

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## Governor DeSantis: Floridians need help, genuine leadership not a new culture war

At present, Floridians have urgent and immediate needs. We are in the midst of the worst health and economic crisis of our lifetime. Floridians need help and genuine leadership. Yet, our Governor behaves as a paranoid xenophobic; this behavior, in a time in which all Americans are suffering direly from the direct and indirect effects of racism, hatred, and violence in our country.

United Faculty of Florida (UFF) members around the state are deeply concerned about the remarks by Governor DeSantis today. We believe in the rights and liberties of all professors, visiting scholars, graduate assistants, and students across our higher education institutions across the state of Florida. Below are some reactions from UFF leaders across the state in response:

“We caution the Governor to be careful not to condemn innocent Floridians of Chinese—or Cuban, North Korean, Iranian, Russian, or Venezuelan—descent. United Faculty of Florida stands for due process and innocent until proven guilty.”

**Karen Morian, UFF President, [karen.morian@floridaea.org](mailto:karen.morian@floridaea.org)**

“We are in the midst of the worst health and economic crisis of our lifetime. I hear from students everyday who are plagued with crushing debt, unaffordable housing, and inaccessible health care. Instructors and college frontline workers are desperate to get vaccinated to protect their loved ones and their own lives, yet our Governor is busy fanning the flames of xenophobia. There are federal laws and processes in place to deal with espionage, corruption, and conflicts of interest. The people’s representatives of Florida should get to work on the real needs of Floridians.”

**Candi Churchill, UFF Executive Director, [candi.churchill@floridaea.org](mailto:candi.churchill@floridaea.org) 352-281-7454**

“I invite Governor DeSantis to come to the University of Florida to talk in person with UF’s Chinese and Chinese American faculty members in order to undo the damage he did today by engaging in racial scapegoating during his news conference. Governor DeSantis’s remarks are especially disturbing given the long history of anti-Chinese racism in the United States. If Governor DeSantis engages in real conversations with Chinese faculty at UF, and when he learns about the amazing research that our colleagues are doing in tandem with academics in China, UFF-UF hopes that he will share this message of collaboration and educational excellence with the world as work we should all embrace.

Florida’s colleges and universities work with students and communities across the globe. Attacking the citizenry in one nation detracts from our goal to be world leaders in innovation, research, and learning generally.”

**Paul Ortiz, UFF-UF, President, [president@uff-uf.org](mailto:president@uff-uf.org)**

“This afternoon, Governor DeSantis made inflammatory, xenophobic comments that fueled the anti-Asian rhetoric we have seen emerge during the midst of the worst global health crisis in a century. He painted a broad brush to try to capitalize on this rhetoric and infringe upon academic freedom. He villainized vital members of our institutions of higher learning, who are critical to the education of the

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next generation of future leaders, produce groundbreaking research to improve the lives of all across industry and sector, and he did so with no basis or correlation for the claims he made.

We all must be the change we seek and stand up to racism and hate-fueled vitriol when we see it, and let Governor DeSantis know that these deeply held bigotries have no place in the state of Florida and our institutions of higher education will not stand by and allow this language and behavior to be institutionalized.

To report hate crimes against AAPI community members, use this reporting link from The Asian Pacific Policy Planning Council: <https://stopaapihate.org/>

**Adela Ghadimi, Vice President of the Bargaining Council for UFF Graduate Assistants**  
[adelaghadimi@gmail.com](mailto:adelaghadimi@gmail.com)

"I am concerned that the remarks from our Governor and Speaker of the House today signal a potential return to a John's Committee Era or a form of McCarthyism from the 1950s-1960s. We cannot allow the misdeeds of a few to be used as fuel for a misguided and irresponsible nativist backlash that hurts us all."

**Robert Cassanello, President, UFF-UCF, [robert.cassanello@gmail.com](mailto:robert.cassanello@gmail.com)**

"This 'action' is just the latest show of bigotry and racism we would expect from DeSantis and it intentionally hurts our Chinese GAs and faculty. These colleagues are invaluable for making research, science, and education move forward at UF; without their hard work and insight we would be stagnant as an institution. Rather than attacking them because of where they come from, we should be focusing on how to ensure they feel safe in their labs and classrooms as we traverse this ongoing pandemic."

**Meridith Miska, Co-President, UFF-UF-GAU, [organizing@ufgau.org](mailto:organizing@ufgau.org)**

"Intellectual property theft by university researchers on behalf Chinese industry and government is a real problem. But it's a problem born of the corporatization of higher education in the US and the greed of university administrators, not of the vast majority of hardworking Chinese graduate workers, faculty, and students.

Instead of standing fanning the flames of anti-Chinese racism, Governor DeSantis could have used this moment as an opportunity to refocus Floridian's attention on how our institutes of higher education have abandoned their duty to educate Florida's future leaders and produce cutting-edge research that benefits all people, here and abroad, rather than attempt to score political points by further marginalizing a group who have bore the weight of some of the most virulent xenophobia in the history of our country, and who are presently suffering from even greater levels of xenophobia due to the reckless comments by the former president and current governor implying they are responsible for the current health crisis."

**Bobby Mermer, Co-President, UFF-UF-GAU, [organizing@ufgau.org](mailto:organizing@ufgau.org)**