

College Trustee Proposes De Facto Bidding Process to Hire Faculty

By Don Sutherland

According to an [article](#) published in *Inside Higher Ed* on October 30, Carlos Beruff, a trustee at the State College of Florida at Manatee-Sarasota has proposed what amounts to a de facto bidding process to hire faculty members. The article explained that under the trustee's initiative, faculty and other prospective college employees would be asked to quote their "fee for services" when completing job applications. Afterward, that information would be used in the hiring decision.

Competitive bidding is typically used when an organization is contracting for the performance of a specific job or task. Competitive bidding can work quite well when firms are seeking labor for discrete projects. Examples range from the construction of a bridge to a consulting firm's valuing a subsidiary a company wishes to sell or spin-off. Such a process typically does not work well when it comes to recruiting and retaining knowledge workers for which the nature of the work requires a continuing employment relationship.

In an environment in which numerous public and private higher education institutions have faced financial challenges, idea like competitive bidding that seemingly hold the promise of providing quick improvement in cost structures can be tempting. However, remedies that are incompatible with the nature of those organizations, their core activities, and their requirements for success, are not viable.

Effective teaching, student learning, timely graduation, and faculty research depends on numerous factors including, faculty knowledge and skills, academic and non-academic support systems and opportunities, an environment that values teaching and learning, and periodic assessment of progress and outcomes. Faculty-student relationships (advising, discussion of progress mentoring) that are sustained for the duration of a student's attendance at an institution can be especially valuable.

Faculty are knowledge workers who provide an advanced and highly-personalized service. Their work is not a commodity in which a single standardized approach will work well for every student or even most students. At the same time, faculty members are not easily substitutable. Faculty members do not achieve relatively equal teaching and learning outcomes. Underinvestment in faculty can suppress teaching and learning outcomes.

Recent data confirms the crucial role played by faculty. The "Great Jobs, Great Lives" study Gallup-Purdue University report published this fall revealed:

If an employed graduate recalls having a professor who cared about them as a person, one who made them excited about learning, and having a mentor who encouraged them to pursue their dreams, the graduate's odds of being engaged at work more than double.

To successfully recruit and retain knowledge workers, organizations need to provide competitive compensation that is typically above what one would find for workers who perform repetitive or standardized tasks coupled with incentives, opportunities for professional enhancement (training,

an ability to participate in conferences, presentations, and other forms of collaboration internally and externally), and sufficient autonomy to allow for creative efforts. Top management support is also crucial.

Even as the proposal might save some money in the short-term, its overall costs in terms of faculty turnover, lack of teaching continuity, and reduced student learning, retention, and graduation outcomes would very likely exceed the benefits of those financial savings. Moreover, those outcomes could adversely impact enrollment, with revenue losses wiping out the proposal's short-term savings. In sum, the proposal is misaligned with customary practices for recruiting and retaining knowledge workers and incompatible with best practices for doing so.