

## Seeking Equity and Social Justice in a “Positively Dystopian” State

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I am a professor and faculty leader in Florida. Over the past 16 years, I have held many roles, as faculty, faculty leadership, and administration. I have been an untenured and a tenured faculty member, the president of our faculty’s labor union, the assistant chair of my department, the president of our faculty’s governing body, and a member of my university’s Board of Trustees. I’ve sat on faculty, provost and president search committees, and I’ve mentored both new faculty and administrators. And as I have moved through and within these roles, I have been afforded many insights and been privy to many perspectives. Each role has offered me a different vantage point and pushed me to think through a different lens about how ideologies get promulgated, how they are interpreted and enacted, and how they affect and impact faculty. In this chapter, I bring these experiences together to examine and explore the circuitries of power and resistance as I offer an insider’s look at ideology and hegemony in action at the university level. I highlight examples of the fight for justice in the climate of extremity that is Florida politics. I hope that my insights are not relevant, that they have no transferability, and that what I have witnessed and participated in Florida is not a harbinger of things to come elsewhere. But I fear that this hope is naïve, and that understanding what is happening in Florida can help us understand broader landscapes as we engage in the struggle for a more equitable world.

### Contexts – Florida, oh Florida!

Florida is arguably the epicenter of the current extreme right movement and its attempts at ideological hegemony. Along with Texas, my state government has consistently made national headlines by its myriad efforts to transform the state into something that few of us would have

recognized even under former far-right governors Jeb Bush and Rick Scott and their respective acquiescent legislatures. In recent years my state government has become infamous for—among myriad other things—flying immigrants to Martha's Vineyard, creating the so-called “Don't Say Gay” bill, banning books in school libraries and classrooms, and punishing schools for trying to adhere to the recommendations of the CDC during COVID. Emboldened by Trump’s rise to power, Florida’s political leaders have developed both a renewed sense of purpose and a newfound pride in their attempts to control what and how residents can think.

Nowhere have these efforts been more concentrated than in Florida’s K-12 schools, state colleges, and universities—places that Governor Ron DeSantis and his supporters have frequently decried as institutions engaged in “woke indoctrination” (Allen, 2022). Florida has largely succeeded in censoring from our schools any ideas that might call into question or challenge right wing ideologies. It is no coincidence that Florida is also home to the paradoxically named *Moms for Liberty*, an organization founded by former district school board members and the wife of a recently ousted chair of the state Republican Party. This is a group that ostensibly seeks to promote freedom by putting significant constraints upon what all public K-12 students in Florida can read via the censoring of books with any LBGTQ+ content or examples of individual or institutional racism. Committed to White Anglo Saxon and Christian norms, and apparently immune to irony, these groups claim to be trying to protect students from indoctrination, via their own form of indoctrination. They offer a textbook example of how hegemony works; some ideas get legitimated and perpetuated by authoritative sources, while others get delegitimized, dismissed, and eventually made invisible. Crafting a theory of hegemony, Gramsci (1992) offered us powerful insights about how people and their free will are seldom controlled by overt force; rather, their ideas and actions are conscribed by the careful management of what they can

know and think via the ideas to which they are exposed. In keeping with this, schools are understood as potential sites of ideological and political contestation. But theories of hegemony frame it as a quiet force, one that succeeds because it is done surreptitiously, Florida has broken that mold; here ideological hegemony is on full display.

Highlighting just how far Florida's state government has gone in its attempts at hegemony both inside and outside of our schools, Chief U.S. District Judge Mark Walker issued an injunction on the Individual Freedom Act (HB 7)—also known as the “Stop Woke Act”—by describing current contexts in Florida as “positively dystopian” (Parnell v. Florida Board of Governors, 2022, p. 2). In a highly unusual move for a federal judge, Walker included in his decision passages from George Orwell's *1984* to describe the state's attempts at censorship:

‘It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen,’ and the powers in charge of Florida's public university system have declared the State has unfettered authority to muzzle its professors in the name of ‘freedom.’ (Parnell v. Florida Board of Governors, 2022, p. 1)

Although there might be some degree of cold comfort gained by thinking that the trouble with Florida is sudden or new and simply converged with the election of Donald Trump, it would be misleading. Dystopia and far right politics are not new to Florida which led the nation in the enacting of racist “Stand Your Ground” laws. The Jeb Bush administration publicly said that the best way to improve public education would be to “blow up” colleges of education, and Rick Scott—a political newcomer whose company had been convicted of the biggest Medicare fraud in history—was reelected governor over a former Republican governor turned independent turned Democrat.

### ***The Florida State University System***

I work at the University of North Florida (UNF), a public university that is part of Florida's State University System. With just over 17,000 students and roughly 650 "in-unit" faculty members (i.e., full time faculty covered by a labor contract that is collectively bargained between the faculty union and the Board of Trustees), UNF is one of the smallest institutions in the State University System. This university system is managed by a Board of Governors (BOG), a group of 17 individuals, 15 of whom are wealthy and politically connected individuals who are appointed by the governor for seven-year terms. It is worth noting here that only one faculty member serves on the BOG, and this member is nominated from within an association of faculty senates. This means that only one person in the BOG has any teaching/educator experience. The BOG "oversees the operation and management of the Florida public university system's twelve institutions" (<https://www.flbog.edu/board/members/>). It has the power of approving major curricular and programmatic changes system wide as well as within individual institutions, it must approve of any university presidential appointments, and it alone controls the expenditure of \$645 million to the 12 universities in the system via the performance metrics which it created. Under the BOG, lies the Board of Trustees (BOT). Each university is directly accountable to its respective BOT. With the exception of one student and one faculty representative (generally the student body and faculty senate president respectively), membership on each BOT is also determined via political appointment by the governor. These trustees are responsible for the oversight of all university operations including the budget and the creation or termination of academic programs.

Recent legislative changes have given Boards of Trustees significant added powers, namely control over faculty longevity via post-tenure review (a term that has become oxymoronic). Florida's tenured faculty must by law be formally reviewed every five years post-tenure. And regardless of the findings via the different levels of review, each university's respective Board of Trustees has the power to put faculty on a remediation plan and ultimately to dismiss them.

### **Leading a Faculty Union in a “Right to Work” State**

One of my first official acts as a new faculty member in 2008 was to join the faculty union, the United Faculty of Florida (UFF). UFF is the entity through which faculty collectively bargain labor-related issues with representatives of the university. These issues include the rules and procedures for promotion and tenure, how faculty are to be reviewed, course loads, academic freedom, and wage issues. The union also provides for its members representation when or if faculty have disputes on any labor-related issues (grievances).

As a new Assistant Professor coming to my university from a job at a private Catholic University where there was no union, I was eager to be a part of an organization founded to protect academic freedom and fair labor practices more generally. Unfortunately, my enthusiasm with our chapter of the union mirrored that of many of my colleagues: it began to wane soon after I gained some experience with it. At that time, our chapter of the union was struggling to capture faculty members' attention and to wrest a commitment from most of them to join. As a “Right to Work State,” Florida allows for public employee unions but prohibits any requirement for mandatory union dues. Faculty can get many of the benefits of union membership—including a collectively bargained labor contract that has built in faculty work and wage protections—without having to contribute financially to the union. Often was the case at my university where

a faculty member joined the union only for the year they were seeking promotion and tenure so as to get the added protections the union could provide. Compounding this in Florida, many individuals who would benefit most from union membership decry unions as anti-American. It is however precisely because of this “un-American” collectivism that unions are essential. Unions, because they consist of people with specific talents and skills coming together, may be one of the few ways left for teachers and professors to fight back against state-sanctioned injustices. It is thus no coincidence that in places like Florida, teachers’ unions are being singled out for decertification. UFF was struggling, union membership was hovering just over 35% of our faculty.

Frustrated at this, I ran for the president of UFF and was elected. One of the first things that my colleagues and I attempted to do was to change the tone the union presented to faculty *writ large*. We felt that we needed both a new energy in our messaging as well as a far more collaborative approach toward dealing with our administration. At this time our university president was extremely popular with our faculty. A former city mayor and major player in state politics, our president was adept at commiserating with faculty over their real and perceived grievances. He publicly acknowledged those areas in which faculty were struggling and hurting—he seemed to feel our pain—yet he was sometimes unwilling and often unable to address some of our greatest concerns. My union colleagues and I were to learn during our private conversations with him that much of this was due to the fact that as a moderate Republican, our president was increasingly finding himself as an outlier among his former political colleagues and state power brokers. He saw an already conservative state party moving increasingly toward open hostility toward our state universities, places they considered bastions of liberalism. He also saw the advent of the state’s “performance funding” model, a system by

which each institution has funding tied to specific performance metrics that were tailored to our land-grant institution and toward our major research-one “preeminent institutions.” He felt and publicly lamented that these metrics were harmful to an institution like ours. For this, he received the appreciation and accolades of our faculty and the ire of the university system’s governing body (the Board of Governors).

Critiquing the administration and specifically the president was, we felt, destined to alienate many of our faculty. So, we tried a new, more optimistic and outwardly collaborative approach. Instead, we publicly embraced the president, repeatedly claiming in our messaging that we were all ultimately on the same team. We created a new website full of information and tips for faculty. We created a new logo that we subsequently plastered across campus via t-shirts, stickers, magnets, beer glasses, etc. Our recruitment team used membership rosters to go door-to-door highlighting our approach to non-members. And we began to reap positive results. First, my vice president and I felt that we made major inroads in our relationship with the president. Coming to our meetings with him not with critiques or complaints but with areas in which we thought we could work together, we found him increasingly willing to intervene with his administrative team toward collaborative solutions. Conversely, in us he found union leaders who were willing to speak candidly to our union membership about some of the realities that limited what our administration could do. During our three years leading the chapter, we were able to negotiate and solve many long-standing issues via private meetings with the president. For example, we were able to negotiate salary raises for the first time in a decade. In addition, the president gave UFF the power to determine where \$1 million of this funding should be spent. Union membership during our term grew more than did any chapter in the state; a situation that further enhanced our bargaining power.

### ***Seeking Safety and Social Justice in a Gun-Loving State***

While my team and I took on numerous issues and challenges during our three years leading the chapter, one issue arguably highlights more than all others the difficulty in struggling for social justice in far-right environments: guns on campus. In 2014, a bill was introduced concurrently in the Florida House of Representatives and the Florida Senate (HB 4001 and SB 68) that would allow individuals to carry concealed weapons on public college and university campuses. The bill, taken almost verbatim from model legislation drafted by the American Legislative Exchange Council, was backed by the National Rifle Association which had previously sought through the judicial system to eliminate bans on concealed carry, on campus. It came about in the immediate aftermath of a campus shooting at the library at Florida State University's Strozier Library that resulted in three injuries and the death of the gunman at the hands of university police. Despite public comments by university presidents and their respective police departments that having more armed people on campus would add to rather than reduce the dangers of campus shootings (after the event, FSU's campus police noted the difficulty in determining the gunman from other students nearby), support for the bill was growing and it began moving successfully through successive house and senate committees along party lines. At the same time, the bill's House sponsor submitted his "School Safety Bill" (HB 19) that would have allowed K-12 school personnel to carry concealed weapons. Obviously, there was political movement for increasing the presence of armed people in our schools.

Seeing the passage of these bills as a grave threat to the safety of students, faculty, and staff at our state's public schools, my team and I joined ranks with our statewide office to try to



defeat the passage of these bills, which then-Governor Rick Scott (who like the bill's sponsors also held an A-rating from the NRA) had promised to sign. As outlined in a subsequent article (Proffitt & White, 2017), one of our first actions was to collaborate with a nationwide nonprofit *Keep Guns Off Campus* and the nonpartisan *Florida League of Women Voters*. These organizations had ready access to data that countered the hyperbolic claims being made both by advocates for the bill and by the NRA-backed group "Students for Concealed Carry" (a group of eleven students that was sponsored by the director of a *Tea Party* think tank).

Our strategy for pushing back against this bill first centered on countering the false narrative being put forward by the NRA-backed sponsor of the bill, specifically that state campuses were harboring would-be rapists and shooters and that more armed people on campus would deter their crimes. We therefore created a series of op-ed articles that used data to highlight the flawed arguments made in favor of the bill, especially the notion that an armed citizenry leads to less gun violence. In focusing on the fact that the bill was ALEC-modeled legislation being pushed by the NRA, our pieces also pointed out that the bill was opposed by university police, university presidents, and the vast majority of the state's university students and their parents. We also highlighted that in ostensibly promoting greater safety via concealed weapons on public campuses, the bill's sponsors exempted laws that prohibit concealed weapons where they worked (the State Capitol). We submitted these op-ed pieces to all the major news outlets across Florida and saw them published in a third of these outlets (all with editorial boards that leaned moderate or left; our submissions to more conservative outlets received no response). I also debated an NRA spokesperson on the merits of the bill on our regional PBS radio station.

Our second strategy was to attend and speak at House and Senate sessions devoted to discussing the bill, an effort that was seriously curtailed by committee chairs closing debate

before opponents could speak. And the third prong of our approach involved campus protests and campus signs that, thanks to union outreach, were well covered by local media across the state. These efforts started to engage more students in the issue and, just as importantly, their parents. We saw a slight increase in our email traffic as well as an uptick in opinion pieces against the legislation in local papers. Finally, we engaged in direct lobbying of state legislators in Tallahassee. These efforts focused solely upon Republican House and Senate members as the bill was being pushed forward against strident minority opposition. Most legislators and their aids refused to meet with us, citing that they were too busy. However, we were fortunate to have found an ally in one important member of the Florida Senate who happened to chair the essential Senate Judiciary Committee (the bill could not get to a floor vote except through this committee). Miguel Díaz de la Portilla of Miami, a concealed-carry permit holder who had been rated A-plus by the NRA, essentially killed the bill by refusing to bring it to a vote. In committee he stated, “I don’t think this is a Second Amendment issue...I think what we’re talking about here is campus safety and the best way to address that issue.” He went on to note that the proposed legislation was “worse than the disease.” (Klaus & Auslen, 2016). Highlighting the already militant political climate in Florida preceding the 2016 national election, Díaz de la Portilla was labeled “a traitor” by the NRA, his constituents were sent direct mail calling him a “traitorous, Communist, Anti-American bastard” (Proffitt & White, 2017, p. 21), and he subsequently lost his reelection campaign. Replacing him as Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee the following year was Greg Steube (R), the sponsor of the House version of the bill.

### ***Union Leadership Takeaway***

My experiences offer small examples of the hegemonic takeover of the far right that is impacting the lives and safety of college and university faculty and those in power who try to be

more judicious in their decision making than their more rabid conservative colleagues. What became clear to me is how much those with power frame and control the issues. They create many of the rules for debate and for legislative processes, they have the backing of major political organizations, political action groups, and public mouthpieces. And they are power hungry. What we witnessed then would become, we have later learned, an ever-increasing and audacious use of hegemony by state leadership to push a far-right agenda regardless of the costs (even to some of their own supporters). In Florida, hegemony operates overtly, proudly, and often in complete abeyance of common sense. The push to allow concealed weapons on our college and university campuses was a textbook attempt at controlling an issue through framing (Lakoff, 2004). Pro-gun legislators attempted to induce a culture of fear by ignoring easily accessible data to promote the false narrative that our universities were hotbeds of crime. They positioned themselves as the heroes who sought to increase public safety. And they denigrated us, their opponents, by suggesting that we were anti-gun and standing against students' safety.

I hold that this is a cautionary tale. As powerful sectors of our society seem to move ever more towards the far right, educators' abilities to teach in safety and to teach critical, anti-hegemonic concepts, will likely rely on unions and their leaders. Now more than ever we need innovative union leaders who can think via new paradigms, who can navigate messaging and framing of the issues in ways that will resonate, and who will take risks to their popularity and to their own livelihoods. In order to win rights and freedoms our responses must be strategic and focus on the connections and collaborations we can forge to enhance our collective power. That said, the world continues to shift in terrifying ways. Debates about rights and demands for equity are no longer ones in which rationality or even common decency are likely to prevail. Faculty, and union officials who wish to push for more egalitarian and socially just policies must contend

with not only opposition that is more extreme, but with the real fear of violence. University administrators and politicians are subject to new levels of vengeful ire. Unions collectivize and consolidate power, still dissent is dangerous. In Florida hegemony sharpens its teeth.

### **Faculty Leadership and Governance in the Anti-Woke State**

My next experience of seeking social justice involves navigating justice with a university president hostile to the thought of it. In spring 2020, having stepped away from faculty leadership roles for three years, I was presented with a new challenge. In the midst of COVID my university was additionally suffering under a deeply unpopular and very removed new university president whose overriding vision was to rebrand the university as “the jobs school.” While this approach appealed to most members of the Board of Trustees and the Board of Governors, it did not appeal to faculty, who felt the purpose of higher education was to expose students to new knowledge, to teach them to think in new ways, and to be far more than a conduit for jobs. The tension between the UNF community and the president did not end there, the new president was committed to modes of leadership that appeared by any metric to be entirely undemocratic and deeply antithetical to the ethos and mission of the university. His relationship with students was so poor that student government broke off all communication with him; his relationship with UFF was only marginally more positive. He quickly developed a reputation as being hostile toward faculty leaders and toward faculty more broadly. It was telling that he insisted faculty, staff, administrators, and even his vice presidents call him “Mr. President” or “President \_\_\_\_\_” and he referred to his wife in all university communications as the “first lady.” As a result of all of this, faculty, staff, and administrative morale was at an all-time low. The challenge from a social justice perspective was for someone, or some group, to be able to work with, for, and against, this type of leader to somehow benefit the whole. It was not

an easy endeavor. Faced with his open hostility, the quiet hegemony I had railed against seemed by contrast to be almost, (almost) preferable! I had to do something. I ran for president of our faculty governance. Though I was an outsider to our faculty governance (I had held only tertiary committee roles in the past), and either despite or because of my reputation for being outspoken, I was elected to become Faculty Association (FA) president and with that a member of the Board of Trustees.

One of my first tasks as FA president was to call out the university president on his remoteness and his unpopularity with faculty and to point this problem out to an oblivious Board of Trustees. My opportunity came during a public Board of Trustees meeting when that body was to decide on awarding the president an annual performance bonus. One by one, members of the BOT lauded the president's performance and approved a bonus of \$75,000. Finally, I had my turn to speak. Leveraging my position as both FA president (and a voice for faculty) and a BOT member, I took a deep breath and began, "I don't want to rain on anyone's parade..." I did my best to show the BOT how their glowing assessment of the president did not match the feelings of practically anyone on the ground at the university. I questioned the wisdom of a bonus that ignored the gravity of this disconnect.

Members of the BOT appeared shocked. From the president, they had only heard good things while from faculty they had previously heard little to nothing. They began to realize that they had filled in the silence with a glowing but distorted narrative. They began to question if there were other aspects of the president's job about which they did not have a complete understanding. And while the president did get his bonus, as a result of this discussion the BOT both revised their comments on the president's annual evaluation and created a performance improvement plan for him for the coming year. Most importantly, this event seemed to cause

some BOT members to take a more critical stance toward what the president was telling them—a stance that would result a year later in the president's resignation prior to the end of his contract.

I was learning a whole new dimension about how and when to leverage the trust and power I had, to benefit faculty and a university I cared about. But the very mechanisms that gave me the position from which to speak truth to power also handcuffed my ability to do so. As faculty and a BOT member I was the intrinsically welded into top levels of the power hierarchies. This meant that I was privy to the logic of bigger pictures, that were sometimes directly at odds with faculty needs. One example came with the issue of faculty salary raises. BOT members felt that it would be fiscally irresponsible to provide raises. The president, now realizing he had significant ground to make up in terms of his relationship with faculty, was eager to push forward a raise. And though the collective bargaining agreement with faculty included raises for the year, the BOT had an escape clause for financial exigency. They wished to exercise that clause. The BOT's reticence to provide raises were fueled all the more by our faculty union who saw this as the university's this broken promise and had filed a grievance against the university claiming that it was in violation of the contract. Influential members of the BOT were angry over the union's reaction. Seeing the idea of raises losing support, I put forward a potential solution. Because the president was so unpopular with faculty, I proposed that if the BOT moved forward with the raises, I would highlight to our faculty via an all faculty email and a message at our Faculty Association monthly meeting that the president had pushed for raises despite the financial exigencies (i.e., to give him credit for the raises when the BOT had legal and financial reasons for denying them). While this solution appeased members of the BOT and helped make the raises a reality, my actions were to prove extremely unpopular with my faculty colleagues. By highlighting our unpopular president's role in bringing about raises—i.e., by

making him out as the hero—I ended up alienated my colleagues generally and the union in particular. I received numerous calls and emails suggesting that I had sold out to “the dark side.” The president of the union called me to complain; she cited union data to suggest that I had been used as a propaganda tool. My former union vice president emailed to complain about my seeming lack of dedication to the union and to faculty more broadly. My argument using university data and what had transpired during that meeting did little to assuage their anger. It was a Catch-22, and I found myself stuck in the middle, caught between faculty, faculty leadership, and administration. I was doing my best to fight the good fight and learning that the biggest challenge I was facing was not an intellectual one, i.e., figuring out logistics and strategies for compromise (which was difficult but doable). The biggest challenge was social; I had to navigate how to be inside multiple roles at once and from that complex stance how to keep trust of groups who had no trust in each other. Walking this tightrope did not end with the question of salaries and was to grow worse for me in the coming year.

***Florida During COVID: “Open for Business”***

In the midst of the pandemic and while COVID was still deadly, Governor Ron DeSantis—already no friend to higher education—began pushing for public K-12 schools, state colleges, and state universities to be front and center in his statewide “open for business” campaign. Denying the validity of the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and ignoring the COVID infection and mortality rates published daily in state newspapers, the governor mandated that schools would reopen in Fall 2020 for in-person instruction. He also began enacting laws that made illegal some research-based tactics to avoid the spread of the disease. He made it illegal for schools and universities to mandate COVID vaccinations for students, faculty, and staff (though traditional vaccinations would remain in place) and for

schools to create or enforce mask mandates for anyone on school grounds. In addition, there would be no enforcement of social distancing in over-crowded classrooms once all students returned to school and no distance learning options for teachers and faculty who found themselves or their families at greater risk of COVID infections.

The fear and panic among faculty was palpable. The union and individual faculty began making calls for our president and BOT to take a stand against irresponsible state laws and the manner in which those laws were to be enacted. Many faculty called on me to publicly demand that the president and/or the BOT publicly decry the new laws and to state that UNF would not abide by them. Their argument was that while such an approach might not work, it would show faculty that our administration supported them, and it would be a public act of civil disobedience. Ethically, they were right. What the state was demanding of educators flew in the face of all of the approaches recommended by the CDC. At the same time, however, what they were demanding was out of the scope of what a university administrator could do. As I worked with the BOT, the BOG, and with our university's general counsel, I knew that were our administration to take a stand against the Governor and his acquiescent legislature, our university would suffer. Taking on Ron DeSantis can result in great harm to an institution. UNF had neither the budget, the endowment, nor the cache/capital of our "preeminent" sister institutions (e.g., University of Florida and Florida State) to withstand the attacks on our funding that would likely result from open rebellion. Cuts to our budget would mean program closures and faculty/staff layoffs. And while each of the state's university presidents were lamenting the actions they were having to take, none were willing to risk making enemies in Tallahassee (thus there would be no solidarity across university leaders against the "normal" reopening of our campuses).



I found myself in a dilemma ironically and discomfitingly common to representative forms of government: trying to balance the demands of constituents against broader contexts to which those constituents might not be totally aware. I was again caught in an awkward space. I was not keen to appear as an apologist for our administration, while I simultaneously could not demand of the administration something that they believed (and I believed) would result in greater harm to the university.

My solution was to write a public letter that I read into the record at a BOT meeting and sent to the student newspaper, our local newspaper, and the Chair of the Board of Governors. In the letter, I highlighted the fact that the Governor and the Board of Governors as his agent were acting out of partisan politics rather than following science. I outlined the risks faculty, staff, and students faced from his actions which, I argued, were based on posturing for a national political stage. Before delivering my remarks, I attended the union's picket line outside of the BOT meeting (where they were getting significant local press). Afterward, I also responded to myriad faculty emails expressing their displeasure with our administration and in an email to all faculty, I tried to note what the university administration publicly could not: that they too were concerned with the forced reopening of our campuses without any recourse to mandatory safeguards. My goal was to try to use the insights I had from two opposing perspectives to bridge the chasm between them. I recognized that I was in an amorphous space between these two groups, and I was bound to alienate people on both sides. And alienate them I did. Some of my union colleagues complained about my unwillingness to demand more from our administration; some conservative faculty members lambasted me for stepping into the political realm by criticizing the Governor; a member of the Board of Governors complained privately that my public

comments might hurt the university. (In fairness, I also received support by members of each group.)

My experiences with trying to navigate best possible outcomes and to push non-zero-sum game thinking was instructive. Although the circumstances were extreme (thankfully Florida is not normal in its disregard for science and the physical welfare of its residents), the lesson is not one without transferability. Faculty, staff and students were being made vulnerable by decisions made far from their lives and arguably far from their interests. Those within those groups who came from marginalized communities were particularly vulnerable. And although in this case the harm was extreme enough to potentially kill them, the issue of inequitable vulnerability—particularly physical and economic vulnerability—is not contained only within health disparities and reactions to COVID. Nor is it limited to Florida. We live in a country (and indeed a world) where enormous chasms exist between those who make decisions and those who bear the impact of them. But the terrain is often so much more complicated than it at first appears.

My experiences as a faculty leader taught me that the house in which we live and work is a house of cards, a fragile balance of precarity and politics. Fighting for social justice from within the halls of power in this fragile home entails climbing like a spider between the cards, spinning threads of communication, withstanding the tremors of anger underfoot and hoping that the whole damned thing holds. To mix metaphors, it is neither for the weak of heart nor the thin skinned. Pushing back against an increasingly entrenched far-right is, at least in Florida, rife with perils to individual faculty, to faculty leaders, to administrators, and to universities themselves. But if unions and faculty leaders don't do so, it is clear no one will. And the latter is the hope behind my state's hegemonic attempts at control; their interests are served when, as W.B. Yeats said, "The best lack all conviction, while the worst/Are full of passionate intensity."

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