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Sent: Tuesday, August 27, 2024 8:25 PM

To: ray.rodriques@fbog.edu <Ray.Rodrigues@fbog.edu>

Subject: Advisory Council of Faculty Senates Feedback on Bias in Textbooks

Dear Chancellor,

Thank you for your continuing engagement with faculty on issues related to concerns regarding potential bias in textbooks. I look forward to keeping the lines of communication open as we move ahead.

The ACFS has met several times on this topic, and our group has raised several points that they have asked for me to share with you. Please see a letter conveying these points below. I've endeavored to capture the variety of concerns here.

Thank you for your time. Please let me know if you have any questions, or if you would like to talk with me and/or the ACFS.

Best regards,

Amanda Phalin

Advisory Council of Faculty Senates Feedback on Bias in Textbooks

All of us agree that we should do everything we can to oppose antisemitism and other forms of discrimination. The dangers of antisemitism are real, and combating antisemitism and other forms of hate and discrimination is of the utmost importance. In opposing these scourges, we need to find an approach that is both effective and respects the principles of [free expression](#) the BOG supports.

The ACFS believes that the approach outlined in the Chancellor's letter to the SUS presidents would not advance the cause of fighting antisemitism and but would substantially weaken the ability of the SUS to pursue our mission of advancing intellectual freedom, encouraging academic inquiry, and fostering free speech.

Please find a summary of major concerns.

1) **While this proposed policy aims to fight antisemitism, it instead verges into antisemitism itself.** Put simply, under this policy, a course on "Judaism and Politics" would likely be subject to heightened review, while a course on "Christianity and Politics" likely would not. This differential treatment burdens the teaching of courses on Judaism—an outcome that is arguably antisemitic.

Also consider the following language from the proposed policy is of particular concern:

"Any course that contains the following keywords: Israel, Israeli, Palestine, Palestinian, Middle East, Zionism, Zionist, Judaism, Jewish, or Jews will be flagged for review"

(emphasis added). Knowing that courses on Judaism will be singled out for higher scrutiny risks a chilling effect on Jewish faculty and other faculty whose work involves sharing their expertise on matters related to Judaism. The same is true for faculty scholars of Palestinian or Middle Eastern history who are effectively singled out by this proposal.

The SUS should not build a state database of "Jewish courses" or of courses associated with any other group. Palestinian and Jewish professors would express concern at being on a list. In fact, antisemitic impacts are already occurring, as we are beginning to hear

reports of administrators proposing that terms such as “Israeli” be removed from courses syllabi in response to the proposed policy.

2) **The proposed policy would impede effective antisemitism-prevention education by burdening the use of materials that directly confront antisemitic rhetoric.** Effective education to prevent antisemitism and other hate demands that students learn to recognize and name forms of hateful rhetoric so they can oppose them. For example, courses teaching about antisemitism during the Holocaust would likely be burdened by additional scrutiny, delaying and impeding these critical lessons. Moreover, this prevention approach is not only more effective, but more in accord with our state values.

It is a founding principle of our nation that free expression is not at odds with defending our core values of equality, liberty, and religious plurality; instead, it is the primary means by which this defense occurs. We hire faculty experts in these fields specifically because they have the expertise to lead preventive discussion of antisemitism with care, sophistication, and effectiveness. This is why it is essential that we empower faculty to use their academic knowledge and freedom to lead these essential discussions—adding more speech rather than curtailing it—instead of burdening them with one-size-fits-all regulatory constraints.

3) **The proposed policy would create a significant regulatory burden that would interfere with up-to-date teaching in the areas it targets.** The requirement to scrutinize textbooks and other course materials in such granular detail, potentially checking every sentence for content that may trigger additional review, would be a logistically impractical task. The time and resources required for this level of scrutiny would potentially occupy multiple reviewers, full time, for many months in each targeted area, delaying the approval of materials and impeding the SUS’s ability to deliver timely and relevant education.

For example, teaching current courses on Israeli or Middle East policy and history, where geopolitical events evolve rapidly, would become increasingly difficult. Faculty would face long delays in getting course materials approved, rendering it nearly impossible to respond to contemporary developments or to provide students with up-to-date information. This regulatory burden would restrict students’ access to timely, relevant education, ultimately undermining the success and security of the SUS, the state of Florida, and the nation.

For these reasons, the ACFS asks the BoG to withdraw this records request and step back from this proposed policy approach.

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