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# United Faculty of Florida *Update*

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## Standardized Testing in the Universities: Has the Nightmare Ended?

**O**verwhelming faculty and public opposition may have halted—at least temporarily—plans to impose standardized testing on university students.

Nearly a year ago, Gov. Jeb Bush and state Education Commissioner Jim Horne sought to make Florida the first state in the nation to introduce comprehensive assessment tests (like the FCATs) into universities. Such a test, proponents suggest, would measure whether university students were learning anything as a result of instruction.

Opponents of standardized testing in higher education argue that a parallel goal is to punish, financially, universities if students did not perform well on standardized tests.

In recent months, however, strong opposition to the proposal for comprehensive assessment tests—from faculty, the public and students—has surfaced on campus and in the media.

“What we don’t need is yet another layer of testing that assumes that a college education is a college education, regardless of whether you’re majoring in studio art or economics or nursing,”

said Jack Fiorito, United Faculty of Florida statewide vice president. “There are different subjects, and there ought to be specialized testing in those fields—guided by the faculty and other experts in that field, not by some standardized one-size-fits-all test.”

Resistance to the idea of standardized testing seemingly has forced supporters, like university Board of Governors (BOG) member Steve Uhlfelder, to back down—at least for now.

An outspoken advocate of the proposed accountability testing, Uhlfelder reportedly represents two well-known for-profit testing companies: Pearson International, which administers the FCATs in the state’s K-12 public schools, and Kaplan, which prepares university students for tests. Recently, Uhlfelder has begun to distance himself from the idea of FCATs in universities.

During the March meeting of the Performance and Accountability Committee—established by the BOG, Uhlfelder reportedly stated that he “was not interested in any kind of FCAT test.” The issue of tests is “dead. I have given up tests,” he said.

Uhlfelder had proposed testing university students, using an instru-

ment similar to the SAT, to measure achievement levels before and after university instruction so that legislators could determine the “value” of education received in the state’s public higher education institutions.

Those tests would be administered by for-profit companies. Academicians have said such a plan would, in effect, replace academic standards of quality with business standards of efficiency as the ultimate arbiter for public decision-making in higher education.

Tying university funding to test scores was one of the most disturbing components of the proposed standardized testing.

“From the beginning, UFF has been opposed to the idea of tying funding to standardized testing of university students,” said Tom Auxter, UFF President. UFF represents faculty statewide.

Student leaders also reject the idea of testing. “The students of Florida do not support testing,” said Clayton Solomon, BOG student representative. “It’s another burden.”

“Only a union contract can protect faculty from the impact of these proposals on our professional employment,” Auxter noted. ■

## Politicians Threaten Integrity of Higher Education

The governor and the majority of legislators in Tallahassee who carry out his agenda and enact his budget are seriously underfunding higher education, in general, and universities, in particular.

The results are a matter of record.

Florida ranks last, or next to last, in four of the past six years in funding for higher education. Simply divide the number of dollars provided by the number of citizens in the state.

Florida is near the bottom in national rankings every year. (Sourcebook for State and Local Government)

When politicians are pressed for explanations of this record, they either claim the most recent budget provides increases (which is true), or they claim that educators are not sufficiently accountable (which is false).

When they claim that there have been budget increases, they ignore the fact that increases in inflation, operating expenses and enrollment more than cancel out the increases.

When they claim that money can be saved in the education budget if only educators were more accountable for the money received and the work performed, they are speaking out of ignorance—or to be more precise—self-willed ignorance.

As a matter of fact, the additional money budgeted for universities this year does not take us beyond the spending levels in 1999, and this does not even adjust for the dramatic increases in enrollments.

Worse yet, students are made to pay (through tuition increases) for most of the budget increases. At the same time, legislators extend hundreds of millions of dollars in new tax breaks to the wealthiest Floridians.

In effect, the governor and legislators are giving real assistance to those who already have made it in life, while punishing the next generation that is trying to make it. This is not only a mean-spirited thing to do to students. It is extremely short-sighted, because an educated workforce produces more tax revenue in the future.

Why is this happening?

The truth is that future taxpayers do not make political contributions. And that is why politicians are supporting those who least need help, namely, those who have the ability to pay for political campaigns now.

Students suffer from being frozen out of classes they need to take because there isn't enough money to open new sections. The classes they take are packed to the limits, and their need for attention and guidance in courses cannot be met fully under these conditions. For that matter, students cannot even transfer to other courses (if they find a subject is not best suited to their needs), because there will be no class openings elsewhere.

Faculty suffer because they cannot do what they have dedicated their lives to do: teach students, conduct research and provide essential services in a climate and under con-



**Tom Auxter**  
UFF president

ditions that allow these activities to be effective. In fact, the extreme shortage of funds means that every department has half to two-thirds of the specialists needed to cover all the areas in a discipline that should be taught.

The result is that the focus of teaching and research efforts is lost when faculty are called upon to teach courses outside their areas of specialization in order to cover what is necessary for a department to offer. This compromises what faculty can achieve and cheats students.

If all of this is not bad enough, the governor and key legislators have a “devious plan” to divert attention from their irresponsibility by introducing “accountability” measures to help them determine whether universities and faculty are doing the job of educating students properly.

The idea of standardized tests for university students to determine whether they have learned anything—to justify the legislative in-

# Legislative Update:

## The Higher Education Budget “Shell-game” Continues in the State Legislature

vestment in their educations—is laughable for two reasons. First, universities already are endlessly evaluated to ensure quality, and a superficial, one-size-fits-all standardized test is not the most effective means for measuring performance. Second, deficiencies in a university education are due primarily to the fact that politicians fail to fund our institutions sufficiently to provide instruction adequate to meet students’ needs.

Concentrating on improvements in test scores and then tying those scores to university funding merely compounds the problem.

The failure rests on the shoulders of politicians, not educators. The lack of accountability of politicians to the citizens of our state is the real problem with higher education in Florida. Politicians need to accept responsibility for their dismal record in failing to adequately fund higher education.

What can faculty do to turn this situation around?

Faculty can become politically active in this election year, since many legislators are up for reelection. We also can lobby legislators (particularly those seek reelection) for the increase we so desperately need. Contact UFF leaders on your campus to become a part of a movement for change.

Faculty can organize on their campuses to build the strength of the union by recruiting new members. A strong faculty union gives us a greater voice in negotiations and in our state Legislature.

Success in negotiating a strong contract that protects faculty is directly proportional to the strength and involvement of the membership. We increase our clout as we increase our numbers and the scope of operations.

By uniting as a faculty, we can change our world. ■

### Budget Woes

As of this writing, the Florida House and Senate budgets had passed their respective houses and were ready for conference negotiations, which were to begin the week of April 12.

Negotiations are expected to be completed by April 30, the official session end date. Once approved by both houses, the budget will be sent to the governor for approval.

Even with increases in both the House and Senate proposals (\$61 million and \$152 million, respectively) for 2004-05, the budgets fail to make up for years of fiscal neglect.

Funding levels are not sufficient to meet increased demands on the system—including growth in student enrollment, salary increases and inflation, UFF leaders say.

Nearly half of the proposed funding increase comes from hikes in tuition and fees, including a 7.5 percent increase this year. If the proposal is approved, tuition will have increased some 39 percent over the past five years.

State funding for Florida’s public universities has decreased by more than \$484 million since 1990. A Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) study of their 16 affiliated states from 1995 to 2000 showed an average increase of \$40 in funding for higher education, after inflation. Florida lost \$349 to inflation from 1995 to 2000. Only Alabama and Tennessee fared worse among the SREB states.

Last year, funding for Florida universities dropped by \$20 million in appropriations for educational

and general activities, which was offset by an 8.5-percent mandatory tuition increase for all students. Universities also charged an additional 6.5 percent for out-of-state and graduate students. Further, no funds were added for new enrollments. In 2003-04, more than 16,400 students were unfunded.

Past budget cuts, coupled with skyrocketing enrollments, have added to the crisis in our 11 public universities. Funding per student in 2003-04 was 16 percent lower than it was four years ago and less than it was two decades ago.

The results: fewer faculty and support staff to serve students, increased class sizes and decreased course offerings. Library subscriptions and purchases have decreased. Building maintenance and renovations are deferred. Universities are unable to build or expand classrooms, laboratories and education facilities.

### Attack on Academic Freedom

Sen. Nancy Argenziano (R-Crystal River) introduced SB 1670, which would require community college students to take general education credit hours in Civics instruction that focuses on American national government. The bill passed in the Senate Education Committee, but stalled after objections raised by UFF and college faculty. An identical bill, HB 709, was introduced in the House by Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-Palm Harbor). The union believes the bills infringe on the academic freedom of faculty to set curriculum. ■

Albert Einstein  
Charter member, AFT, Princeton, 1938



"... to protect [our] own economic status and . . . to secure [our] influence in the political field."

For updates, documents and other UFF information, visit us online at [www.unitedfacultyofflorida.org](http://www.unitedfacultyofflorida.org)

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## 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.

