

ACFS Emergency Resolution on Threats to Academic Freedom

The State University System of Florida Advisory Council of Faculty Senates, representing the faculty of all twelve public universities in Florida, have united to express our grave concerns over the recent events taking place at our member institution, the University of Florida. Together, we express deep alarm about what appears to be a serious breach of academic freedom.

In its 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, based on its original 1915 Declaration of Principles, the American Association of University Professors set forth clear professional norms regarding faculty participation in civic discourse: "College and university teachers are citizens, members of a learned profession, and officers of an educational institution. When they speak or write as citizens, they should be free from institutional censorship or discipline..." Recognizing their obligations as representatives of their disciplines and universities, the AAUP further notes that faculty have an obligation in such circumstances to speak with accuracy and respect for others, and as individuals rather than institutional speakers. This is precisely what the faculty at the University of Florida were attempting when their public participation was blocked by the university.

When faculty are invited to participate in policy processes through their speech or research, they do so as objective experts, prepared by academic training to focus on evidence over bias. When they are denied the right to participate, not only does it undermine both freedom of inquiry and the independence of the university, it denies the citizens of the State, to whom the university is ultimately responsible, access to the most current and independent knowledge available on the issue under consideration.

In these recently publicized instances, faculty in a variety of disciplines attempted to engage in professional activity consistent with the principles of academic freedom that have been protected in the United States for over 100 years. As fellow faculty and stewards of the academy, we rise to defend these principles, especially when they are challenged in what appears to be a systematic way. We urge the University of Florida to reconsider these decisions, and we urge the State University System to reaffirm its commitment to academic freedom and freedom of speech as core values of all public institutions of higher learning.