

Hello, I'm Robert Austin, and I'm one of your five full-time physics faculty. Our university has reached a fork in the road, and though I'm not a union member, I feel compelled to share my opinion about the direction that I fear our university might take. Poly is experiencing an identity crisis. I've felt this for a long time, but it was emblazoned on my consciousness like an ad on a gaudy neon sign after I read the results of the collective bargaining section of the recent UFF survey, particularly Poly faculty's reaction to the proposal that promotion to associate professor would require a faculty member to show "[serious] scholarly achievement where there is a clear indication that an individual will achieve national reputation in their chosen field." Over fifty-eight percent of us surveyed considered the proposal to be "very unacceptable." That was, by far, the strongest negative reaction to any of the 29 survey items. I'm sure Poly faculty agree that scholarship and research should be encouraged, but to what extent? I believe the strong negative vote is because the proposal (or at least its tone) is at variance with what many faculty think Florida Poly's mission should be, which is to focus on preparing undergraduate students for good employment in STEM careers, not furthering faculty reputations as researchers and scholars or the reputation of Poly as a traditional research university, which would likely come at the expense of our students' educations.

At a traditional research university, a professor has graduate students doing most of the grunt work. The professor's research necessarily holds primacy over teaching on the list of professional aspirations. At Florida Poly, teaching comes first and our university does not grant PhDs, and to remain true to its mission, that shouldn't change. Therefore, Poly faculty will never have graduate students to devote years of their lives working on their advisers' research projects, and we cannot expect undergraduates to do graduate-level research. Putting first class scholarship and research high on the list of requirements for promotion would put Poly faculty in a catch-22 situation, since a dual devotion to teaching and research without a cadre of graduate help would leave no time for the grueling and often pointless task of proposal writing for grants that faculty would need to perform their research. Florida already has UF, FSU, UCF, USF, and a host of other well-regarded research universities. Did Poly break off from USF just to compete with it? We must not permit the Poly model to evolve into the research university model we rejected at Poly's birth. Thank you.

