

CENSORED

SAVE the RACKS

Editor Clare Lennon ■ Managing Editor Erin Jester
Alligator ■ Thursday, July 26, 2012

Alligator staff addresses UF president's response to council's request to reconsider Machen said university has supported paper President's claims don't tell the whole story

Dear Anne and Journalism Department Advisory Council,
Thank you for taking the time to write to me about the Independent Florida Alligator.

First, let me say that we appreciate the Alligator and want it to succeed. It is an excellent news source for our students and training ground for those studying journalism. Even in this time of major budget reductions, we have continued our long-standing support of the paper through regular advertising, which currently totals nearly \$28,000 a year.

Our goal in moving toward modular newspaper racks is to enhance safety and aesthetics. When we started this initiative, there were 407 newspaper racks on campus containing 26 different publications. During hurricane season, these racks pose a serious hazard. It is not uncommon to remove racks from city streets as a storm approaches. By installing modular racks, the university will not be faced with the time-consuming task of monitoring which publishers have picked up their racks and which haven't, thereby requiring university personnel to remove the potential projectiles. The new racks are also more attractive and are less visually intrusive in the historic part of campus where they

have been installed.

When we started this process in 2010, all 20 of the publishers except the Alligator agreed to make the switch. That includes other free publications. In response to the Alligator's concerns, we have met repeatedly with them and have delayed the full implementation of the conversion to the modular units by almost three years. We have also made changes in our plans. For example, when the Alligator's representatives said they were concerned students wouldn't know to look for the Alligator in the modular units, we offered to let them put the Alligator's distinctive logo and orange color on the modular units.



Machen

You should also know that we are not seeking to replace all of the Alligator's racks. Half of their inventory of racks on campus — approximately 40 — will remain where they are.

Thank you for writing. I hope this answers some of your questions and concerns.

Bernie

In a response to a letter from the Journalism Department Advisory Council, UF President Bernie Machen made a few claims about the current situation with the Alligator's orange racks that deserve clarification.

President Machen's letter can be read to the left. Here is our response to his claims:

► University advertising has dropped over the years.

► Machen's letter implies that we have not offered to comply with whatever standards are necessary to secure our racks. We have offered to secure or weigh down our racks before a storm.

► He argues that during hurricane season, university personnel are faced with the daunting and time-consuming task of removing these racks for safety reasons. We have offered to remove the racks ourselves.

► He fails to mention that not all the other publications on campus have received the licensing agreement

sent to the Alligator.

► He argues that the orange racks are "visually intrusive in the historic part of campus." These racks have been on campus for decades, are well-maintained and display the school's colors. How are they not an historic icon for UF's campus?

► Eighty-two percent of our papers are delivered in this historic district.

► While it is true that after Aug. 15, we will have close to 40 racks remaining on campus, if the university moves ahead with its future removal plans, we will have only 30 left. Most of the Alligator racks the university demands be removed are in high-traffic areas.

► The logo the university offered to allow in the modular racks is thinner than the average bumper sticker.

Frankly, President Machen's response fails to answer the question of why the university feels so adamant about removing the racks.

Alligator Staff

STATE

Former Gator, Alligator reporter criticizes UF's plan to remove orange newspaper racks

This column appeared Friday in The Miami Herald.

Sometimes, the threats to media freedoms aren't blatant and up front, but they're no less dangerous.

They take the guise of regulation, behind-the-scenes intimidation, and in the latest case in our state, in a housekeeping directive by the administration of the University of Florida that the signature orange newspaper racks carrying The Independent Florida Alligator on campus be removed.

The Alligator's dedicated racks, accented by blue-lettered adhesives with the newspaper's name, have been as much a part of campus life in Gator Nation as the brick buildings.

The storied newspaper founded in 1906 and housed on and off campus through various incarnations became independent in 1973, after years of attempts by the UF administration to censor its content.

It is widely respected as a practicum for student journalists who cover UF life and the city of Gainesville, and often wins top national awards.

It is inconceivable that a university that houses one of the top journal-

ism programs in the nation would want to curtail students' easy access to the student-run newspaper.

But after a century of the paper's circulating freely on campus — the last 30 years in the distinctive orange racks — the administration now finds the racks aesthetically offensive and unsafe, and has demanded The Alligator remove them by Aug. 15.

"The racks are our branding," says Ed Barber, president emeritus of the newspaper and executive director of the Alligator Alumni Association. "We have to grab people's attention and say, 'Here we are.'"

The laughable range of reasons cited for their removal — that students might trip over them (not even in my time at UF, when the legal drinking age was 18 and alcohol was widely consumed on campus, was this an issue) and that they could become projectiles in a storm (as if there haven't been storms before in Florida the past three decades and no chains strong enough at Home Depot to secure racks) — are suspect.

As is the proposed alternative: UF wants to replace the current visible racks with bland, modular black racks for which the university would charge a fee to The Alligator and other publications that would rotate us-

ing them.

What is really behind this attempt to undermine the student newspaper and tax what is essentially a public service?

Is it a crass attempt to collect more fees, or something larger and more sinister and apt to the times?

Those of us familiar with the shenanigans of governance and campus affairs (I wrote for the Alligator during the late '70s) know that history indicates that the real cause for annoyance to the powers that be is student-journalist scrutiny.

This isn't a safety issue, and certainly UF's orange-and-blue colors aren't suddenly out of fashion in campus decor.

It's at best a display of insensitivity to the value of a newspaper that shouldn't be treated like a giveaway shopper.

Special interests would like nothing more than to weaken the media.

But a university's administration and board of trustees should take positions that strengthen democracy, not erode it, even if it's only by a count of 19 orange newspaper racks.

Contact Fabiola Santiago at fsantiago@miamiherald.com.



David Carr/Alligator Staff

Show Your Colors

A signature orange news rack holding copies of The Independent Florida Alligator stands next to university-owned modular racks at Weimer Hall, which houses the College of Journalism and Communications.

UNIVERSITY

Former Student Body President supports saving the racks, keeping a 'treasure' of UF Student Body

In my time as a student leader at UF, I saw first hand how critical it is for the student body to have a dedicated student newspaper.

In this era of budget cuts and tuition increases, it is vital that the student body remain informed and engaged.

While I have at times taken issue with the Alligator, it has done a tremendous service to the student body and should be permitted to continue unabated.

I have no doubt that the administration's push towards modular units is in good faith, having discussed it with many administrators at the project's inception.

However, I disagree with the current approach as I believe the Alligator is unique and must be treated singularly from the other newspapers which will occupy the modular units.

Many of these other newspapers are nationally circulated, with no specific focus on our university. Others are not regularly printed.

The Alligator is the only daily newspaper focused solely on the UF Student Body.

The licensing fee to be placed on the Alligator is particularly troublesome. The Alligator is free for every student

and thus consistently has difficulty getting out of the red.

I would speculate that such a fee would be a major burden on the paper, which is completely student produced, in a way that would not affect heavy-weights such as the New York Times or USA Today or even the Gainesville Sun.

In addition, the modular units will not be placed nearly as ubiquitously as the Alligator's orange racks are currently.

This would reduce student access to the student newspaper, something I believe most students would object to.

The Alligator has been a treasure of our Student Body since the time my grandfather attended UF.

I believe every consideration must be made to ensure the Alligator remains a student-run student newspaper that is accessible to every student and able to remain financially afloat.

I stand for "saving the racks."

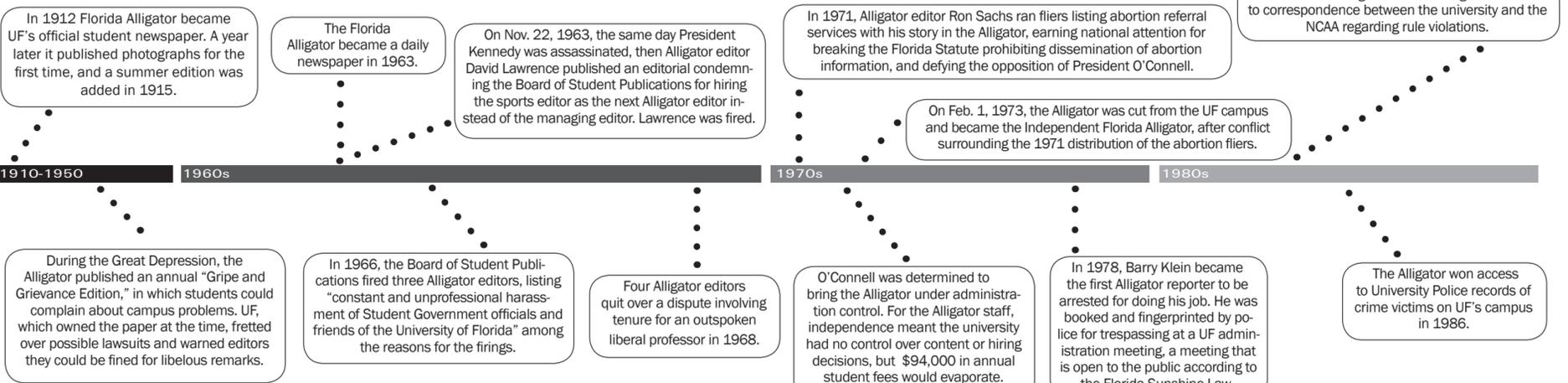


Meyers

Ben Meyers

Former Student Body President

Timeline of the Independent Florida Alligator



Natalie Teer / Alligator Staff

“ When truth is no
longer free, freedom
is no longer real. ”

Jacques Prevert
French poet
1951