

Florida's students and families don't need their government to tell them which classes they can take, which degrees they can complete, or what kinds of campus activities they can engage in. The Constitutional rights promised to all Americans do not come with an asterisk that says "unless Gov. DeSantis disagrees with you." All Floridians, of all political affiliations, should be outraged by these efforts to curtail speech, belief and association in our state's higher education system.

Unfortunately, we see that once again Gov. DeSantis and his cronies in Tallahassee are focused on spreading lies and misinformation about Florida's colleges and universities, when they instead could be focused on helping. The United Faculty of Florida stand in lock-step opposition to any and all so-called "reforms" that will actually destroy our state's world-class degree programs and their ability to serve our students. We will not allow Florida's future to be sacrificed for cheap political points.

Simply put: "Indoctrination" is not occurring in college and university classrooms, and if it were, someone — anyone — would have been able to provide at least one example. Gov. DeSantis's lack of examples and his emphasis on "zombie studies," which also does not exist, show that truth is not on his lips when he speaks of Florida's colleges and universities. The millions of students, faculty, staff and their families who benefit from our state's higher education system deserve better. They deserve hope. They deserve truth.

And here's a healthy dose of truth — defunding diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programs will make it more difficult for first-generation college students, veterans, students with disabilities, and more to enroll in classes and complete degrees in Florida; the false boogymen of evil DEI programs and coordinators will be used to attack everyday Floridians who have no dog in the governor's fight with all things non-white, male or Christian. The words themselves, "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion," show that these programs are not just about race; they are about ensuring that **everyone** has fair and equal access to Florida's higher education classrooms.

One more dose of truth — cutting world-class experts out of interviewing and hiring decisions, handing tenure over to political appointees with no experience in the fields they are evaluating, and giving campus presidents like Ben Sasse — who, as a lifelong politician from Nebraska, could not determine a qualified candidate in any given field if it rose up and bit him on the ankle — can only tank Florida's colleges and universities. I remember when being the governor of Florida meant improving our state's higher education system, rather than demolishing it. Unfortunately, those good times are far behind us as long as Gov. DeSantis remains at the helm.

We cannot allow politics to overtake good sense, good policy and best practice. We cannot allow authoritarianism to force tax-paying Floridians out of our public higher education system. We cannot stand by idly while a tyrant destroys our state's future. UFF will fully oppose every step of this so-called "reform" program that actively harms our colleges and universities, and we will do so because we care about **all** Floridians.

In Solidarity with all Floridians,

Andrew Gothard, Ph.D.
UFF President

**The Higher Education Affiliate of Florida Education Association, National Education Association,
American Federation of Teachers, and AFL-CIO**