

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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United Faculty of Florida at Lake-Sumter State College (UFF-LSSC)

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### **Lake-Sumter State College Threatens Faculty Rights**

On June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021, Lake-Sumter State College President, Dr. Stanley Sidor, terminated Dr. David Walton, a continuing contract Assistant Professor of Anthropology, elected leader, and bargaining team member of the UFF-LSSC chapter. The President's actions were illegal and unprecedented among Florida colleges as it was carried out without just cause or due process. This threatens the job security of every faculty member on continuing contract at Lake-Sumter State College.

There are college and state mandated processes for how faculty members can be removed from such contracts. These include state rule 6A-14.0411: Employment Contracts for Full-Time Faculty and Lake-Sumter State College administrative procedures PRO 5-15 Faculty Contracts, PRO 5-16 Separation of Employment, and PRO 5-06 Reduction in Force. These procedures were not followed.

The only claim for his termination was offered in a letter from the Vice President of Academic Affairs, Dr. Michael Vitale, addressed to Dr. Sidor. It states that he personally reviewed all full-time faculty schedules and determined that Dr. Walton did not teach as many courses in his discipline as others and concluded that he should be terminated. Dr. Walton's course schedule was of course assigned to him by the administration, and there is no precedent of terminating continuing contract faculty members for such reasons. Karen Morian, President of the United Faculty of Florida stated, "Administrative actions such as this is why the United Faculty of Florida continues to grow. Continuing Contract faculty have a legal right to due process. UFF will continue to fight to protect these rights. I am astounded at Dr. Sidor's actions, and question the wisdom of a decision which makes a contract with LSSC not worth the paper it's written on. The business community it partners with, as well as the faculty and students deserve better."

This unprecedented and unilateral action was taken without any conversation with Dr. Walton or any of his supervisors - associate dean, dean, associate vice president, vice president, or president. Dr. Walton received LSSC's first ever Excellence in Scholarship Award in 2019, making the President's decision to terminate him even more confusing. Debby Hicks, biology professor and UFF-LSSC president commented, "Faculty, staff, and students were blindsided by Dr. Sidor's termination of Dr. Walton. Dr. Walton is a man of integrity and high moral values. He had always received high praise on his Faculty Evaluations. He has chaired and served on many committees throughout his time at LSSC. If a valued faculty member such as Dr. Walton can be fired via email without even his supervisors knowing ahead of time, where does that leave the rest of the faculty? No faculty member is safe regardless of how long you have been at

LSSC. No course is safe. Dr. Walton was the only instructor qualified to teach in his area. Where does that leave our students?"

At the Board of Trustees meeting on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, students and alumni spoke to the impacts this decision would have on students and prospective students of LSSC. Maria Ocando Monaco, Alumni of Lake-Sumter State College and current student in the anthropology department at the University of Central Florida, said to the Board of Trustees, "Dr. Walton's termination contradicts my notions of what the college stands for. This rash decision is not only an extreme overreach against the college's governance and values but an intrusion on the community's access to exceptional scholarships such as the one Dr. Walton brings to the Lake and Sumter counties. Shouldn't our communities have access to top-quality professors like Dr. Walton?"

The faculty union is currently in a period of status quo while first contract negotiations continue. On June 21, 2021, the United Faculty of Florida filed a petition for an administrative hearing to rule on the validity of the facts proposed for this termination. This hearing must take place within 60 days.