

MINUTES
STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF FLORIDA
BOARD OF GOVERNORS
STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE
FLORIDA AGRICULTURAL AND MECHANICAL UNIVERSITY
March 23, 2021

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and its committees are accessible at <http://www.flbog.edu/>.*

1. Call to Order and Opening Remarks

Chair Tim Cerio convened the meeting on March 23, 2021, at 12:55 p.m. with the following members present: Vice Chair Levine, Governors Edge, Frost, Huizenga, Jr., Jordan, Lamb, Self, and Silagy. A quorum was established.

2. Minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee Meeting

Chair Cerio asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the January 27, 2021, committee meeting. Governor Frost moved to approve, Governor Jordan seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.

3. 2020-2021 Pillars of Excellence, Quarter Two Spending Report

Chair Cerio announced that the next item on the agenda was to hear an update on the Pillars of Excellence second-quarter spending for the 2020-21 Fiscal Year. Chair Cerio recognized Dr. Christy England, Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, to make the presentation.

Dr. England provided an overview of the framework for the Pillars of Excellence 2020-21 awards. She reported that \$30 million was allocated for Preeminence/National Rankings for Florida State University (FSU) and the University of Florida (UF) with a focus on national rankings, research, and faculty. Dr. England also noted that \$9 million was allocated to the University of North Florida (UNF) and Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) as universities of distinction with a focus on core competency, workforce needs, and innovation.

Dr. England reported that FGCU has spent approximately \$860,000 (29%) of its universities of distinction funding to support the Water School. She said that additional equipment to assist in coastal water research has been purchased, the search process for four faculty members has been initiated, there has been support for research and teaching assistantships, ten teachers have been trained for Project WeTLands, and two community initiatives are being supported including a STEM camp for low-income underrepresented groups.

Due to technical issues, Ms. Emily Sikes, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Strategic Initiatives and Economic Development, assumed the presenter role. Ms. Sikes provided

details on UNF's MEDNexus initiative, which seeks to connect healthcare providers, students, faculty, and researchers in northeast Florida and become national leaders in healthcare, research, and innovation. Through the second quarter, UNF has spent approximately \$1.1 million (18%). Ms. Sikes reported that UNF has purchased lab equipment, begun working with partners to identify and lease classroom, laboratory, and office space, and is building out faculty positions. Chair Cerio asked if any faculty have been hired yet. Mr. Scott Bennett, Vice President of Administration and Finance at UNF, stated that they are working on the advertisements for filling four faculty lines and five staff lines and that none have been hired as of yet.

Next, Ms. Sikes reviewed the second quarter update on the Preeminence/National Rankings Pillar, noting that both FSU and UF received \$15 million for national rankings enhancements. She reported that FSU has spent approximately \$8 million (53%) of the allocated funds, investing in the redesign of STEM gateway courses, upgrading computer lab equipment, increasing financial aid, and recruiting and retaining more graduate teaching and research assistants. Also, FSU invested in faculty compensation and has hired eleven out of fifteen faculty positions.

Ms. Sikes then reported that UF has spent approximately \$7.6 million (49%) investing in the continuing cost of faculty raises and investing in Moonshot Programs that focus on cancer research, reducing health disparities, and improving STEM K-12 education. Additionally, UF renovated the data center to prepare for the HiPerGator AI Super Computer and expanded institutional aid for Pell-eligible students. Both of these initiatives were funded through additional operating funds provided by the 2020 Legislature.

Governor Self stated that expanding faculty is vital for our System, as this reduces student to faculty ratio and helps to improve student outcomes. He reported that this would also impact specific U.S. News and World Report's rankings metrics.

Chair Cerio thanked Dr. England and Ms. Sikes for the presentation.

4. Civil Discourse Initiative

Chair Cerio reported that the last item on the agenda was a new initiative established by Chair Kitson during his January State of the System address.

Chair Cerio stated this initiative on civil discourse and free speech might turn out to be one of the most significant issues to tackle as a governing board. He said that when Governor Kitson announced this initiative, he correctly recognized that in a university community, "differences of opinion, experiences, and backgrounds, provide the foundation for understanding, learning, and growth." Chair Cerio commented that we have seen all across our country the breakdown of civility in public discourse and debate, and this is not a partisan problem unique to just one side of the political spectrum. He said in some elements of the media (both traditional and social), in some elements of the academy, and certainly, in politics, the debate about the day's critical issues has seemingly devolved into both a literal and virtual shouting match.

Chair Cerio stated that unfortunately the focus is not always on influencing minds but on ratings, sales, clicks, or acquiring more followers. He said the more provocative you can be, the more you enhance your profile. Chair Cerio commented that one of the best ways to do that is to vilify the “other side,” whoever that other side may be, rather than to engage in a civil dialogue. Chair Cerio assured the committee that he is not singling out a particular party or philosophy, that this is an issue prevalent from one side of the political spectrum to the other.

Chair Cerio reminded the committee that about two years ago, our university System adopted its Statement on Free Expression. He proceeded by reading the two following paragraphs from that document.

1. A fundamental purpose of an institution of higher education is to provide a learning environment where divergent ideas, opinions, and philosophies, new and old, can be rigorously debated and critically evaluated. Through this process, often referred to as the marketplace of ideas, individuals are free to express any ideas and opinions they wish, even if others may disagree with them or find those ideas and opinions to be offensive or otherwise antithetical to their own world view. The very process of debating divergent ideas and challenging others’ opinions develops the intellectual skills necessary to respectfully argue through civil discourse. The development of such skills leads to personal and scholarly growth and is an essential component of the academic and research missions of each of our institutions.
2. It is equally important not to stifle the dissemination of any ideas, even if other members of our community may find those ideas abhorrent. Individuals wishing to express ideas with which others may disagree must be free to do so without fear of being bullied, threatened, or silenced. This does not mean that such ideas should go unchallenged, as that is part of the learning process. And though we believe all members of our campus communities have a role to play in promoting civility and mutual respect in that type of discourse, we must not let concerns over civility or respect be used as a reason to silence expression. We should empower and enable one another to speak and listen rather than interfere with or silence the open expression of ideas.

Chair Cerio commented that today “free speech” often means different things to different people, and there is not always a common frame of reference. He said that it is not a dramatic overstatement to say that academic freedom is jeopardized, as is the survival of our country if we cannot begin to re-learn how to engage in thoughtful and civil dialogue about the issues of the day with those with whom we vehemently disagree. Additionally, he said that even if we do not like what someone is saying, we must extend to such individuals a bit of grace and remember that those individuals have value and worth. Chair Cerio stated that we head down a dark and dangerous path

when we begin to believe that those who hold opinions different than ours are inherently worth less as individuals than those who share our opinions and ideas.

Chair Cerio said there is a unique opportunity in Florida to reexamine and reemphasize the importance of civil discourse on our university campuses. This would give our universities the opportunity to become the leaders among world-class institutions of higher learning on how to conduct ourselves when we engage in dialogue and debate and how to foster a spirit of mutual respect for the other person, even when there is strong disagreement. He commented this is an example that can and should be set, not only by our students, but also by our university faculty, administration, university trustees, and this Board. Chair Cerio said, when university presidents are being evaluated by the governing Board, the Board should examine if the president worked to foster a university community that encourages civility and open discourse among and between its students, faculty, and administrators.

Chair Cerio emphasized the importance of having a bi-partisan approach with bi-partisan input on this initiative for civil discourse and free speech. He said that he was pleased to introduce two strong voices on these topics, from two organizations that have demonstrated years of commitment to civil discourse and free speech. Chair Cerio stated that Bill Mattox, Director of the Stanley Marshall Center, from the James Madison Institute, an organization fairly described as center-right, would be presenting. He said the James Madison Institute is a nationally recognized think tank that brings a “free market” approach to policymaking. Chair Cerio then stated that the founder and CEO of The Village Square, Liz Joyner, would also be presenting to the committee. He noted that The Village Square is an organization fairly described as center-left and is a non-partisan public education forum dedicated to providing and promoting civic and political debate among citizens with differing viewpoints.

Chair Cerio recognized Mr. Mattox to give his presentation.

Mr. Mattox began his presentation by providing some history about the James Madison Institute (JMI). He said that JMI’s focus has been primarily on K-12 education, but JMI has been involved with higher education issues about free speech.

Mr. Mattox reported that in 2013, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) developed a template to measure the success of higher education institutions and systems in various states. ACTA requested to work with JMI to conduct a survey of Florida institutions, and they published the report “Florida Rising.” The active conclusions drawn from the survey were that Florida universities were doing a very good job in the areas of cost/affordability, educational standards, and governance. The weakness as a state university system was noted in the area of intellectual diversity. He said the basis for that was drawn from ratings produced by a group called FIRE, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education. Mr. Mattox said FIRE regularly looks at official policies of universities to determine if the university promotes free speech and expression.

In 2017, JMI decided to reevaluate the question of intellectual diversity and what progress, if any, had been made since 2013. The 2017 report was entitled Free Expression and Intellectual Diversity. Mr. Mattox reported that there was noted progress, and the Board of Governors along with the twelve university presidents presented a joint statement affirming interest in free expression. He said this was the first time any state university system had adopted such a statement.

Mr. Mattox stated that in 2020, JMI issued a new report entitled Combatting Idea Suppression. The report included campus free speech ratings by FIRE for 2013, 2017, and 2020. FIRE ratings only measure the official policies of the university and use the red light, yellow light, and green light system, with green being the best rating. Seven universities showed improvement in ratings from 2013 to 2020, four universities maintained their rating, and one university has not been rated by FIRE. Mr. Mattox said that while the FIRE ratings measure official policies, campus culture is not measured. He went on to say there can be a disparity between official policies and campus culture and said self-censorship might be the best way to measure how free and open a campus is.

Mr. Mattox said the recent report presents two recommendations. One is that state university leaders give priority to improving the official policies so that Florida soon becomes an all-green light state, according to FIRE. He said the second is to conduct assessments of campus culture, which measure how freely students and professors believe they can express their ideas and opinions on important topics. Mr. Mattox stated that this assessment would allow progress to be charted and performance to be compared to other systems around the country.

Mr. Mattox stated the freshman orientation process provides a great opportunity for these ideas to be expressed and for the university policies on these ideas and student expectations to be set before students step on campus. He said that one initiative to consider replicating is sending a letter to all incoming freshmen that the university wants each student to come and think independently and recognize that each student is free to explore ideas. Mr. Mattox said a letter of this kind written by a single official of the state or professors or leaders on each campus would be helpful in setting a standard before students arrive to campus.

Mr. Mattox said a second item to consider sharing are the photos of the protests by FAMU students about segregated lunch counters in the 1960s. He stated the students were skillful in making an argument.

Mr. Mattox said that JMI would welcome the opportunity to pull together stories and make a 15-20 minute video presentation that may be used statewide or university specific that shows students how to conduct themselves while making an argument. He stated that JMI believes in free expression and the marketplace of ideas and wants spirited debate and discussion, because that is where truth and solutions to various problems are found.

Next, Chair Cerio recognized Liz Joyner from The Village Square to present.

Ms. Joyner began her presentation reporting The Village Square started in Tallahassee with the mission to bridge the division of who do not look or think alike inside a community. She said the organization works to build a community that understands that we only know a part of the whole if we only know our side. Ms. Joyner said that the group has learned that the best things happen when ideas collide inside the bonds of respect. She stated The Village Square builds a center of gravity for the values of free speech and diversity to exist inside a community by hosting big community events that become community traditions. Ms. Joyner said the organization looked at how to advance the events to the university community and conducted a pilot study on the BYU and Berkeley campuses. She stated that they set out to disrupt the standard university talks by bringing not only one opinion and one speaker to the campus but more than one at a time. Ms. Joyner said these speakers had significant relations with each other despite substantially disagreeing with each other. She stated these presentations show that you can disagree respectfully and show a profound appreciation for disagreement.

Ms. Joyner reported that Respect Rebellion speakers spoke with over 2500 students on campuses in the 2018-2019 school year. Of the four campuses surveyed ($n=400$), 85% of students reported feeling more comfortable about sharing his/her political views honestly. Eighty-three percent reported they were more optimistic about conversing with people whose political views are different from his/her own.

Ms. Joyner reported the following recommendations after being on university campuses:

- Invest in a culture of open inquiry
- Harness the power of modeling
- Transcend the political frame
- Inspire with the highest principles
- Excite with the power of discovery
- Start early – orientation or before
- Support student-led bridging efforts
- Amplify the best ideas across campuses

Governor Kitson commented that we have to create a culture on our campuses that embraces freedom of expression, differences, and listening. He said that starting freshman year is critical. Governor Kitson stated this is an excellent start to this initiative and said he is hopeful this leads to action items.

Governor Edge said suggestions were given during the presentations regarding the student population and asked about suggestions for faculty and administration for creating this culture. Mr. Mattox responded that being proactive is most important in setting standards. He said orientation is an ideal place to begin but needs to be affirmed throughout as being important for us to not only get along but to learn, grow, consider and challenge ideas, and ask different questions. He stated this is central to the mission of the university. Mr. Mattox continued by saying the leadership on this needs to come from the administration, and that faculty and students must embrace the

vision. He said when problematic incidents arise, they should be dealt with in a manner that is constructive, where learning occurs so the incidents are not repeated. Mr. Mattox reported that being proactive and conducting annual assessments to evaluate self-censorship allows for the opportunity to show that the campus culture is a constructive one should an incident arise.

Ms. Joyner agreed with Mr. Mattox about being proactive, as well as clearly articulating the norms and values of the community and having a road map for addressing issues that arise. She stated a clear articulation of these principles to the academy is vital, so faculty know leadership is standing behind them.

Governor Schneider asked that when an extreme incident on campus occurs, what place does a university statement denouncing the behavior have? She commented that she sees the potential for the statement to alienate some people from different areas of the political spectrum and commented that we need to make sure the university fosters a safe space for people. Ms. Joyner recommended using the core catalyst model, which gets people on different sides of an issue together to talk about the issue. She said this model has been used with a lot of success and provides the platform for a powerful statement.

Governor Stermon commented that the modus operandi of the Board of Governors is one in which we stay back and let people do their jobs with an expectation they are held accountable to do their jobs. He said the Board also tries to find harmony in a sense of agreement in the state university system. Governor Stermon stated he is unsure if this will work for this initiative, as the Board needs to be out in front of this and realize that standing up for everyone is going to create criticism. He finished by saying this initiative is important enough that we cause good trouble.

Chair Cerio commented that he understands the FIRE measurement can change frequently with a university showing FIRE what has changed and been accomplished. Mr. Mattox commented that Chair Cerio's understanding was correct.

Governor Self said encouraging debate on our campuses is important, as too much of what is heard is one-sided.

Chair Cerio concluded by stating this was an excellent start and that he is looking forward to action items that will result from the work of the committee. He stated he envisions this work to result in best practices for how our universities can promote a culture of engagement in civil discourse and determining how to measure how well our universities are doing.

5. Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Chair Cerio thanked all the institutions for continuing to serve the needs of students in the System.

Having no further business, Chair Cerio adjourned the meeting at 1:58 p.m.

Timothy Cerio, Chair

Lynn Nelson, Ed.D.
Director, Student Affairs