A faculty analysis of key documents and proposals for changing Florida’s colleges and universities has identified nine flawed assumptions about the condition of state-supported higher education here and around the country. In highlighting these nine flawed assumptions, the faculty seek to draw attention to the significant strengths of the traditional model of American higher education. The faculty also aim with this statement to refocus the debate away from ideologically-framed rhetoric and move toward a fact-based, data-driven assessment of the issues at stake – issues that impact the future of university students and the vitality of American democracy for generations to come.

Flawed assumptions are in bold, followed by a summary of the key findings discussed in the full statement.

1. **The foundational premise of the proposed reform is that the current system of higher education in his country is “broken” and needs radical structural revision.** While many U.S. goods and services have faced severe challenges over the past three years, “exports” of education have increased. Worldwide, rising nations consume U.S. education and adopt key elements for their own college systems from the U.S. model.

2. **Better economic and educational outcomes will be obtained if the government determines which subjects are “useful,” eliminates those that are “not relevant,” and sets goals for how many students should be graduated in each major field.** Traditional higher education in the U.S. is based on a free-market model, and central planners cannot predict what is necessary or useful long term. Where central planning of higher education has been attempted, it has proven to hinder innovation and economic growth, and can result in massive unemployment.

3. **The economic problems of the present are mostly due to a discrepancy between the skills of new college graduates and the needs of employers.** The first priority of education should be responding to employers’ demands for technical and vocational training in specific skill areas. The liberal arts teaches students how to master new skills and knowledge rapidly and intelligently across multiple disciplines and fields, and apply these to new situations. Those merely trained for a particular job will not be far less able to adapt to changes and innovation in tomorrow’s workplace.

4. **Educational institutions should not waste scarce resources teaching irrelevant humanities, arts, and social-science subjects.** Instead, they should focus on producing graduates in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields and in practical vocational and business-related majors. Recent studies show that more learning occurs in the humanities and social sciences while students in more practical vocational fields show significantly smaller gains in learning. Additionally, students are frequently academically unprepared for the rigor of STEM programs.
5. **Perceived deficiencies in the educational outcomes of college graduates are significantly influenced by deficiencies in the quality of teachers, and/or in teaching methodologies.** Education should be compared to industry, and its outcomes can be measured in terms of “efficiency.” The competition for college teaching jobs is very high, and teaching ability is a main criterion for the positions. Teachers are continually assessed in numerous forms as well. Measuring educational outcomes by “efficiency” directly counters the experience and expertise of educators who find that small classes produce better results than large classes.

6. **Teaching and research are distinct activities and their funding should be split.** Experience has demonstrated the value of integrating teaching and research, and undergraduate research has been proven to advance student learning significantly. Much of this research is conducted without any additional cost to the university.

7. **Teacher performance is pervasively lagging because teachers are not given monetary incentives to improve.** Competitive incentives such as merit pay will encourage better teaching. Lack of monetary incentive is not a reason for poor teaching, and may well lower teaching quality by distracting focus from teaching itself. While faculty should be recognized for excellence, excellence needs to be determined based on a wider range of metrics than students’ rating of their satisfaction with instruction.

8. **Students should be viewed as “consumers” of education; student evaluations are a reliable method of assessing “consumer satisfaction;” “consumer satisfaction” in education is a valid measurement of educational outcomes.** The consumerist model implies students are entitled to a grade or degree because they have paid tuition. Student satisfaction may not accurately reflect the quality of the teacher or course. Aiming for “consumer satisfaction” results in a less rigorous curriculum and grade inflation.

9. **There is insufficient assessment of teachers, programs and institutions in higher education.** Costs and liabilities associated with increased assessment are justified by the results in terms of improved outcomes. All state universities already undergo multiple program and institution-level assessments for accreditation, while teachers and programs are continually assessed both from within and outside the institution. The cost of assessment, both monetarily and in time spent, should be carefully weighed against its benefits.