

Internal Review
OPPE Events for 2025-26
April 13, 2026

Faculty and staff have expressed concerns regarding possible political bias associated with the University's Office of Public Policy Events (OPPE). This office is established pursuant to a state statutory mandate and since August 2025 has been under the direction of Dr. Cliff Humphrey. The following report outlines the relevant statutory requirements and this workgroup's findings.

SUMMARY

UWF's OPPE may be violating [Florida Statute 1.001.93](#) as well as the university's recently adopted statement on institutional neutrality.

This issue warrants prompt attention. Florida statute requires each OPPE to submit an annual report of its events by September 1. While UWF will be able to report a complete slate of events, the substantive content of those events raises concerns regarding compliance with statutory requirements.

Florida Statute 1.001.93 specifies that "debates and group forums must include speakers who represent widely held views on opposing sides of the most widely discussed public policy issues of the day and who hold a wide diversity of perspectives from within and outside of the state university community."

In contrast, OPPE programming for the 2025–26 academic year reflects a limited range of perspectives which have been focused largely on specialized historical or philosophical questions and presented primarily by speakers external to the State University System.

This workgroup reviewed publicly available information regarding the political and institutional affiliations of OPPE speakers during the 2025–26 academic year and makes the following observations:

- Approximately **71 percent of invited speakers** have identifiable affiliations with explicitly conservative institutions, organizations, or elected officials, while 7 percent—one speaker during the academic year—held a comparable affiliation commonly identified with liberal organizations or causes.¹

- **Three-fourths (75%) of OPPE events** this academic year featured only speakers with expressly conservative affiliations.

¹ The single "liberal" individual was invited and hosted by Interim President Diaz. Underscoring OPPE's apparent bias, this event was balanced but largely organized outside the regular OPPE staff and leadership.

- **More than one-third of all speakers have current or former affiliations with a single institution, Hillsdale College**, a private Christian college with a clearly articulated and politically engaged [mission](#). While such perspectives constitute an important component of contemporary public discourse, they appear disproportionately represented in OPPE programming for this period.
- **100% of the scheduled and previously featured speakers** for the 2025–26 OPPE events are men. Although speaker gender representation was not an initial focus of the review, the complete absence of women suggests either an unduly restricted selection process or intentional exclusion, both of which raise potential compliance and legal concerns.

Taken together, **the concentration of viewpoints and limited scope of debate in OPPE programming raise substantial questions regarding adherence to Florida statute**. As a public regional university, UWF is charged with serving the general public interest of the State of Florida, which includes statutory commitments to viewpoint diversity and institutional neutrality.

Additionally, for faculty and students, **this bias creates a chilling effect on speech and inquiry**. UWF is responsible for fostering an environment that allows faculty and students across different viewpoints and backgrounds to encounter and engage these and other positions. UWF has an obligation to foster an academic environment in which members of the university community can encounter and critically engage a broad spectrum of perspectives. Board of Trustees training materials underscore the importance of avoiding official actions that inhibit inquiry. Previous state-mandated Intellectual Diversity surveys demonstrate that UWF, along with other SUS institutions, has historically taken this responsibility seriously.

The **current trajectory of OPPE programming** risks undermining that trust and may expose the University to potential legal challenges from students, members of the UWF community, or Florida taxpayers who could reasonably question whether a publicly funded institution is serving the full public interest rather than a narrowly defined set of political viewpoints.

BACKGROUND

Florida Statute 1001.93 established an Office of Public Policy Events at each university in the State University System. Beginning in 2024, each OPPE is required to submit an annual report containing the following information:

1. The total number of debates and group forums conducted.
2. A chronological listing of events, including the title of each event, participating speakers and their affiliations, and the sponsoring unit or organization.
3. Student attendance data for each event.
4. Expenditures associated with speaker per diem and travel reimbursement.

The statute further requires that each OPPE host a minimum of four debates or group forums annually, and that such events include speakers representing widely held and opposing perspectives on public policy issues.

The statute also specifies that outside speakers may be invited and financially supported only when no qualified speaker within the university community is available to represent the necessary viewpoints.

DATA

To date, the Office of Public Policy Events (OPPE) has hosted or co-hosted seven events, with two additional events scheduled for April 16 and April 17. In reviewing these events, the workgroup identified all participating speakers and excluded individuals serving solely in a moderating capacity. For example, Dr. Adam Blood (Department of Communication, UWF) moderated two events but did not contribute substantively to the discussions and was therefore not included in the analysis.

Across these events, there were 13 distinct individuals who served as speakers, representing 15 total speaker appearances. Two individuals—Dr. Cliff Humphrey and Dr. Mark David Hall—participated in two separate events. Because Florida Statute 1001.93 emphasizes the structure and content of individual events, rather than unique speakers, each appearance was counted separately for purposes of this review.

For each speaker, we identified the following:

- *Affiliation*

Affiliation was defined as a current or recent organizational association relevant to the event topic and to the speaker's asserted expertise or authority.

- *Conservative/Liberal/Unknown*

The analysis did not attempt to assess individual speakers' personal political beliefs. Instead, speakers were categorized based on whether their affiliated organizations are commonly associated with, or explicitly identify with, a particular political orientation. For example, Manny Diaz and his invited guest Steve Schale have served in Republican and Democratic administrations, respectively. Other speakers held affiliations with organizations such as the Heritage Foundation and Regent University, which explicitly identify, in different ways, with the U.S. conservative movement.

Several speakers, including Adam Cayton, Tom Parker, and Brian Rucker, are faculty or instructors at UWF or Pensacola State College and do not have readily identifiable political affiliations.

Findings

Conservative/Right affiliation:	10 (71%) ²
Nonpartisan/Unknown affiliation:	3 (21%)
Liberal/Left affiliation:	1 (7%)

Local/Florida University	6 (43%)

Several additional notes underscore the relative bias of this outcome.

First, ten of the fifteen events reviewed (67%) featured exclusively speakers with conservative institutional or organizational affiliations.

Second, approximately one-third of all speakers (five total) hold current or past affiliations with a single institution, Hillsdale College. Notably, Dr. Cliff Humphrey, who currently directs the OPPE office, is a recent graduate of Hillsdale College and participated as a speaker in two events during the review period.

Third, the workgroup examined the extent to which speakers were drawn from the Northwest Florida region or from within the State University System (SUS). The statute explicitly emphasizes fiscal responsibility and encourages OPPE offices to prioritize qualified speakers from the host institution or other SUS institutions. University OPPEs are directed only to invite and financial support external speakers only when necessary. Only one UWF faculty member, Adam Cayton, appeared as a speaker. The workgroup expanded the definition of “local” to include administrators and faculty from nearby institutions such as Pensacola State College. Even under this expanded definition, 60 percent of speakers were invited from outside the state of Florida.

Fourth, although demographic representation was not an initial focus of the review, a notable pattern emerged: all speakers during the review period were men. While we affirm that academic programming should prioritize intellectual substance over symbolic representation, the absence of any women among OPPE speakers raises questions about the breadth of the speaker pool. A majority of UWF’s faculty are women, and only 40 percent of speakers had a direct local or Florida-based affiliation. These figures invite consideration of whether broader engagement with the university’s faculty and regional expertise could have resulted in more inclusive, less expensive, and locally grounded programming.

OTHER NOTES

Narrow Topics

This review did not undertake a systematic assessment of the subject matter or content of OPPE-supported debates, discussions, or lectures. Nevertheless, based on an initial qualitative

² Percentage decimals rounded up/down.

review, the workgroup observed that most events appear narrowly framed relative to the statute's emphasis on widely discussed public policy issues. While this initial assessment is necessarily interpretive, the overall pattern warrants attention.

A useful comparison may be drawn between the events titled "*What Caused the Change in the Youth Vote? A Bipartisan Dialogue*" and "*Debate: Church, State, and the First Amendment: Freedom of Religion or Freedom From Religion?*"

The former better reflects the intent of the statute. Organized by then–Interim President Manny Diaz, the event featured a former member of the Obama administration and addressed a contemporary and broadly relevant issue: changes in youth voting patterns during the 2024 presidential election. The topic was timely, accessible, and particularly salient to a university audience.

The latter event illustrates potential limitations in OPPE programming. Although the speakers expressed genuine disagreements, both individuals held conservative affiliations, and the topic centered on a highly specialized legal dispute that the speakers had previously debated. As presented, the discussion was likely difficult for a general audience to engage and functioned primarily as a technical exchange within a narrow ideological context.

Funding Questions

The workgroup did not review OPPE budgetary documents or detailed expenditure records. Nonetheless, the statute explicitly emphasizes fiscal efficiency and the prioritization of Florida-based expertise and faculty. Based on the speaker selection patterns identified above, current practices appear to diverge from this statutory guidance.

Are these outside speakers being reimbursed? Do they receive other compensation? From which fund is this money drawn?

We offer these observations in the interest of encouraging further transparency and alignment with statutory expectations.

Events, Speakers and Affiliations

Date	Event	Speakers	Affiliations
09/17/2025	Storm over the Constitution: Procedure or Prescription?	Dr. Cliff Humphrey	Hillsdale, former DeSantis appointee, UWF President's office
		Dr. Allen Mendenhall	Heritage Foundation
11/17/2025	What caused the change in the youth vote? A Bipartisan Dialogue	Manny Diaz	DeSantis administration and former GOP politician. Interim UWF President
		Steve Schale	CEO, Unite the Country and former Obama administration
10/7/2025	The President, the Bureaucracy, and the Fate of Government by Consent of the Governed after 250 Years	Dr. Ronald J. Pestritto	Hillsdale
1/22/2026	Debate: Church, State and the First Amendment: Freedom of religion or freedom from religion?	Dr. Mark David Hall	Professor Regent University
		Dr. Steven Green	Professor Willamette University and Federalist Society
1/23/2026	America and the Question of a Christian Founding	Dr. Mark David Hall	Professor Regent University

		Dr. Adam Cayton	UWF Dept of Government
		Dr. Cliff Humphrey	Hillsdale, former DeSantis appointee, UWF President's office
		Tom Parker	PSC Faculty
2/25/2026	Private Vices, Public Prosperity: Can Self-interest Sustain a Free Republic?	Brian Rucker	PSC Faculty
3/5/2026	Rome in Philadelphia: Polybius and the Roman Republic at the American Founding	Dr. Carl E. "Tripp" Young III	Formerly of Hillsdale, now CEO at Davenant Institute
4/16/2026	America's 250 Lecture	Dr. Bill McClay	Hillsdale faculty
4/17/2026	America's 250 Lecture on Galvez³	Dr. Gonzalo M. Quintero Saravia	Former ambassador to Spain; former Fellow at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University

³ This event has been postponed and removed from the counts above.