

STUDENT SENATE BILL 2024-1720

TITLE: Graduate, Union, and Institutional Development Enhancement(GUIDE):

Section 2, Volume V: Condemning Anti-Academic Freedom Legislation

AUTHOR(S): Senator Austin Britton, Senator Cassandra Urbenz

SPONSOR(S): Senator Danielle Loftis, Senator Anna Huber, Senator Anusha Chaudhary

WHEREAS the Florida state legislature has spent the previous decade passing several laws aimed at reshaping public higher education in the state of Florida, notably focused on academic freedom, curricular control, shared governance, accountability and oversight, and an inclusive workplace environment [1]; and,

WHEREAS in 2022 through 2024, SB 266, SB 264, SB 864 and HB 7 were notable for their effects on public higher education [2-3]; and,

WHEREAS this legislation regarding academic freedom is not unique to Florida but are occurring in state legislatures across the United States [1]; and,

WHEREAS Graduate Assistants United under the United Faculty of Florida (GAU) and the United Faculty of Florida at the University of Florida (UFF-UF) are the recognized bargaining units for graduate employees and faculty at UF [4-5]; and,

WHEREAS academic freedom is protected by the CBAs of both Graduate Assistants United and the United Faculty of Florida at the University of Florida, inherently tying the fight for improved academic freedom to the higher education labor movement in Florida [4-5]; and,

WHEREAS SB 266 bans colleges and universities in the state from spending money on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs, with notable exceptions for student organizations and to comply with federal laws and regulations [2]; and,

WHEREAS in response to SB 266, the University of Florida fired 13 full-time DEI staff and ended 15 DEI-based appointments [6-7]; and,

WHEREAS the University of Florida also terminated contracts with outside vendors related to DEI [6-7]; and,

WHEREAS the University of Florida Student Government released a statement supporting the individuals fired and an open letter from UF students condemned the "abhorrent changes" resulting from removing these positions [8,27]; and,

WHEREAS the University of Florida Student Senate passed SSB 2023-1051, condemning the passage and effects of SB 266 [9]; and,

WHEREAS following the firing of DEI faculty and staff, the UF Student Senate passed SSB 2024-1088, condemning the effects on DEI communities and resolving to protect these programs and initiatives, recognizing that cutting funding will "prove catastrophic to the survival of many organizations and communities on campus" [10]; and,

WHEREAS prior to SB 266, the University of Florida Student Senate had already passed SSB 2022-1005, SSB 2022-1060, SSB 2023-1016, and others, confirming UF Student Government's continued support for diversity and inclusion initiatives [11-13]; and,

WHEREAS prior to SB 266, the University of Florida Faculty Senate released a resolution supporting academic freedom and noting previous legislation regarding academic freedom by the state legislature through HB 57 and HB 233 [14]; and,

WHEREAS upon the passage of SB 266, institutions such as the University of Miami, the University of South Florida, the University of Rhode Island, the University of Colorado, and the University of Florida Faculty Senate released statements supporting academic freedom in Florida and condemning SB 266 [15-19]; and,

WHEREAS, HB7, known as the Stop WOKE Act, has been condemned by the ACLU as an attempt to "erase America's complex and painful history of racism, oppression, and gender discrimination, which continues to impact our country, our institutions, and our culture" [21]; and,

WHEREAS, HB7 has been identified as a 21st century anti-literacy law, "masquerading in freedom's clothing" as well as having the potential to create a "climate of fear" within higher education [22]; and,

WHEREAS, overall these bills work to "silence and punish the teaching of marginalized histories" as well as "effectively demonize, diminish, and disappear whole areas of race-related scholarship and race scholars in Florida's post-secondary educational system" [22]; and,

WHEREAS, these actions represent Governor Ron DeSantis' self-proclaimed public attempt to "wrest control and completely overhaul K-20 education in Florida" [26]; and,

WHEREAS, these actions work to erase the essential truth that "education is an instrument of freedom" [22]; then,

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate acknowledges that SB 266, SB 264, SB 864, and HB 7 threaten the autonomy and integrity of colleges and universities across the state; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate supports the missions of Graduate Assistants United (GAU) and the United Faculty of Florida at the University of Florida (UFF-UF) as mentioned above, affirming their role in defending academic freedom and labor rights on campus; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate supports the idea that academic freedom is to be upheld without political interference, ensuring a robust educational environment free from ideological constraints; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate stands united with the University of Florida Faculty Senate and other educational institutions in Florida and nationwide in supporting academic freedom and institutional autonomy; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate supports and promotes inclusivity and equality for all residents and students, regardless of national origin or background; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate supports and empowers educators to teach critical thinking and engage in open dialogue; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate reaffirms its commitment to diversity and inclusion initiatives, as evidenced by prior resolutions and actions; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate recognizes that elected officials at all levels have a duty to identify and reduce injustices within higher education; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate argues for the idea that State representatives and legislators should advocate for policies that uphold academic freedom, equity, and inclusion; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate advocates for resources and efforts to be directed towards enhancing educational quality and accessibility; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate supports student and faculty leadership in attempts to further foster a supportive environment where all members of the university community can thrive.

Proviso: A copy of this resolution shall be sent to UF-GAU Co-Presidents Eva Garcia-Ferres and Cassandra “Cassie” Urbenz, and UFF-UF President Meera Sitharam.

- [1]<https://flaglerlive.com/academic-freedom-threatened/>
- [2]<https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2023/266>
- [3]<https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2022/7>
- [4]<https://uff-uf.org/>
- [5]<https://www.ufgau.org/>
- [6]<https://administrativememo.ufl.edu/2024/03/compliance-with-bog-regulation-9-016-on-prohibited-expenditures/>
- [7]<https://www.alligator.org/article/2024/03/uf-eliminates-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-offices>
- [8]<https://www.gainesville.com/story/news/education/campus/2024/03/04/university-of-florida-eliminates-diversity-equity-inclusion-staff/72839942007/>
- [9]<https://sg.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/SSB2023-1051.pdf>
- [10]<https://sg.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2024-1088-Resolution-to-Protect-DEI-Funding-for-Communities-on-Campus.pdf>
- [11]<https://sg.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/SSB-2022-1005-Resolution-Condemning-the-Dont-Say-Gay-Bill.pdf>
- [12]<https://sg.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SSB-2022-1060.pdf>
- [13]<https://sg.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/SSB-2023-1016-Resolution-Advocating-for-Protections-Against-the-Political-Encroachment-on-the-Florida-Education-System.pdf>
- [14]<https://fora.aa.ufl.edu/docs//78///2021-2022//11-17-21%20FinalAcademicFreedomResolution.pdf>
- [15]<https://fora.aa.ufl.edu/docs//78///2023-2024//final.Resolution%20on%20Civil%20Discourse.Feb.01.2024.pdf>
- [16]<https://myuff.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/FAC-LoS-for-UFF-Minette-Church-1.pdf>
- [17]<https://myuff.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/UM-Faculty-Senate-Support-of-Academic-Freedom-2022-109D-Resol-FS-philsply-1.pdf>
- [18]https://myuff.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/University-of-Rhode-Island_Florida-Support-Letter-3_2023.pdf
- [19]<https://usf.app.box.com/s/a0o1xz5iva57maq3h4s6yyvw2ebytpn5>
- [20]<https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2022/7>
- [21]<https://www.acluf1.org/en/legislation/sb-148-hb-7-government-censorship-discussions-regarding-race-and-gender>
- [22]<https://scholarship.law.ufl.edu/facultypub/1200/>
- [23]<https://www.flsenate.gov/Committees/BillSummaries/2023/html/3145>

[24]<https://www.advancingjustice-aajc.org/press-release/historic-legal-battle-unveiled-against-discriminatory-florida-housing-law-sb-264>

[25]<https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2023/846>

[26]<https://perma.cc/XTX8-N9U8>

[27]<https://abcnews.go.com/US/students-protest-dei-firings-university-florida/story?id=107861573>