

USF BOT Meeting, Tuesday Sept. 6, 2022

Chairman Weatherford, President Law, BOT Members, and Colleagues:

Good morning. It is good to see activity returning to USF as we leave the virus behind. Since we are in St. Pete, I'll take note that the sailing team starts competition at both Rollins College in Orlando and at the College of Charleston this coming weekend. Go Bulls!

As we look forward optimistically to growth as a top urban, public university, I promise not to get into legislative issues or accreditation, but I have to say that I personally have a sense of Déjà vu, or maybe I'm channeling some of my ancestors. Here's a 2-minute story and a point. About 95 years ago, I have a grandmother who got married during a teacher shortage (like the one we have in Florida now) at exactly the time of expansion of public education of all levels. At the time, Mrs. McKerley was told only unmarried women could be employed as teachers. In the 1920s, women could vote. Excluding women from a professional opportunity soon lost out. After some battles, she taught English more than 30 years at Savannah High.

My father used the GI bill to go to college, served, and moved the family to SC in the 60s to take a position as a professor of otolaryngology at the growing Medical University of SC. There was a salary dispute with the nurses. The medical school hospital was shut down for months by a strike because the black nurses were earning less than white nurses. At the same time as this strike, I was taking a required public-school course in SC history using a very controversial textbook by MCSO. As students at all levels, we were watching integration and strikes alongside a mandatory curriculum that was clearly inconsistent.

Ten years later, I started teaching middle school in 1976, and the elected superintendent was a retired pastor, and the evolution volume was missing from my classroom science library. No parent complained. There were no meetings. Darwin just disappeared off the shelf.

About 10 years later in the mid 80s, I finished graduate school and worked for the Governor's Remediation Initiative with Richard Riley (2 term Governor of SC and Secretary of Education). That awful SC History book finally went away, and the Governor's goal was to get SAT scores up, introduce computers, etc.. Now there were new issues like transmission fears during the HIV/Aids crisis.

Now I've been at USF for 30 years, and my observation is this. There will be battles and policies and dissonance. I'm pretty sure that our diverse faculty will not likely dictate societal values in the classroom that students automatically accept. That SC History book was mandated for 50 years and 9 editions, but from the first edition, most students knew it was a "half tale". It would seem crazy to exclude women from any profession today, but there's a big difference here. On today's agenda, USF is focused on resources necessary to move into the elite ranks of urban, research universities. One of our previous Presidents at USF was a national leader in developing high quality teachers, so I hope that we don't lose sight that without those teachers, the universities will end up teaching remedial content – so look carefully at the test score results in the pipeline now.

Unlike all the examples I related before, there is good news. USF has a valuable tool. We have a contract. Every few years we can sit down and address the issues and changes. The CBA legitimately removes arbitrary censorship and systematic bias, hopefully without expensive court cases where no one likes the outcome. Of course, any tool is only as good as its application! Our UFF chapter is committed to USF and the community of students that we serve. The faculty look forward to implementation of our new contract