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## ***Removing sociology as a Florida core course demonstrates the danger of politicizing education***

Florida's decision devalues a discipline that contributes fundamentally to the social, political and economic well-being of our country. As leaders of the American Sociological Association, we should know.

We are leaders of the American Sociological Association, a 119-year-old professional organization that represents thousands of faculty members, students and researchers, and we want to stress what a grave error Florida made in removing sociology as a general education core course option at its public colleges and universities.

That decision devalues a discipline that contributes fundamentally to the social, political and economic well-being of our country, harming Florida's students and the communities where they live and work. Late last month, the Board of Governors of the State University System of Florida, responsible for more than 300,000 students across 12 public universities, voted to pull "Principles of Sociology" as a core course option. This decision followed a similar vote for the Florida College System, composed of Florida's 28 state colleges.



*Joya Misra [ Provided ]*

Before the vote, the Board of Governors appointed faculty committees with relevant expertise in various subject areas to make recommendations to a board subcommittee regarding core course options. The social sciences faculty committee recommended adding one history course to the list and did not

recommend removing sociology. When the board subcommittee met to review these recommendations, they were poised to vote on them as presented when a last-minute amendment to remove sociology was put on the table by Florida Commissioner of Education Manny Diaz Jr. The amended recommendation ultimately went to the full board for approval.



*Prudence Carter [ Provided ]*

Upon introducing his surprise amendment, Diaz provided ambiguous rationale seemingly related to how many courses could be in the social sciences category, but Diaz later gave insight into his real motive when he charged that “sociology has been hijacked by left-wing activists and no longer serves its intended purpose as a general knowledge course for students.” Diaz further stated that “Florida’s higher education system will focus on preparing students for high-demand, high-wage jobs, not woke ideology.”



*Adia Harvey Wingfield [ Provided ]*

Diaz’s comments reflect a gross mischaracterization of sociology, the scientific study of social life, social change, and the social causes and consequences of human behavior. Sociologists have played pivotal roles in advancing knowledge, understanding and practice across many job sectors, including medicine, finance, law, technology and agriculture. Far from being “woke ideology,” sociology improves American lives in concrete ways. In just one example, sociology content knowledge makes up almost 10% of the MCAT, the medical school entrance exam and precursor to a high-demand, high-wage job.

Sociological findings offer insights into a patient’s background and shows that certain factors are correlated with health outcomes, trust in the medical system and likelihood of compliance with medical advice. Doctors use that information to

better serve patients. Engineers, urban planners, teachers, lawyers, tech workers — and a host of other occupations — similarly draw on sociological knowledge to better serve society.

The decision to eliminate sociology from general education core course options runs afoul of Florida's own stated goal to prepare "students to become civically engaged and knowledgeable adults who make positive contributions to their communities." The topics that sociologists study are among those of current public debate, including improving access to education, health care, technology and well-paid work, and addressing social issues such as immigration, poverty, crime and unemployment. Without a scientific understanding of the issues confronting society, how can we expect students to make constructive contributions to their communities? To neglect the exposure of students to the scientific exploration of the challenges faced by American communities amounts to a failure in civic education.

The politicization of education is a dangerous practice for democracy. In this case, the Board of Governors flagrantly ignored calls for an evidentiary basis for removing sociology from the core options. Diaz and some of his colleagues in Florida emphasize their disdain for frameworks that highlight how social factors, such as class, wealth, religion, race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, operate in society, yet have not taken the time to understand how these subjects are taught in the sociology classroom. Like teachers in any discipline, some sociologists bring personal viewpoints into the classroom. However, the overwhelming majority of professional sociologists base their teaching on empirical research and valid theoretical frameworks.

Partisanship and political animus appear to motivate Diaz and his colleagues to challenge the integrity and importance of the work sociologists do, ultimately to the detriment of Florida's students and communities. The commissioners have asserted their power to adjudicate what Florida students should and should not learn, overturning the recommendation of social science faculty. Curricular

decisions should be guided by educational experts. When such expertise is ignored in the interest of political performance, America's citizens suffer. All Americans in every state, regardless of political persuasion, should be chilled by this move to politicize education and should call upon their own legislators to advocate for broad inclusion of disciplinary expertise, including sociology, in their core curricula.

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