

March 14, 2011

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

We, the Coalition of American Voters (COAV), are deeply troubled by ongoing and flagrant abuses of our public tax dollars at the University of Florida. Thus far, UF President Bernie Machen, UF Public Relations Director Janine Sikes, and UF Researcher Mingzhou Ding have refused to entertain all queries and have summarily dismissed each of our concerns. This failure to engage the public is not exclusive to the university as the silence emanating from the Chairman of the Board of Governors of the State of Florida is deafening.

Therefore, the COAV is turning our attention to our lawmakers and politicians who are responsible for allowing the gratuitous and less-than-ethical abuses outlined below to continue. Since the institutions have absolved themselves of accountability and blotted out any transparency that once existed, we must now leverage our votes and our voices.

Our support in the upcoming campaign seasons will hinge upon which of our leaders will represent the voters and which leaders will continue to allow the taxpaying public to be exploited and dismissed.

It is with the utmost urgency that we respectfully request an immediate end to the corrupt policies that victimize every American taxpayer and voter.

We hope you will agree that the time to take a tough stand on behalf of your constituency is now.

I. COAV Demands a Moratorium on all NIH awards to the University of Florida pending a comprehensive audit, investigation, and public report of findings;

II. COAV Demands that NIH Grant - Project Number: R01MH079388 – awarded to Dr. Mingzhou Ding be immediately revoked and all future installments terminated;

III. COAV Demands that the University of Florida reimburse taxpayers in excess of \$1,00,000 with which they have been unjustly enriched thus far over the life of NIH Grant - Project Number: R01MH079388 awarded to Dr. Mingzhou Ding.

The most current financial data available from UF indicates that in 2009 they received over \$338 million in taxpayer-funded federal grants largely composed of National Institute of Health (NIH) awards.[i] Based upon this report, the American taxpayer is funding nearly 60% of UF's research budget and we will accept nothing less than full disclosure and accountability.

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#### Denial of Public Records

On October 22, 2010, in accordance with Fla. Stat. Secs. 119.01 to 119.15, a public records request was delivered to the University of Florida and, pursuant to their instructions, \$564 was subsequently remitted to cover expenses. On December 18, 2010, the university issued an anonymous statement on UF letterhead refusing to comply with “sunshine laws” in the state of Florida. It is important to note that the documents requested -- veterinary records charting the course of their animal-based research-- have historically been recognized, distributed and, therefore, ratified by UF as public information.

Last year, however, by invoking a “veterinary-patient” privilege under “Section 474.2165, Fla. Stat.”[ii] UF decided that it is no longer accountable and, thus, disallowed public scrutiny going forward. Their custom-tailored position suggests that their veterinarians – their employees – have a duty of confidentiality to their “clients” which, according to the language of the statute cited, refers to researchers also employed by the university.

Therefore, the University of Florida contends that an artificial duty of confidentiality between groups of their own employees supersedes and invalidates any and all statutorily-defined duties of public disclosure. UF has demonstrated a clear and astounding disregard for ethics and a formidable resistance to act in the best interests of the public.

Based upon the information that has accidentally come to light, their position is wholly consistent with the seemingly-fraudulent practices they would prefer remain hidden. It is clear that their research program hinges on systemic abuses and exploitation of taxpayers and, until the scope and magnitude of the problem is determined, it appears futile to expect anything more than dishonesty and collusion from those profiting within this public university.

NIH Grant - Project Number: R01MH079388 – Awarded to Dr. Mingzhou Ding

In 2009, Dr. Mingzhou Ding received an annual installment of \$260,070 under the above-noted NIH grant to conduct neurological experiments (i.e., “brain-mapping”) in monkeys. When community activists expressed their objections to these arguably barbaric experiments, UF Public Relations Director Jeanine Sikes quickly absolved Dr. Ding of complicity in several media sources.

According to one report:

“But according to UF Public Affairs director Janine Sikes, the experiments were not done at UF and the data were public domain... ‘and they falsely alleged things about this individual who just analyzed the data,’ Sikes said.”[iii]

In attempting to discredit community activists, Ms. Sikes exposed that disturbing abuses are inherent in their federally-funded research program:

- (1) Dr. Ding never participated in the experiments for which he applied and received NIH awards;
- (2) The actual experiments were conducted in New York;
- (3) Dr. Ding is the applying for federal money to access data that is already publicly available;
- (4) An unknown number of institutions across the country are enjoying federal awards for the same experiment;
- (5) Clearly, these facts warrant a thorough investigation and audit of every taxpayer dollar infused into UF under the guise of "research."

Further, in 2010, Ding applied for and received another \$260,000 from taxpayers for the same brain-mapping experiments that he has never conducted at UF.

According to data available through the NIH[iv], a fair amount of information about Dr. Ding's agenda is outlined. The abstract doesn't go into the specifics since he is focusing on establishing a way to measure monkeys' brainwave output and analyze it. Based on his proposal, “brain mapping” in primates is implicit in his grant request. Dr. Ding makes no reference to the data being provided by a third party. The proposal implies that his project will generate the output data that he will then analyze.

As this institutionalized form of taxpayer abuse is shrouded in secrecy and bureaucracy, COAV demands an immediate moratorium on NIH funding as well as a comprehensive and thorough audit.

We look forward to your favorable and thoughtful response.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Camille Marino

Wildwood, Florida

Coalition of American Voters

[http://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group\\_209791369034291&ap=1](http://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group_209791369034291&ap=1)

[i] According the 2009 University of Florida Research Office Annual Report, of an aggregate \$574 million in research awards received by UF, 59% (or \$338.66 million) were taxpayer-funded federal grants.

(<http://www.research.ufl.edu/research/pdf/dsrannual2009.pdf>)

[ii] The University's denial of our public records request may be viewed online at [http://universityofflorida.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/denial\\_of\\_public\\_records-redacted.pdf](http://universityofflorida.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/denial_of_public_records-redacted.pdf)

[iii] The Independent Florida Alligator, "UF Defends Accused 'Animal Murderer,'" October 12, 2010 ([http://www.alligator.org/news/campus/article\\_a5d3d6ae-d5ae-11df-b82b-001cc4c03286.html](http://www.alligator.org/news/campus/article_a5d3d6ae-d5ae-11df-b82b-001cc4c03286.html))

[iv] NIH Project Information, Project Number 5R01MH079388-04

([http://projectreporter.nih.gov/project\\_info\\_description.cfm?aid=7905763&icde=6690954](http://projectreporter.nih.gov/project_info_description.cfm?aid=7905763&icde=6690954))