

Moral jello

A UF board composed of faculty, students and administrative personnel recently released a document called "Standard of Ethical Conduct For The University of Florida Community." It avoided using the phrase "moral conduct" and with good reason.

Moral leadership is a difficult task in the best of times. No one wants to have the values of others imposed upon them and teachers are painfully aware of this. Academia has spent the last decade bending over backwards to avoid such charges.

As a result, children graduate from grade school without understanding the differences between democracy and other forms of government, such as dictatorships and totalitarian systems. History books used in high school talk about the pilgrims coming to America but never mention why they left their homes — religious persecution.

So a place of higher learning is our last chance to ensure that education is not an ethically neutral experience. The "Standard Of Ethical Conduct" would seem to be an attempt to help in that effort.

We might have been concerned that these conservative times would have encouraged the board to go too far and impose its values on the student body at large. Instead, it has delivered a four-page paper remarkable for how vague and tentative it manages to be. A better name for it would be "Suggestions Of Ethical Conduct," for they are filling up the ethical vacuum of UF with moral jello.

The strongest words are reserved for cheating. We can rest assured that UF is unequivocally opposed to such practices and finds them inappropriate to learning. "Honesty, integrity and caring are essential qualities of an educational institution," it states in the first line.

In addition, a full page is devoted to explaining how cheating is bad and nobody should do it. In contrast, the thorny, complex issue of relations between religious, racial and cultural minorities is covered in two lines. The problems of women and sexual relationships take all of four lines.

Well, we know what UF says about cheating, but how does it act? The most visible area in which it operates that calls for honesty and integrity is the athletic program.

UF hired Charley Pell to coach the Gators in football for the '79 season. He had been the head of the program at Clemson and that team showed substantial improvement during his stay there. Pell bailed out before the NCAA slapped Clemson with probation and gladly went to UF.

During his first season, UF was in such poor shape that its record was 0-10-1. Remarkably, Pell turned the team around with his tried and true coaching tactics. In the '80 season — his second year — the Gators were 8-4 and triumphed in the Tangerine Bowl.

When he was fired in '84, UF was in the middle of the first of the two best years in the program's history. Coincidentally, the NCAA was well on its way to putting UF on probation, just like Clemson.

Who says cheaters never prosper? Tomorrow we'll look at what the "Suggestions of Ethical Conduct" says about women, blacks, gays and other minorities, as well as alcohol and drug abuse and academic freedom. Then we'll tell you how UF is *really* behaving.

Moral Jello II

An education without values is an education without value. With that in mind, we spoke yesterday about the release of the "Suggestions of Ethical Conduct" and our football program's honesty and integrity. As the probes of a federal grand jury and the DEA overshadow our basketball program, let's look at the rest of the document.

In the preamble, it states, "A university is a place where self-expression, voicing disagreement, and challenging outmoded customs and beliefs are prized and honored."

That's all well and good, but how has UF behaved? In 1987, a little incident called Chambergate occurred. Through transcripts of a taped conversation, it was revealed that John Schroepfer, the president of the Gainesville Chamber of Commerce, boasted about how Marshall Criser would silence two professors who were adamantly pro-environment. Schroepfer eventually said he exaggerated the conversation and resigned.

Regardless of Criser's role in the affair, he failed to take two simple actions that would have shown he "prized the voicing of disagreement." One, while repeatedly denying the charges, he never stated that he was in full support of academic freedom. Two, Criser never contacted the two professors named in any way to assure them that the stories weren't true. How would you feel if the newspapers were blaring that your boss had promised to silence you and he never bothered to pick up the phone to say it ain't so?

On alcohol and drugs, the paper says — in full — "The use of alcohol and drugs can have a negative impact on judgments and reaction, health and safety, and may lead to legal complications as well." The document then goes on to talk obliquely about the role of the university and the university community, but such vagueness is odd.

Why not say, "The University condemns the abuse of alcohol and the use of drugs as utterly inappropriate to a learning environment. It will not be tolerated from students, faculty or administration." This is the one area in which UF could have talked tough without offending anyone. The fact that it hems and haws even here is telling.

Don't blink while reading or you may miss the paper's take on minorities. It states, "One of the major benefits of higher education and membership in the University community is greater knowledge of and respect for other groups, religious, racial, and cultural."

That's nice, but the truth isn't. The percentage of black faculty on campus is 2.2 percent and has been for the past 10 years. Women are paid less than men any way you cut it.

And as for dealing with any organization that "upsets the delicate balance of communal living," where was UF when Student Government cut funding for the UF Lesbian and Gay Society and one student senator wondered why they should spend students' money on "a bunch of fags?" If they had said the same about blacks, you can imagine there would have been *some* action, but apparently gays aren't organized well enough to deserve equal rights.

Moral leadership is a difficult and delicate task that the "Suggestions of Ethical Conduct" doesn't even begin to make easier. Anyone reading it would find vagueness and apathy, not the guidance that is so strongly needed. And the most eloquently worded document won't make up for the way UF behaves.