



Graduate Assistants United
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PRESS RELEASE

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GAU Opposes Implementation of Florida House Bill 233

GAINESVILLE, FL –

This past Tuesday, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signed three education bills into law: House Bill 5, House Bill 233, and Senate Bill 1108. [House Bill 233 on “Postsecondary Education”](#) has already received significant attention due to its controversial nature. The bill requires all colleges and universities within the state to administer an annual survey--the results of which will be published each September--to “encourage intellectual freedom and viewpoint diversity.”

Governor DeSantis [has stated](#) that the purpose of this bill is to maintain a college and university system that is “focused on critical thinking, academic rigor” due to parents’ fears of indoctrination. However, other proponents of the bill have made it clear that the survey will be used to impose ideological sanctions within. [Barney Bishop, a lobbyist for the bill, has claimed](#) that the bill intends to rectify that the education system is “stacked” toward “liberal ideology and also secularism.”

Furthermore, there are fears that if the survey responses are not to the liking of Governor DeSantis, the Board of Education, or the Board of Governors, colleges and universities could face funding cuts due to the political and ideological makeup of their students, staff, and faculty.

GAU strongly opposes the implementation of Florida House Bill 233. We feel that a survey of political and ideological beliefs infringes on our privacy as individuals. Additionally, the underlying intent of the bill to limit or silence a particular ideology will not only further political division but also prevent students from the well-rounded education they deserve. It is exposure to what is new or different that helps us learn

and grow. Using legislative power to monitor and target specific ideologies or groups within the college and university system harkens back to the days of the Johns Committee, a particularly shameful moment in history for the entire state but the University of Florida in general.

Moreover, GAU is concerned over how much uncertainty exists within this bill. How will the survey will be administered? What punishment will there be for nonparticipation? Will the survey be anonymous? How will this survey impact recruitment and retention of faculty and graduate students within the college and university system in the state of Florida? Additionally, there needs to be assurances that funding will not be reduced if a college or university fails to fit the bill's narrow definition of "intellectual freedom and viewpoint diversity." Overall, GAU views the passage of HB 233 as another in a string of attacks on academic freedom and integrity within the state.

We also want to reiterate that Article 9.1 of [GAU's Collective Bargaining Agreement](#) affirms the academic freedom of all graduate assistants at the University of Florida. Through our CBA we are guaranteed "the freedom to discuss all relevant matters in the classroom, to explore all avenues of scholarship, research, and creative expression [...] all without discipline or restraint."

As your union, we will fight this discriminatory bill based on political and ideological surveillance.

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GAU is the official labor union representing the approximately 4,000 teaching, research, and graduate assistants at the University of Florida. UFF, FEA, NEA, AFT, AFL-CIO. For additional information, please contact GAU's Communication Chair at communications@ufgau.org or 352-575-0366.