



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

November 10, 2021

President W. Kent Fuchs
226 Tigert Hall
P.O. Box 113150
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL 32611

VIA: president@ufl.edu

Dear Dr. Fuchs:

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) strongly supports last week's reversal of the University of Florida's decision to bar professors from serving as expert witnesses in court cases and to form a task force on the larger matter of school employees providing testimony on public positions deemed to be in opposition to the state government. It is imperative that no policy be allowed that infringes upon academic freedom at precisely the time when that value is under assault from many directions.

The SAA is an international organization that, since its founding in 1934, has been dedicated to research about and interpretation and protection of the archaeological heritage of the Americas. With nearly 7,000 members, the SAA represents professional and avocational archaeologists, archaeology students in colleges and universities, and archaeologists working at tribal agencies, museums, government agencies, and the private sector. The SAA has members throughout the United States, as well as in many nations around the world.

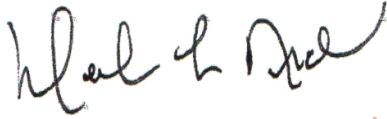
The principle of academic freedom is critical to the ability of the University of Florida (UF) or any other university to carry out its purpose—the pursuit of scholarly knowledge. Without the open inquiry and debate that this freedom allows, institutions of higher learning will atrophy and see their value to a free society diminish. UF is an internationally recognized research institution and one of its attractions has been its reputation for open inquiry and debate. The fact that UF professors are state employees is irrelevant as to whether or not they should be able to contribute to public debates, even ones in which the state itself has taken a particular position. In fact, their expertise in the myriad fields that the academic departments at UF cover is a valuable resource upon which the state—and other participants in the legal system—should be able to call when necessary.

In recent years, we have seen a growing number of attacks on academic freedom, from both the Left and the Right, from outside the campus, and even, regrettably, from within. Students, teachers, and administrators alike must, with the rest of society, work to defend that freedom,

without regard to ideology, party, or faction. To do otherwise, as these actions have, is to contribute to the further erosion of our most valuable ideal and bedrock principles.

We urge the new UF task force to provide concrete recommendations as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Deborah L. Nichols". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Deborah L. Nichols, PhD, RPA
President