



Written by [James Murphy](#) on May 16, 2023

DeSantis Signs Bill Prohibiting Spending for DEI at Florida Universities

On Monday, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signed a bill that will forbid state educational institutions from spending federal or state dollars on so-called “diversity, equity, and inclusion” (DEI) programs. In a news release, the governor’s office referred to such programs as “discriminatory.”

Senate [Bill 266](#) also states that institutions in the state may not break state law in order to gain accreditation. So, even if an accreditation service requires DEI instruction, schools may not break the new law in order to simply gain accreditation.



AP Images
Ron DeSantis

“Florida has ranked number one in higher education for seven years in a row, and by signing this legislation we are ensuring that Florida’s institutions encourage diversity of thought, civil discourse, and the pursuit of truth for generations to come,” DeSantis said. “Florida is taking a stand for empowering students, parents, and educators to focus on creating opportunities for our younger generations. I am happy to have worked with the legislature to get this important legislation signed, sealed, and delivered.”

“It’s our view that when the taxpayers are funding these institutions, that we as Floridians and we as taxpayers have every right to insist that they are following a mission that is consistent with the best interests of our people and our state,” the governor [told](#) a crowd at New College of Florida in Sarasota on Monday. “You don’t just get to take taxpayer dollars and do whatever the heck you want to do, and think that that’s somehow ok.”

DeSantis said that SB 266 represented a return to the “traditional mission” of universities.

“Part of that traditional mission is to treat people as individuals; not to try to divvy them up based on any superficial characteristics,” DeSantis said. “We’re going to elevate merit and achievement above identification with certain groups.”

The law will also keep a closer rein on how so-called gender theory is taught in schools, as it will require universities to review lessons “based on theories that systemic racism, sexism and privilege are inherent in the institutions of the United States and were created to maintain social, political and economic inequities.”

Florida Democrats were outraged at De Santis for signing the legislation.

“Make no mistake, this legislation will absolutely destroy Florida’s world-class higher education system,” said Florida Democratic Party Chair Nikki Fried. “DeSantis’ brand of fascism has already begun to obliterate academic freedom and freedom of thought, just like dictators of oppressive regimes around the globe have done for generations.”



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Some even accused DeSantis of censorship.

“We saw a governor who believes that viewpoint discrimination, the undermining of constitutional rights, compelling speech from students and faculty, and censoring ideas he disagrees with are somehow acceptable in a democratic society,” said United Faculty of Florida President Andrew Gothard. “Today, we saw a failure of Florida’s elected leadership at the highest levels, and UFF will do all in our power to stop this harm to Florida’s students and families before the damage is irreversible.”

DeSantis had his defenders as well.

“Florida’s top-ranked state college and university system, with a strong commitment to academic excellence, recognizes the importance of academic freedom and upholds this principle as a fundamental value of its educational mission,” said Florida House Speaker Paul Renner, a Republican. “The bills signed today promote a supportive environment where faculty and students can explore and express ideas freely without fear of censorship, retribution, or discrimination. Academic freedom is a cornerstone of higher education, as it allows for the free exchange of ideas and the pursuit of knowledge and truth.”

The bill would also appear to outlaw the teaching of so-called identity politics in the state, as well as weaken tenure protections for professors.

In addition, DeSantis also signed [HB 931](#), a law that will outlaw public institutions from requiring students, faculty, or staff to take political loyalty tests or for persons to meet certain ideological qualifications as conditions for employment or attendance at a university.

DeSantis also signed [SB 240](#), a bill that will expand the teaching of workforce education programs and technical education (CTE) in the Sunshine State.

DeSantis, who is set for a presidential run in 2024, appears to want to make his own personal war against so-called woke politics a cornerstone of that run. Considering how people are reacting to “woke” issues such as the Bud Lite boycott, it’s not the worst strategy.



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