-Elect Barbara McDade Gordon, Past President Carmen Diana Deere, Secretary George Hochmuth, Treasurer Richard H. Davis.

Board Members: Leon Couch, John Foltz, Alison Gerencser, Pushpa Kalra, Jim Kurtz, Lucinda Lavelli, Richard Phillips, Robin Poynor.

The above faculty members are from the Colleges of the Arts, Engineering, Law, Liberal Arts and Sciences, Medicine, the Institute of Food & Agricultural Sciences, and the Library.

The RFUF Statement was sent to relevant members of the Florida Legislature, UF President, President of the United Faculty of Florida. It appeared in the *Florida Times-Union* and *The Gainesville Iguana* newspapers.