

FACT SHEET:

Florida's Viewpoint Diversity and Intellectual Freedom Survey

Compiled and submitted by Amanda Phalin, 2022-2023 UF Faculty Senate Chair

July 21, 2022

Timeline:

- June 2021: The Florida Legislature passes [HB233](#), which requires the creation of “an objective, nonpartisan, and statistically valid survey” to be distributed to faculty and students across the State University System (SUS).
- June 2021: The Board of Governors (BOG), which oversees the SUS, agrees to pay Florida State University's Institute of Politics (IOP) \$75,000 between June and September 2021 to create the survey.
- June 2021–September 2021: At some point during the creation process, IOP researchers express concerns about the use and design of the survey. According to the *Tampa Bay Times*, one such researcher wrote, “While I do not know what the implications of this survey will be, I do know this is not a good survey.” The IOP's involvement in the final version of the survey is unclear at this time.
- April 4, 2022: The survey is distributed via e-mail to faculty and students across the SUS.
- July 2022: A story about the survey goes viral the week of July 4, falsely claiming that the voluntary survey is compulsory.
- July 2022: UF and FSU Faculty Senate leaders publish op-ed about the survey.
- September 2022: Date by which HB233 requires results of the survey to be made available.

Survey Key Facts:

- The foundation of the survey itself has a fundamental methodological flaw: It impacts directly the problem it is trying to measure—political polarization and discomfort. The survey asks whether takers feel uncomfortable sharing political points of view on campus, without considering that *the survey itself* may be the source of the discomfort it measures. It therefore cannot quantify accurately what it purports to assess.
- The survey was distributed without any security safeguards guaranteeing that only faculty and students could participate, or ensure that participants could complete it only once. As a result, *anyone* could ultimately take the survey, not just the intended students and faculty on Florida campuses who received the invitation. Florida newspapers reported that links to access the survey were distributed en masse to non-university affiliates, who could complete it multiple times.
- While administrators reported that approximately 9,000 faculty and 9,000 students had completed the survey—about 3 percent of the total SUS population—because of the security flaws, it is impossible to determine how many were actually members of Florida public university communities, or even how many discrete individuals participated. As a result, no legitimate results or conclusions can be drawn from the data, regardless of the results presented.
- Because of these serious flaws, it is likely that the survey does not comply with HB233, which requires the creation of “an objective, nonpartisan, and statistically valid survey.”
- The survey does not appear to have been vetted through any Institutional Review Board (IRB) process, an audit that ensures human-involved research meets ethical standards and does not harm its subjects. The IRB process is not only required policy at all Florida public universities, it is mandated by federal regulations. Academic researchers take these ethical standards and the protection of research participants extremely seriously, and so conducting this kind of research without IRB approval can result in serious professional consequences.
- No benchmarks or standards have been made public about how the state government will assess the survey's results: What is considered a “good” or “bad” result on any given campus? How might the legislature use the results in future policymaking or funding allocations at different universities?

For a more thorough analysis of the survey, please see this op-ed, by Faculty Senate leaders from the University of Florida and Florida State University.