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# United Faculty of Florida COMMUNITY COLLEGE UPDATE

**November, 2006**

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## Broward Faculty Protest Board Actions

Today a board of trustees appointed by Governor Jeb Bush is challenging faculty standards and principles in ways faculty have never seen before.

**F**aculty at Broward Community College know from experience that an active and involved union membership translates into successful collective bargaining. Beginning with the first contract twenty-five years ago, the key to a long string of contract victories has been an activist leadership with strong support from a large majority of faculty who join the union. With membership as high as 80%, the negotiated salary raises have been as high as 10 and 11% in the early years of collective

bargaining, and BCC faculty were among the first in the state to see contractual protections for principles faculty care about most.

Today a board of trustees appointed by Gov. Jeb Bush is challenging faculty standards and principles in ways faculty have never seen before – either at Broward or elsewhere in the state. These challenges range from reneging on a contract negotiated last summer to micro-managing academic and administrative decision-making to interfering in the faculty hiring process.

But Broward faculty are rising to the challenge. Faculty pickets and demonstrations have been covered by all the south Florida newspapers and by television crews. The board's mistreatment of faculty is always the theme.

On October 12th



Tom Green, who is both the UFF President and the Faculty Senate President at BCC, speaks to Channel 10 about the crisis in the College.

faculty wore caps and gowns at a picket outside the college. Tom Green, a geography professor and faculty union president, told Channel 10, "The faculty has already voted to accept the contract and quite frankly, I would rather be spending my time worrying about students than trying to get a contract so that I know what my pay will be and what my rights are as a faculty member."

Tom Brooks, the attorney for UFF, is prepared to file an Unfair Labor Practice with the Public Employees

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UFF-BCC Treasurer Lorenzo Harrison talks with Chancellor David Armstrong on the picket line at a Board meeting, before Armstrong addresses the Board on its proper role. In the background are UFF State President Tom Auxter and UFF-BCC Vice President Catherine Leisek, after speaking with the Chancellor about the problem.

*photograph by Jim Lansing*

Relations Commission, if the board does not place the agreement on its agenda for a vote at an open meeting. Steven Weinberger, the UFF Executive Director, states that faculty now have grounds for court action as well, with the potential for damages to be collected, because the Board met secretly to decide to back out of the agreement signed with the administration. This violates collective bargaining and Sunshine laws, which require a public meeting for a ratification vote.

On October 19, the BCC Faculty Senate voted unanimously for a motion of no confidence in the board. Tom Green, who is the Faculty Senate President, as well as the UFF president, wrote a letter outlining the Senate's motion to David

Armstrong, the Chancellor of the Florida Community College System. The letter states the objections to the Board's micromanagement and mistreatment of employees.

"We believe that the appropriate role of a college's Board of Trustees is to establish policy for the institution. The BCC Board

**Broward faculty are rising to the challenge. Faculty pickets and demonstrations have been covered by all the south Florida newspapers and by television crews.**

is now actively involved in the day-to-day operations of the college. Further, we believe that the Board

should not be directly involved in the hiring procedures of the College, nor should they be directly involved in curricula and related academic affairs.... This Board has treated all faculty, administrators, and professional technical staff in a harsh and unprofessional manner. As a result, employee morale at the College is extremely low."

The letter concludes with a request for the Chancellor: "SACS emphasizes the division of the responsibilities of a board and a college president. The Faculty Senate encourages you to communicate to the Board the appropriate role of a Board of Trustees in the operation of a college and to emphasize the need for this Board to follow that model."

Other unions in the area are now joining the demonstrations as protests against the board grow in size and intensity. The Broward Teachers Union and the Broward Educational Paraprofessionals joined United Faculty of Florida outside the board meeting on October 25<sup>th</sup> and led the chant of the picketers: "What do we

want? A contract! When do we want it? Now!" Students supplied water for those marching with signs and joined in the chant. Later, when the picketers walked into the board room with signs demanding a contract, several administrators and staff members clapped.

The South Florida Sun-Sentinel reported a statement by Catherine Leisek, a fine arts professor and the union's vice president: "We're constantly battling with the board. The board should be supporting the faculty."

In the background has been an on-going conflict between board members and the college president, who signed the contract with the faculty in July and shook hands on it.

**"We're constantly battling with the board. The board should be supporting the faculty."**  
*Catherine Leisek, UFF-BCC Vice President  
South Florida Sun-Sentinel , October 13, 2006*

The president finally resigned at the October 25 meeting after experiencing resistance from the board on a variety of issues. Faculty and their contract have been caught in the crossfire coming from the board.

UFF state president Tom Auxter, who joined the picketing at board meetings, told the Miami Herald: The behavior of board members, holding faculty hostage in a conflict with the president of the college, is disrespectful toward faculty. UFF has over twenty contracts between faculty and boards

across the state, and nothing like this has happened. "This really is unprecedented."

At the end of the meeting, the chair of the five-member board, Levi Williams, spoke directly to Tom Green and promised to deal with the issue at the next meeting on November 25<sup>th</sup>. He said he wanted everyone at Broward to be treated like "family."

The meeting will be held at 1:00pm in the BCC Downtown Center, 111 E. Las Olas Blvd.; in Fort Lauderdale.

Faculty Salary Increases in Collective Bargaining at Community Colleges 2006-07	
Brevard CC	4.0%
Edison College	4.0%
Hillsborough CC	5.0%
Fla CC at Jacksonville	3.0% plus a workload reduction valued at approx. 2.0%
Pensacola Jr. College	4.0%
Palm Beach CC	4.0% For 2007-08 & 2008-09 ; 5.0% each year

## Faculty Win Legislative Races in Florida

Both faculty members running for the Florida House of Representatives won in the November 2006 elections. Bill Heller (University of South Florida) and Keith Fitzgerald (New College) were elected to seats from the St. Petersburg and Sarasota areas respectively. Both are members of United Faculty of Florida and received strong support from UFF colleagues across the state.

UFF president Tom Auxter states, "This victory is testimony to the personal qualities of two faculty members who reached out to citizens to explain the crisis we face in education in this state. Their tireless efforts to translate what they know about the dimensions of the problem into terms making sense to each constituency show what faculty can do to influence politics when they are committed to the task."

"In the early stages of the process both Bill Heller and Keith Fitzgerald enlisted the help of their colleagues to frame the message and build support for their campaigns," Auxter continues. "UFF members rose to the challenge, talked with the

**"This is just the beginning of what faculty are ready to do to address the crisis in funding and quality affecting higher education."**

*Tom Auxter, UFF President*

candidates about issues, and spread the word about what was needed to elect candidates who understand the seriousness of the problems. We did more than endorse the candidates. We expanded the base of support for them in Florida. We are proud of them for their incredible achievement in forcefully, convincingly, and effectively articulating what faculty care about most."

"This is just the beginning of what faculty are ready to do to address the crisis in funding and quality affecting higher education," he concluded. "We are drafting model legislation to end the exploitation of part-time and contingent faculty that makes life impossible for the professionals who teach in our classrooms and damages the learning experience for students. We are lobbying for salary structures that do not have the effect of driving faculty away from Florida. And we

are making the case in every forum that the burden of debt placed on the next generation – forced to take out loans for a public higher education provided to previous generations without any comparable burden – is morally unacceptable and easy to remedy with adequate funding for our institutions."

In a related development, a former Broward Community College faculty member, Debbie Wasserman-Schultz, who was elected with UFF support to both the Florida House and the Florida Senate in past elections, was re-elected by voters in the Fort Lauderdale area to the U.S. House of Representatives.

# UFF From the President

## Florida Outlaws Faculty Teaching and Research in Five Countries

At the end of the 2006 legislative session, Governor Jeb Bush signed a bill that prevents faculty from teaching or conducting research in so-called “terrorist states.” The bill effectively shuts down all educational activities in Cuba, Syria, Iran, North Korea, and the Sudan. These are the countries currently listed by the Department of State as “state sponsors of terrorism.”

The bill, [“Travel to Terrorist States,”](#) specifically prohibits any use of state funds “to implement, organize, direct, coordinate, or administer activities related to, or involving, travel to a terrorist state.” The legislative language not only prohibits the use of state funds for academic travel; it also

**“The bill is counterproductive because ignorance is counterproductive.”**

prohibits the use of outside grants because state funds would be required to process the grant by a university or community college.

The sponsor of the bill, Rep. David Rivera (R-Miami), said that faculty could still find private donors to sponsor travel as long as funds are not processed through a Florida higher education institution. But even assuming that a professor has a multi-millionaire friend willing to sponsor this research, there is still a problem. To get credit from the institution for the completed research, it would require the use of state administered funds for recognition of “activities related to or involving travel.”

Filling out an annual activities report and asking for official recognition of work completed, which involves use of state supported time and materials, could be a criminal act, even if a professor conducted and wrote up the reported research on private time and at private expense.

Because almost all private colleges and



Tom Auxter  
UFF State President

universities accept some form of financial aid from the State of Florida, they fall under the bill too and are specifically included in the legislation. The travel ban so completely rules out teaching and research by Florida faculty in the countries named that journalists have dubbed this phenomenon [“Florida Isolationism.”](#)

What are the immediate effects of the bill? The list of research and teaching activities terminated by this new Florida law is not finished yet, but we already know enough to assess the damage.

- This law brings to an end research in marine biology on the coral reefs between Miami and Cuba. Why are the coral reefs dying? How are development patterns affecting the reefs? What changes would make a difference in protecting the reefs? Jeb Bush and the Legislature decided we do not need to know. As a result, the conservation efforts to protect biological diversity, which depend on this research and hold the potential for benefiting the United States and Cuba, as well as other parts of the world, come to an end.
- On July 1<sup>st</sup>, all scientific research in the region on climate change, the spread of disease, the effects of oil spills, and agricultural productivity, among other things, was abruptly terminated. Researchers had to scramble to collect all data and records and shut down operations within thirty days, as Science reported. (Science Magazine, Vol. 312 6/6/06)
- Longitudinal studies of the causes and effects of migration patterns,

requiring interviews across generations and spanning decades, are suddenly destroyed by politicians. The University of Florida, which has the largest collection in the world on Cuban history and documents, must immediately shut down operations that build its collection.

- At the Cuban Research Institute at Florida International University, where forty faculty members study Cuban and Cuban-American issues, research has become impossible.
- Archeological research in the five named countries must be abandoned, which means that the sites will be looted, and the research destroyed.
- Faculty cannot accept a Fulbright Fellowship or foundation grant if the country is listed by the State Department at the

time the grant is offered.

- Every time a national administration decides there are political goals to be served by adding new countries to the list, destruction of the magnitude we see now in Florida will reoccur. Florida becomes a political minefield for academic projects. As a consequence, Florida sends a message: serious researchers and teachers need not apply.

These are some of the most immediate and visible effects. As bad as these are, the long-term effects are even worse and explain why the academic community is so strongly opposed to the bill.

United Faculty of Florida, which is affiliated with the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, stands opposed to this bill and is preparing for both legal and legislative action. We are not alone. The [American Association of University Professors](#) wrote

**“We live in an age when it is dangerous to rely exclusively on government officials for the truth.”**

a letter to the Governor objecting to the law. The faculty senate at Florida International University joined the [American Civil Liberties Union](#) in filing suit, and the Chancellor for the universities, Mark Rosenberg, is on record as against it. In June the Advisory Council of Faculty Senates, representing all university faculty senates in Florida, voted to join the ACLU suit.

United University Professions, the AFT affiliate in New York, with 30,000 members in the state universities, considered at its annual convention in September the UFF resolution opposing the travel ban. The 350 delegates voted unanimously for the resolution. The council of community colleges represented by AFT in California just passed the same resolution.

When the nine thousand delegates at the convention of the National Education Association were debating the motion in July against the Florida law, which was to pass by a near-unanimous vote, a teacher from Miami who had emigrated from the Soviet Union told me the collapse of Eastern European regimes at the end of the Cold War did not come from military victories, but it

**“Florida is digging its own academic grave with this legislation.”**

came from the realization that a more open way of life was valuable and attainable. This reminded me of a comment made by Chancellor Rosenberg: Even at the height of the Cold War, there were as many scholars teaching and conducting research in the USSR as at any time in that region before or after. Educators see immediately that shutting down the educational process for those who might find something of value in our ways is counterproductive and makes no sense – even if national security is the only value at stake.

The bill is counterproductive because ignorance is counterproductive. It is impossible to understand global and regional challenges to the United States if we isolate ourselves from and remain ignorant about those who challenge us. As a nation we commit ourselves to our own destruction by framing policies for national security based on false assumptions about those we fear. When

we shut down channels of communication, information, and education, we weaken ourselves in relation to others and in relation to our own future viability. Failing to understand the full dimensions of threats to the United States or to the international community does not serve either national or international interests.

The debate over knowledge about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq is the most dramatic and telling example illustrating the thesis that government officials should not be trusted to present the only information citizens receive on an issue. But there is a more subtle point, often emphasized by Sen. Bob Graham, about the intelligence gathered by the Central Intelligence Agency for its reports to the President: a reduction of human intelligence operations in favor of electronic surveillance was a primary cause of the misreading of events leading to the disaster on September 11.

It is worth noting that human intelligence relies heavily on the use of

academic sources generated by research inside countries where there is sentiment against the United States. Whether the research is scientific or historical in nature, it can lead to conclusions that challenge assumptions and prompt a change in policies.

We live in an age when it is dangerous to rely exclusively on government officials for the truth; and it is doubly dangerous to rely on government officials who politicize the process of gathering information and insulate themselves from evidence they do not want to consider. The nation suffers from these miscalculations, and the entire world suffers from the effects when a superpower is on a collision course.

But the value of education is not only in learning more about “the enemy.” It is also a matter

of affecting others in ways that make them less likely to demonize us, less likely to think of us as their enemy, more likely to learn from us, and much more likely to introduce some of our ways into their ways of life. U.S. educators in every country change the images people have of the United States and cause them to be more curious about and open to the freedoms we enjoy.

The government’s contempt for academic freedom and constitutional principles adds to the pernicious effects of this bill and sends even more signals to faculty across the country and the world that Florida is not in their future. Imagine working in a state where politicians tell you what you can and cannot study and teach – a state where they place boundaries on research and

scholarly investigations. Imagine a state where people do not want to know what is currently happening in the countries that concern them most. What will be attractive to educators about moving into a state of ignorance?

Florida is digging its own academic grave with this legislation. The parameters of the mind are smaller here. The horizons of intellectual activity are narrower when we look across the sea from the land of Florida. No wonder journalists call this phenomenon “Florida Isolationism.”

The mindlessness of such policies, in an era of international peril, affects everyone. It is time for educators and citizens to stand up for the value of education.



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**United Faculty of Florida**  
**COMMUNITY COLLEGE**  
**UPDATE**

Visit us on the web at [www.unitedfacultyof florida.org](http://www.unitedfacultyof florida.org)

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