

From the *Tallahassee Democrat*

Richard Fallon: FSU must act now to save its reputation

Richard G Fallon • My View • February 26, 2010

The new president of Florida State University, Eric Barron, is seeking to increase staff at the FSU Foundation to help him raise the billion dollars he has been charged with raising.

We cannot wait another day, President Barron, for action must be taken now by the administration to stop the loss of our hard-earned national standing among American colleges and universities. Our national standing helps us attract top-notch professors, who in turn get national and foundation grants, which are essential to the economic welfare of FSU.

The firing of distinguished tenured professors to meet budget shortfalls is an attack on the fabric of FSU as well as on our Florida education system. Tough financial situations and decisions are part of the history of FSU and can teach us how they should be faced.

I speak from personal experience and on behalf of all those "49ers" and others who built this university into one of the nation's distinguished institutions. To us old-timers, a budgetary crisis was a yearly occurrence. No matter the Florida Legislature's financial issues, it was dominated by University of Florida alums who made sure their alma mater received the largest budgetary allocations.

FSU's strategic advantage came when a new president, Robert Strozier, arrived and brought with him perhaps the strongest cadre of administrators FSU had ever had. They worked with those 49ers and other nationally recognized scholars to build a highly respected university (listed among the top 10 institutions by *U.S. News & World Report* in the 1960s).

Each year there was too little money to maintain what FSU had established, much less to allow us to continue to build. But no professors were fired, and as Robert Lawton told the faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences, we must find our own resources and create programs that either do not exist at the University of Florida or are neglected and weak. Professor Lawton said we must find strong faculty who would like the opportunity to build a great university.

So it was that patrons' organizations were formed at the School of Theatre, that we met with the community seeking local funds, that grants were written and every conceivable source of money was pursued. Faculty and students joined together to build a strong financial base, never retreating, never sacrificing the quality of our faculty or our programs.

We understood that to attract and keep the best students in Florida we had to offer excellence in education. That the quality of the next generation of business leaders, schoolteachers, scientists, artists and actors was going to be developed through the hard work of maintaining our academic reputation.

Today, I look to the alumni, staff and students at FSU, to this community and to the legislators convening soon in Tallahassee — before it is too late — to stop the brain drain from Florida State University. The FSU Foundation should set up a "Stop the Brain Drain" Fund to be used to

provide for the salaries of tenured faculty if their positions are threatened. If the foundation would ask all FSU alumni to send in \$1 or more each, the fund would raise millions. We have all benefitted from a strong FSU and all the resources it has to offer. All of us need to come together to provide the money to retain those tenured faculty who were fired and assure that the university will not take such actions again.

Now is the time for a leader to step forward — and for retired faculty to raise their voices and for Tallahassee to rally round FSU. The economy will rebound — our academic reputation will not.

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Letter to the Editor from John W. Winchester

Re: "FSU layoffs of tenured faculty cause a stir," (news article, Feb. 19).

In the story about the layoffs, reference was made to "FSU's highly regarded Department of Oceanography." The department was especially pleased in 2006 when two former oceanography graduate students from the 1970s, Mark Thiemens (Ph.D.) and David Karl (M.S.), were elected to the National Academy of Sciences, one of the highest honors given in the U.S. to its scientists. As far as we know, Mark and Dave are the first and still the only former Florida State University graduate students in any field to be elected to NAS.

It is certainly a sign of excellence in the education program offered by the Department of Oceanography and a credit to Florida State University as a whole. We hope that state of Florida funding will be at a level sufficient to enable us to continue aiming for excellence as a primary goal in education, "having a nose for excellence" as Bob Lawton once told me in 1970.

JOHN W. WINCHESTER

Professor emeritus

Chairman, FSU Department of Oceanography, 1970-76