



February 11, 2012

Dear Senator Lynn and members of the Florida Senate,

We read with great dismay the announcement that you had introduced a measure tacked on to the higher education appropriation bill that would immediately create an institution being called Florida Polytechnic University.

This measure seems to have been introduced based on two primary assumptions: 1) that USF Polytechnic faculty and staff are NOT currently working toward separate accreditation and independence in a timely manner; 2) that achieving accreditation for the new university through Valencia College/University of Florida will be faster/easier than the current process for USF Polytechnic's separate accreditation. While we cannot speak definitively to the second assumption, we, as engaged faculty members, can attest that the first assumption is erroneous.

USF Polytechnic faculty and staff are working diligently toward separate accreditation and independence. For example, we have formed a SACS accreditation team that meets every other week; a First Freshmen Task Force (FTII) that meets every other week, to prepare for our first freshmen class fall 2012; and a Faculty Senate General Education council meeting on the same schedule, designing poly-centric approaches for our new general education program. Additionally, faculty across the academic units are working on proposals for new academic programs and plan for April 1, 2012 submission of these new program proposals, per the BOG recommended timeline.

Some faculty senators serve on the SACS accreditation team, and we believe that USF Polytechnic is on track for separate accreditation by 2014: the 365+ page primary SACS document was submitted to SACS President, Belle S. Wheelan on Friday, February 10, 2012. If you know of a faster way for the new university to achieve separate accreditation, we would appreciate the information. It is our understanding that the soonest a new university starting from scratch could hope for accreditation would be five years from start-up. In the meantime, without accreditation, how would such a university attract new students or competent faculty?

FACULTY SENATE
University of South Florida Polytechnic
3433 Winter Lake Road • Lakeland, FL 33803-9807
(863) 667-7000 • poly.usf.edu/FacultySenate



We have four primary concerns about the measure as introduced:

1. Accreditation of Florida Polytechnic University
 2. Student recruitment, retention, graduate school prospects, and future employability
 3. Employment status of current USF Polytechnic faculty and staff
 4. Research support for current and future STEM faculty members
- 1) Several of USF Polytechnic's key degree programs depend not only upon SACS accreditation but also upon national accreditations unique to the disciplines. For example, education programs must be accredited through NCATE, engineering under ABET, and business under AACSB. Currently, the memorandum of understanding with USF Tampa ensures continuity of these national accreditations. It is our understanding that dissolving the memorandum of understanding nullifies the accreditation of these programs.
- 2) USF Polytechnic struggles to recruit new students under the *current* arrangement: many potential students simply do not understand what a "polytechnic" university is, and many current students would prefer not to have the word "polytechnic" on their diplomas. Faculty and staff have worked hard to educate students on the benefits of a polytechnic education, with considerable success. Of concern is the instability that would be created by this proposed measure, which makes it difficult to recruit students for the new university and to retain current students already enrolled at USF Polytechnic.

In many fields, such as education or engineering, students wishing to pursue a graduate degree need to complete a bachelor's or master's degree through a regionally or nationally accredited degree program. Our understanding is that a new university must demonstrate five years continuous operation before receiving SACS accreditation, much less these specialized accreditations – what parent would send his/her child to a university knowing it is not accredited?

We also question future employment prospects for students in such fields as education or engineering. Our experience is that companies may hire graduates from unaccredited programs, but to lesser jobs. For example, in engineering, graduating from a non-accredited program usually leads to a technician's job, but not to an engineering position. In the information technology field, the choice would be between a certified Information Technology degree such as that hosted in Sarasota, or a non-accredited Information Technology degree at what is being called the Florida Polytechnic University.

FACULTY SENATE
University of South Florida Polytechnic
3433 Winter Lake Road • Lakeland, FL 33803-9807
(863) 667-7000 • poly.usf.edu/FacultySenate



- 3) What does it really mean for USF to “retain the current faculty and staff?” The wording of the measure suggests that the USF System would have to come up with the financial resources to do so. It also suggests that the new Florida Polytechnic University would have the authority to hire faculty and staff, thereby setting aside the business plan submitted by USF Polytechnic to the Board of Governors. The plan guarantees continuity of USF Polytechnic faculty and staff employment, faculty rank, and the right to collective bargaining (page 50 of the plan submitted to the BOG on Wed., Nov. 9, 2011). Therefore, entirely new funding would have to be approved to hire faculty and staff for Florida Polytechnic University. How is this a fiscally responsible decision? It potentially represents a multi-million dollar duplicative expenditure at a time when resources for higher education are scarce.

- 4) Research is the backbone of STEM education and STEM funding. The kinds of young, emerging researcher/practitioners the new Florida Polytechnic University would hope to attract cannot afford to interrupt their research agendas while waiting for a fledging university to put into place an institutional review board (IRB – required for federal funding and most competitive grants), research laboratories, library resources, and the many other elements of a university infrastructure. Already, our colleagues at USF Polytechnic worry that the upheavals of the past six-seven months may jeopardize their ability to compete for necessary research funding in the near future.

We respectfully request that you remove this measure from the higher education appropriations bill. Let USF Polytechnic faculty, staff, administrators, and students complete the tasks given to us by the Board of Governors. We can meet the benchmarks set by the BOG, and we believe far more expeditiously than could be accomplished by a newly-created entity with no faculty, no accreditation, and no established support for research.


Sherry Kragler

USF Polytechnic Faculty Senate President, on behalf of the USF Polytechnic Faculty Senate

FACULTY SENATE
University of South Florida Polytechnic
3433 Winter Lake Road • Lakeland, FL 33803-9807
(863) 667-7000 • poly.usf.edu/FacultySenate