



W. Scott Cole

Shareholder

Higher Education Team Leader

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Focus

- Higher Education
- Education
- Exempt Organizations
- Government

Veteran higher education lawyer and consultant with decades of in-house experience. Former general counsel steeped in academy culture, representing colleges and universities across Florida.

Scott Cole leads the GrayRobinson Higher Education Team. He has a unique and intimate understanding of the opportunities, challenges, and constraints facing higher education today, having served for nearly two decades as general counsel for the University of Central Florida and a decade as associate general counsel for the University of Florida. Scott provides legal counsel and operational consulting for colleges and universities, as well as charter and public schools, and serves as outside general counsel for multiple state colleges, school boards, and charter schools across Florida and nationwide. Notable client relationships include the University of Central Florida, Florida International University, Florida Atlantic University, University of Florida, Florida State University, Broward College, South Florida State College, the school boards of Lake and St. Lucie counties, and the Villages Charter Schools.

Scott works closely with key stakeholders on a wide variety of issues, including business transactions involving nonprofit entities, employment, student affairs, policies and procedures, governance, and contracts. He understands the university and nonprofit cultures and collaborates regularly with presidents, leadership, administration, and governing boards. This deep cultural awareness of higher education professionals and their environment enables him to provide both strategic and preventative counsel in this continually evolving space. Scott supports clients in anticipating risk and guides them through emerging and complex issues, including industry consolidation, revenue pressures, and collective bargaining. When issues do arise, Scott has extensive experience overseeing and successfully resolving disputes and investigations - from sexual harassment to student misconduct.

Mindful of avoiding a heavy hand, Scott takes a collaborative and consensus-building approach to his work, helping clients make sound decisions, solve problems, and get back to the business at hand. His rich in-house experience includes transactional, regulatory, compliance, and governance issues, as well as issues involving athletics, due process and First Amendment, construction, tax-exempt finance, nonprofit foundations, health science campuses, Title IX, alternative revenue sources, research, federal

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grants, and the many competing interests that intersect in large and diversified academic communities. Scott teams with GrayRobinson colleagues in the litigation, labor and employment, intellectual property, and corporate practices to round out client service offerings for large and multifaceted projects.

Notable Work

- Represented a private university in tax-exempt financing of a campus housing facility.
- Represented a Florida nonprofit hospital system in a public-private partnership for the development, financing, and operation of two medical office buildings.
- Assisted numerous state universities and colleges in the presidential search process.
- Established a new charter school focused solely on students on the autism spectrum.
- Provided leadership, complex legal counsel, and business advice in connection with the establishment of the University of Central Florida College of Medicine, including negotiation of the purchase and gift of private land for the new campus.
- Spearheaded the first P3 project for a Florida public university, responsible for drafting the legislation allowing private financing. Represented the University of Central Florida in a first-of-its-kind \$600 million project that included a new football stadium, basketball arena, student housing complex, hundreds of square feet of retail space, and three parking garages. The project was financed without state funding.
- Key member of the negotiation team on a joint venture to establish a teaching hospital with Healthcare Corporation of America. The University of Central Florida negotiated 20% equity in the hospital joint venture and 50% of the board seats, with no cash contribution.
- Mobilized the University of Central Florida's discounted purchase of a Sanford Burnham research facility from Orange County, financed by the County over 30 years at 0% interest.
- Established a public-private partnership to fund a hotel on the University of Central Florida campus with no university investment, annual rent payments, and participation in net receipts.
- Represented the University of Central Florida board of trustees through numerous impasse hearings with the faculty union.
- Served as the business point person on the development of an implementation plan for the University of Central Florida to restructure an affiliated corporation operating a \$120 million research and manufacturing facility.
- Represented the University of Central Florida in NCAA investigations and hearings, resulting in the successful resolution of most issues and reduction of proposed sanctions.
- Served as the primary negotiator and legal advisor for the establishment of the National Entrepreneur Center, a resource for small businesses in Central Florida.
- Lead counsel on the development of a \$178 million university-based continuing care retirement community, whose affiliation with all university colleges creates unique education, research, and service opportunities for students and faculty and unparalleled life-long learning experiences for residents.

Insights

- "GrayRobinson Higher Education Insight: College and University Crisis Management: The General Counsel's Role in Helping Boards and Leaders Navigate Crises," GrayRobinson Insight, September 10, 2026

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- "From Preparedness to Public Voice: Helping Boards and Leaders Navigate Crises," Presenter, National Association of College and University Attorneys (NACUA) 2026 Annual Conference, July 1, 2026
- "2026 ELA Year in Review: US Higher Education," Webinar, Employment Law Alliance (ELA), February 18, 2026
- Annual Colloquium Series, AdventHealth University, August 25, 2025
- "How to Effectively Work with Public Entities," Co-Presenter, Association of Corporate Counsel Central Florida Chapter, February 23, 2023
- "NLRB: Dartmouth Basketball Players Considered Employees and Can Unionize," GrayRobinson Higher Education TeamInsight, February 15, 2024
- "528: Crisis Communications in US Higher Education," Podcast, Employment Law Alliance (ELA), December 12, 2023
- "Business and Legal Trends in Higher Education," Webinar, International Colleges and Universities of Florida, August 8, 2023
- "Complying with Florida's Safety in Private Spaces Act," GrayRobinson Higher Education Team Insight, June 20, 2023
- "IRS Chief Counsel Issues Memorandum on Tax-exempt Collectives," GrayRobinson Higher Education TeamInsight, June 13, 2023
- "D.C. Briefing: Review of Recent Developments in the Legal Landscape that Impact U.S. Employers," Webinar, Employment Law Alliance (ELA), November 15, 2022
- "NIL and Student Athletes as Employees," State University System Attorneys Meeting, November 3, 2022
- "Temporary Injunction Issued Against Florida's 'Stop WOKE Act' – What this Means for Colleges and Universities," GrayRobinson Higher Education TeamInsight, August 30, 2022
- "Proposed Amendments to the Title IX Regulations," GrayRobinson Higher Education Team Insight, July 11, 2022
- "Legal Issues and Foundations," Spring Conference, Florida Council for Resource Development, April 28, 2022
- "NLRB: Student Athletes as Employees," Labor and Employment Luncheon, Hillsborough County Bar Association, April 20, 2022
- "When Good Educators Do Bad Things," Spring CLE: Managing Faculty Misconduct, National Association of College and University Attorneys, March 30, 2022
- "Faculty Misconduct," Spring CLE: Managing Faculty Misconduct, National Association of College and University Attorneys, March 29, 2022
- "NLRB: Student Athletes as Employees," Orange County Bar Association, March 11, 2022
- "Implications of recent cases for the future of affirmative action in universities," D.C. Perspectives Briefing, Employment Law Alliance (ELA), March 3, 2022
- "NLRB Releases Memorandum: NCAA Players Considered Employees," GrayRobinson Higher Education TeamInsight, September 29, 2021
- "White House Safer Workforce Task Force Issues COVID Safety Protocols for Federal Contractors," GrayRobinson Higher Education TeamInsight, September 28, 2021
- "What's Next After Alston and NIL? College Football Players as Employees?" Daily Business Review, September 22, 2021

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- "What Do NCAA Changes Mean for Athletes and Their Parents?" Bloomberg Law, July 27, 2021
- "U.S. Supreme Court Renders Decision in NCAA v. Alston," GrayRobinson Higher Education Team Insight, July 1, 2021
- "Preparing Your University for Possible Student-Athlete Compensation for Use of Name, Image, or Likeness (NIL)," GrayRobinson Higher Education Team Insight, June 16, 2021
- "Legislation Filed in Congress Aims to Classify College Athletes as Employees," GrayRobinson Higher Education Team Insight, June 4, 2021
- "The General Counsel as a Strategic Partner with the Business Officer," Annual Conference, National Association of College and University Business Officers, 2017
- "Legal Roadblocks to University Partnerships," Task Force of College Presidents, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2017
- "Dealing with Difficult Situations," General Counsel Institute, National Association of College and University Attorneys, 2017

Media

- "10 Questions With an NIL Expert, Flight Horror Stories," *Saturday Down South Podcast*, July 1, 2021
- "Six States Set to Let College Athletes Profit From Name, Image," *Washington Times*, June 25, 2021
- "Higher Demand For Student Housing is Driving Work For Real Estate Lawyers Across Florida," *Daily Business Review*, August 19, 2024

Affiliations

- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
 - Board Member
- American Bar Association
 - Law School Accreditation Team
- National Association of College and University Attorneys
 - Board Member, 2004-2007
 - Strategic Planning, Board Operations, and Finance and Audit Committees
- Small Business Advisory Counsel
 - Board of Directors, 2012-2020

Credentials

- J.D., University of Florida College of Law, 1986
- B.S., University of Florida, 1983

Admissions

- Florida