

Below is a letter that chapter president John W White sent to Governor Rick Scott in response to the latter's request for feedback on ways to improve our state university system and to reduce costs. The Governor's Office never bothered to acknowledge receipt of the letter, much less provide any response

Governor Rick Scott
Office of the Governor
Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Governor Scott:

John Delaney, the President of our university, forwarded the faculty your message regarding efforts to make the state university system the best it can be for Florida's students. In that letter, you asked that we faculty keep you "apprised of your efforts and any ideas you have to make our colleges and universities even greater and to connect our student with jobs." It is in that spirit that I send you this letter. It is my sincere hope that the contents of this letter actually reaches you and that we might indeed have a dialogue about improving our universities. As faculty who love our work, our students, and the state of Florida, we are sincerely invested in making our universities as strong as possible. Having worked in the SUS system and directly with our most important stakeholders, Florida's college and graduate students, we have many practical ideas that could change our universities for the better.

A frequent mantra of business leaders is, as you well know, that "you get what you pay for." In other words, quality comes at a price. It is clear to all faculty and administrators in the SUS that if we want a top-notch system of higher education in Florida, we all need to invest in this enterprise. Investment in terms of higher education means hiring and retaining the best possible faculty with excellent credentials who know their subject matter and the most recent trends and issues within their fields. To successfully recruit and to keep these faculty, we must offer competitive salaries, ample opportunities to conduct research to stay current in their respective fields, and opportunities to develop ever more modalities for reaching and teaching their students. Similarly, we need to ensure that Florida's college students get the kind of personalized attention that they want and need. This means smaller class sizes and frequent interactions with faculty. It means guaranteeing that universities consistently and frequently provide a broad array of required courses. It means taking extra steps and offering individualized educational opportunities for students who have unique needs and come from nontraditional contexts (working parents, career changers, former military, self-funded students, etc.).

Of course, all of these things cost significant amounts of money. These costs can only be met by two sources of revenue: state tax monies to higher education (SUS Education and General funding) or increased tuition. I am certain that you agree

with Florida's SUS faculty that the costs of high-quality higher education should not be born solely or even primarily by our students (who too often graduate college with burdensome student debt) or by their parents. If education is to be an avenue toward greater social and economic equity for all of Florida's students, we cannot unfairly burden students and their families with ever-higher costs of tuition and fees. We similarly should not encourage our graduates to take jobs elsewhere in order to earn enough starting salary to be able to pay their student loans. Thus we are left with one option: increased state-support for the SUS. The institutions of the state university system desperately need the Florida legislature and your office to allocate additional funds to our universities across the board as well as in a manner that is not disproportionately punitive for some institutions and their students (as is the current system via the Board of Governors' matrices).

Faculty in the SUS see these costs as investments rather than expenditures. As you suggest in your letter and have stated on numerous occasions, our long-term welfare is highly related to our current investments. Businesses require long-term investments if they are to grow and prosper. Higher education is no different. If we invest in higher education now, the state and its citizens will undoubtedly reap tremendous benefits in the near future. Conversely, if we continue to try to cut costs (e.g., by using increasing numbers of adjunct faculty, by failing to fill vacated faculty positions, by relying on distance learning, by cutting course offerings, by increasing class sizes and faculty loads, etc.) we do our students and ultimately the state of Florida a terrible disservice. Examining the strongest state university systems across the nation, it is clear that the states with the best public options for higher education are also the states that provide the most funding to their universities.

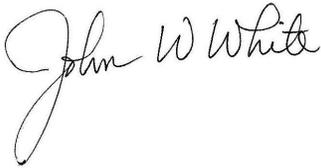
With that said, my fellow faculty members and I do have practical (and insider) ideas for how to reduce some of the costs of higher education. Florida's university faculty have noted with dismay, for example, that while our numbers have remained stagnant or even declined over the past decade, the number of university administrators (with salaries that far trump those of faculty) has grown exponentially. Why do universities need ever more vice presidents to oversee fewer faculty and programs? Why does such a great percentage of SUS salary money go to administration (at my university roughly 40% of the salary pool goes toward administrators' salaries)? Why do we at UNF have four full time attorneys and still pay an outside attorney \$250,000 a year to conduct contract negotiations? Do not misunderstand: I know that the vast majority of my colleagues in university administration do an excellent job. My concern is not with administrators' motives or the quality of their work; rather my concern – and that of my colleagues – relates to the need for so many administrators at so high a price. Administrative costs (and growth in their ranks) is but one of the major costs that we question (we also question why all of the SUS institutions are charged with creating distance education programs to compete with each other; we question why the state college system has been allowed to create degree programs that compete with those of the SUS). The point is, we have ideas for improving our students' experiences and for reducing costs. Unfortunately, we have thus far been largely ignored by the state legislature,

by your office, and by the Board of Governors.

I know that my colleagues and I would welcome a thorough and honest discussion about how to improve the state university system to make it comparable to those of North Carolina, California, Virginia, Texas, and other large states with strong systems of higher education. We are happy to share our ideas and our experiences with you and your staff. All we need is an invitation and assurances that our ideas will be heard and considered.

We all want what is best for our students and the state of Florida. We love what we do and we are fortunate in that we can see the tangible benefits that come from quality instruction in the SUS. We recognize, however, that our students deserve more than we are able to offer with our severely restricted funding.

Genuinely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Wesley White". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

John Wesley White, Ph.D.
College of Education and Human Services
University of North Florida

President, United Faculty of Florida (UNF Chapter)