



Student Responses to Higher Ed Legislation and Initiatives in Florida

Dr. Anna Peterson and Aayushi Patel



Introduction

In recent years, Florida's higher education landscape has undergone significant transformation through legislative initiatives targeting DEI programs and related academic areas. While administrators, politicians, and faculty perspectives have dominated public discourse around these changes, student voices, those most directly affected, have been notably absent. Our research addresses this critical gap by documenting and analyzing University of Florida undergraduate students' knowledge, perceptions, and opinions regarding these initiatives, particularly Governor DeSantis's "Stop WOKE Act" and related policies that have reshaped educational experiences across Florida campuses.

Methods

Our research employed a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data. We first conducted focus groups to develop a comprehensive survey. We administered it to approximately 200 University of Florida undergraduate students representing diverse majors, class years, and demographic backgrounds. The survey assessed students' awareness of recent higher education legislation, impacts on their educational experiences, and opinions about the educational and political value of these initiatives. Later, we conducted involved interviewing with 10 randomly selected students to gain insights into their perspectives, experiences, and concerns and produced a documentary.

Results

73% of respondents indicated they believe the legislation will have a negative effect on students at UF, with similar proportions expressing negative expectations for higher education across Florida generally. 89% respondents believe these initiatives will negatively impact DEI efforts for students, faculty, and staff. 72% indicated the legislation would negatively affect teaching quality at UF. Student perceptions of "indoctrination" directly contradict legislative justifications, 81% reporting they had never experienced attempts at indoctrination by faculty. Instead, students identified peer interactions as a more common source of perceived bias or indoctrination attempts.

Data

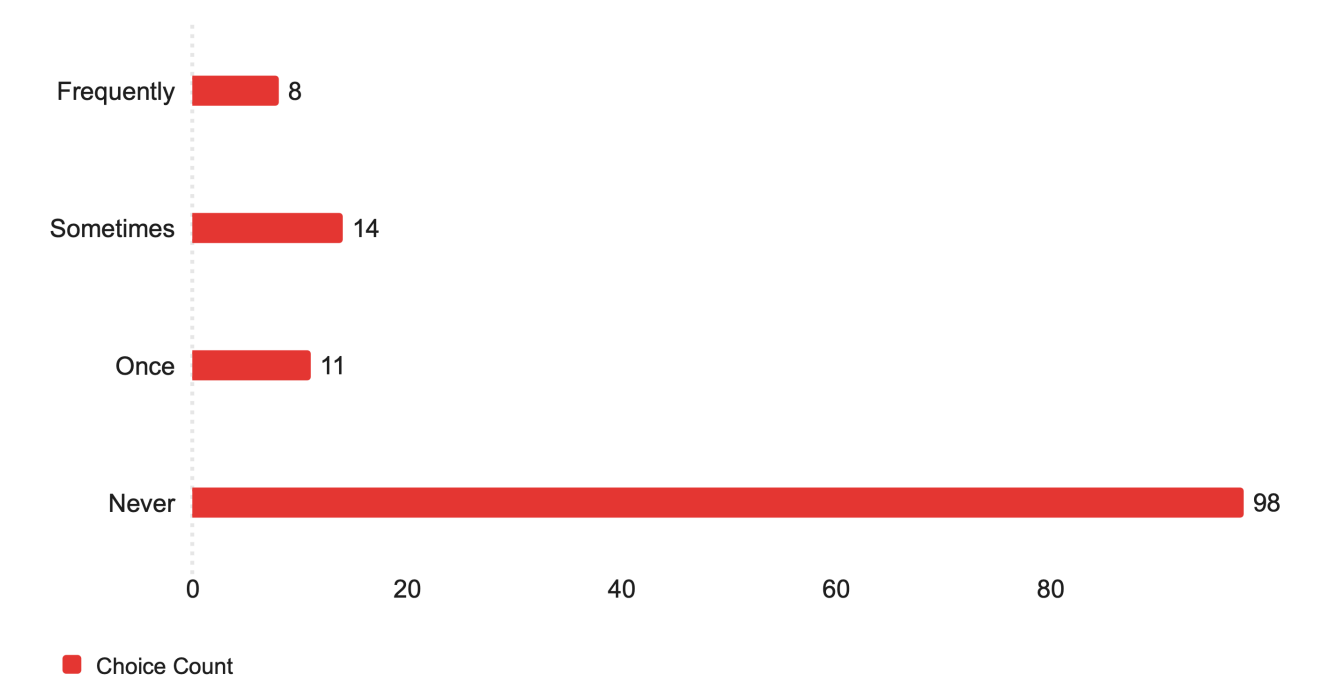
Our dataset comprises 183 survey responses from University of Florida undergraduate students collected in Fall 2024, with the majority (117) being Florida residents. The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences was most heavily represented (89 respondents), followed by Engineering (27) and Business (23). House Bill 999/Senate Bill 266 was the most recognized legislation (71 respondents), followed by House Bill 7 (54 respondents). Open-ended questions yielded qualitative data about student expectations of legislative impacts, with common themes including "less critical discussions on race," "more focus on Western Canon," and concerns about "restrictions on education" and "academic freedom."

Discussion

This research highlights the critical importance of including student perspectives in discussions about educational reform. Students' concerns extend beyond immediate classroom experiences to anxieties about their future professional prospects and the long-term value of their degrees. The findings suggest a fundamental misalignment between stated legislative objectives and students' educational needs and expectations. Many students view college as a time to engage with diverse perspectives and challenging ideas—the kind of educational experience they fear these legislative changes inhibit. This disconnect raises important questions about the proper role of government in determining educational content and the potential consequences of politically-motivated education reforms.

Q25_1 - UF administration or staff

131 Responses



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