



UFF Biweekly

United Faculty of Florida -- USF System Chapter

United Faculty of Florida - USF Chapter

27 August 2026

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A Letter from Washington (And Another Accreditation Salvo)

There must be a certain feeling of dread that senior college and university presidents feel nowadays when they get a letter from Washington. One ominous letter recently landed on their desks.

- **A Letter from Washington.** US Secretary of Education Linda McMahon sent a benign-looking letter to presidents of universities with warm-and-fuzzy-looking bullet points, but there is considerable trouble lurking between the lines. And even bigger trouble that the Secretary is not addressing...

Some additional items.

- **Accreditation is not just accounting any more (if it ever was).** In order for a college or university to get most federal money - especially student aid - it must be accredited via one of the agencies authorized by the federal government (USF is accredited by [SACSCOC](#), although many individual programs are accredited by other agencies). Accreditation has been around for a while, but it took its current form after the [GI Bills](#) sent many World War II veterans to college - and some were defrauded by [degree mills](#).

Recently, for-profit schools have chafed under accreditors while ideologues have hoped to use accreditation to...[reform](#)...what colleges and universities teach. Enter a [proposed federal regulation](#) (whose [public comment period](#) ends on Sept. 21); see [the bullet points](#) posted by the American Council on Education. The American Council of Trustees and Alumni is [predictably supportive](#), the American Bar is [wary](#), and the National Education Association (one of our national affiliates) is [opposed](#). Meanwhile, the Center for American Progress observes that among other things, the new regulation would [create opportunities for the sort of gift and fraud](#) that the current system was designed to prevent.

- **Certification Watch.** UFF USF delivered our petition for recertification (those SOI cards) to PERC (the Public

Employees Relations Commission) (we need to be certified to continue to represent YOU in bargaining and enforcing the contract). PERC are playing games with the cards, but unless they do something blatantly illegal, they will hold a recertification election. **They will probably choose a strange time and give us little notice, so be aware.** Remember, **unless a majority of the employees vote in the recertification election, UFF will not be recertified - and the contract itself will no longer be in force.**

- **Strategic Planning time.** State law requires that the university compose a new strategic plan periodically, and since this plan influences where resources go, faculty should pay attention and maybe kibbitz. USF has started a new [strategic planning process](#), and the Strategic Planning Committee will meet on Sept. 14 at 9 am on USF Tampa in Traditions Hall.
- **USF Culture of Disengagement.** As we have mentioned in previous biweeklies, USF faculty are unusually disengaged, and there is a serious morale problem. Newly appointed President Limayem appointed a team to study the problem, and they have posted [a web-page](#) with a timeline and a form. We encourage faculty to reflect on USF's culture, and we will have more about this issue in future Biweeklies.
- **The new contracts are in the print shop, and will be sent to USF office addresses.** Meanwhile, an electronic copy is [online](#). **Remember, the contract is in force only so long as the union is certified.**

And the arrival of new students remind us that they're not getting younger, we're getting older. (Okay, so they're getting younger.) And the [2026 Mindset list](#) has just come out to tell us about the Class of 2030, and we find that for them, a teen in Forks, Washington has always been in love with a vampire, "Too big to fail" has always been part of American wisdom, Grand Theft Auto has always been a game, and...Tampa Bay has always had true baseball contenders. Oh, and the UFF would like to note that a dollar today is worth 64 cents in 2008 money.

Chapter Meeting Tomorrow Friday at 12 noon on Zoom: here is [the link](#). On [the agenda](#): reviewing the summer and planning for fall. And here are the [July 24 minutes](#). For more information, contact [the chapter secretary](#).

Upcoming Events

Meetings and events are posted in [the Events Calendar](#) on the [UFF USF website](#). Here are events for the next few weeks:

- **August 28 at 12 noon on Zoom: Chapter Meeting on Zoom.**

- August 28 at 5 pm: Social at New World Tampa at 810 E Skagway in Tampa.
- **September 8 at 1 pm: USF Board of Trustees meeting on USF Tampa in Traditions Hall.**
- September 9 at 2:30 pm: USF Faculty Senate Executive Committee meeting on USF Tampa in MSC 3700 and on Teams.
- **September 11 at 12 noon: Chapter Meeting in room TBD and on Zoom.**
- September 11 at 5 pm: Social at New World Tampa at 810 E Skagway in Tampa.
- **September 14 at 9 am: USF Board of Trustees Strategic Plan Workshop on USF Tampa in Traditions Hall.**
- September 16 at 2:30 pm: USF Faculty Senate on USF Tampa in MSC 4200 and St. Petersburg in Bay220 and on Teams.
- **September 25 at 12 noon: Chapter Meeting in room TBD and on Zoom.**
- September 25 at 5 pm: Social at New World Tampa at 810 E Skagway in Tampa.
- September 30 at time TBA: Florida State University System Board of Governors Committee Workshop on the University of Florida at place TBA. What mischief they will be up to is TBA.



The [Bombardment of Fort McHenry](#), by John Bower, from Wikimedia Commons. Francis Scott Key was inspired to write the national anthem, whose first verse described the night-time bombardment: "...the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air, // Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there...",

Similarly, the current continuing bombardment of Academia gives proof that our banner of freedom to teach and freedom to learn is still there.

That Letter From Washington

On August 3, US Secretary of Education Linda McMahon sent [A National Call to Action to University Presidents and](#)

Governing Boards calling on universities to "describe to the American public" various commitments and to post "statements of principle [that] should be posted prominently on institutional websites." In particular, Secretary McMahon "ask[s]" institutional leaders to "address" the current opacity of admissions, encouraging "an ethic of free speech and foster a thriving marketplace of ideas", encouraging "intellectual pluralism in all of its academic units", the cost of postsecondary degrees, and "incentiviz[ing] rigor in the age of AI", "protect[ing] academic programs from foreign influence." All this is to be completed by the end of this calendar year.

Bloomberg reported that "the administration's latest move was developed in partnership with university leaders, primarily the Association of American Universities, which represents dozens of top research institutions including all eight Ivy League colleges." USF is also a member. (AAU President Barbara Snyder **described to the Chronicle** a somewhat paranoid drafting process.) On the other hand, a scholar at the American Enterprise Institute - which **claims** to work towards "a pluralistic, entrepreneurial culture" - **seems to regard the letter** (that she influenced) as a reasonable compromise. (Also, see the **Chronicle's interview** with Johns Hopkins President Ronald Daniels, who also was in the room.)

Reactions were mixed. A Forbes columnist warned that **McMahon's Call To Action Raises Questions About University Independence**. The American Association of University Professors **warned** that the letter was an attempt by the federal government to get colleges and universities to make dangerous commitments. **Experts warned that**, given the power of the federal government, as well as dangers in making long-term commitments to get out of immediate problems, college and university presidents should be careful in their responses.

Florida's State University System Board of Governors was **delighted to echo** Governor DeSantis's **report** that Florida was the first state to respond (positively) to McMahon's letter: "In providing this response to your excellent letter," wrote all forty Florida public university and college presidents (as various Tallahassee bigwigs stood behind them in spirit, watching them sign), "Florida's higher education system seeks to document forthrightly the progress we have made..." And the Heritage Foundation, which produced **Project 2025**, **advocated state legislation** that would go beyond the commitments requested in the letter.

Given the current federal Administration's attempts to restrict freedom of speech and obstruct the marketplace of ideas, not to mention efforts by the Administration's political allies to shut down academic units that they don't like, there is some skepticism that the Secretary is acting in good faith. (It does not help that the the Administration cut back on financial aid - and that its objection is not to foreign influence, it's to research collaboration with foreigners.) But on a ships-passing-in-the-night note, there is a problem that *might* worry the more thoughtful American First types.

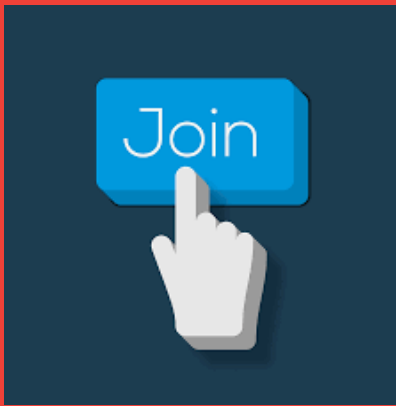
"American colleges and universities rose to the ranks of the best in the world. They attracted top scholars who won a disproportionate number of Nobel Prizes. They helped drive the innovation economy...", begins a recent article in [*the Hechinger Report*](#), but, "Now, as a new academic year begins, American dominance in higher education globally is incontrovertibly in decline, according to data, international rankings and independent experts." Costs are high, political attacks are taking their toll, fewer students are coming, and top scholars are leaving. Meanwhile, "Chinese institutions, for example, have increased their production of graduates with doctoral degrees much faster than American ones in the critical fields of science, technology, engineering and math. Rather than expanding, U.S. doctoral programs are now admitting fewer candidates or have stopped accepting new applicants altogether."

Some observers are warning that we are approaching a tipping point. In fact, earlier this month, the American Academy of Arts & Sciences warned that [*Once globally preeminent, U.S. universities are sliding into decline*](#).

If there is any official whose job it is to address this approaching tipping point, it is the US Secretary of Education. But she is too busy on this mouse hunt to address the elephant in the room.

EDues issues

If you are not paying dues, you are not a UFF member - and unless you are paying dues by check, you would be getting biweekly notices from FEA's computer about dues deductions. ***If you are not receiving FEA's receipts, you are not paying eDues.*** For assistance, [contact us](#).



Union Membership

If you are not a union member, please **[join today](#)** (the form connects automatically to the eDues form, so you will want to have your banking information or checkbook information handy). We are stronger standing together in solidarity.

If you have difficulties with the eDues form, see the **[instructions](#)**.

Membership Status

If you are going on a reduced-pay leave or sabbatical, or if you are retiring or resigning, please contact us so we can adjust your eDues accordingly: visit the **[UFF Membership Policy webpage](#)**. In particular, if you are retiring, we encourage you to consider joining the UFF Retired chapter: here is **[their webpage](#)**.

The Contract Can Help

A contract can help when you get in trouble - ***if you use it***. If your contractual rights are violated, you have the right to file a grievance seeking redress, and we can help. But remember, **you have thirty days from the time you knew or should have known about the contract violation to file the grievance, so if something happens, contact us asap**. For more information, see the **[Grievance Page](#)**.



Follow us on Social Media &&& *Join us on Social Media*

We have a Facebook group: see [United Faculty of Florida at USF](#). This page is a place where UFF members can exchange thoughts and ideas. **The page is "public", but only dues-paying UFF members are eligible to post items on the page. If you are a UFF member, ask to join on the page, and the moderator will invite every UFF member that asks to join.** Non-members are welcome to look (but you need a Facebook account to do that). So check us out ... join the conversation.

- We have a blog: see [The USF Faculty Blog](#). This has news items as they come up.
- We are on Twitter (aka X), so follow us on Twitter / X via [@UffUsf](#).
- We are on Instagram, so check us out at Instagram [@usf_uff](#).
- We even have a You-Tube channel: [check out our videos](#).

We are revamping our publicity machine, and if you are interested in social media, in membership, or in conversations with you colleagues across campus, *come join the campaign*. Contact the [chapter secretary](#).



USF United Support Fund for Food Pantries

Many of our students are struggling during with food insecurity, and the USF Foundation is supporting the [USF Food Pantries](#) to help out. They are accepting non-perishable donations, but one can also make monetary donations for the pantries at all three campuses.

Details, Details

The USF-UFF Chapter website is <http://www.uff.ourusf.org>, and our e-mail address is uff@ourusf.org. About this broadcast: This Newsletter was broadcast from Constant Contact, and is intended for all members of the UFF USF Bargaining unit (USF faculty and professionals at most departments). A (usually identical) version will be broadcast to the USF-Talk group from mccolm@usf.edu.

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United Faculty of Florida | 30238 USF Holly Dr University of South Florida | Tampa, FL 33620 US

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