

From the *Tallahassee Democrat*

Tenure in the spotlight at Florida State University

By [Doug Blackburn](#) • DEMOCRAT SENIOR WRITER • November 16, 2009

Florida State University faculty received what could be described as a much-needed pep talk this morning.

Matthew Finkin, a law professor at the University of Illinois who specializes in labor and employment issues, assured some 75 FSU faculty members that tenure is “critical to the function of the university.”

Facing an \$82 million reduction in state revenue since the 2007-08 school year, FSU administrators have eliminated some programs and sent layoff notices to more than 50 professors and staff, including 21 tenured faculty members.

While the recession has required difficult decisions at all 11 schools in the State University System, more tenured FSU faculty are scheduled to be laid off than at the other 10 universities combined, according to data supplied by United Faculty of Florida, the statewide union representing college professors.

FSU’s UFF chapter is asking the university to rescind the layoff notices to all faculty, particularly tenured faculty. The union is also pursuing a grievance with the university.

Approximately 750 of FSU’s 2,000 faculty — excluding the law and medical schools — have earned tenure, which traditionally means they have permanent status and can’t be dismissed except for cause.

Finkin, a respected consultant with American Association of University Professors, said tenure is at the root of academic freedom.

“The societal import of what we do (as professors) demands tenure,” Finkin said. “Should tenure be tenuous? To me, obviously not.”

Finkin noted that at the state universities in California and Arizona, where the recession also has made financing higher education a challenge, administrators have turned to furloughs rather than layoffs.

Jack Fiorito, UFF chapter president at FSU and a professor in the business school, said the union will continue to press to retain faculty positions.

“We’re going to keep fighting this,” Fiorito said. “This is fundamental. This is what a university is about.”