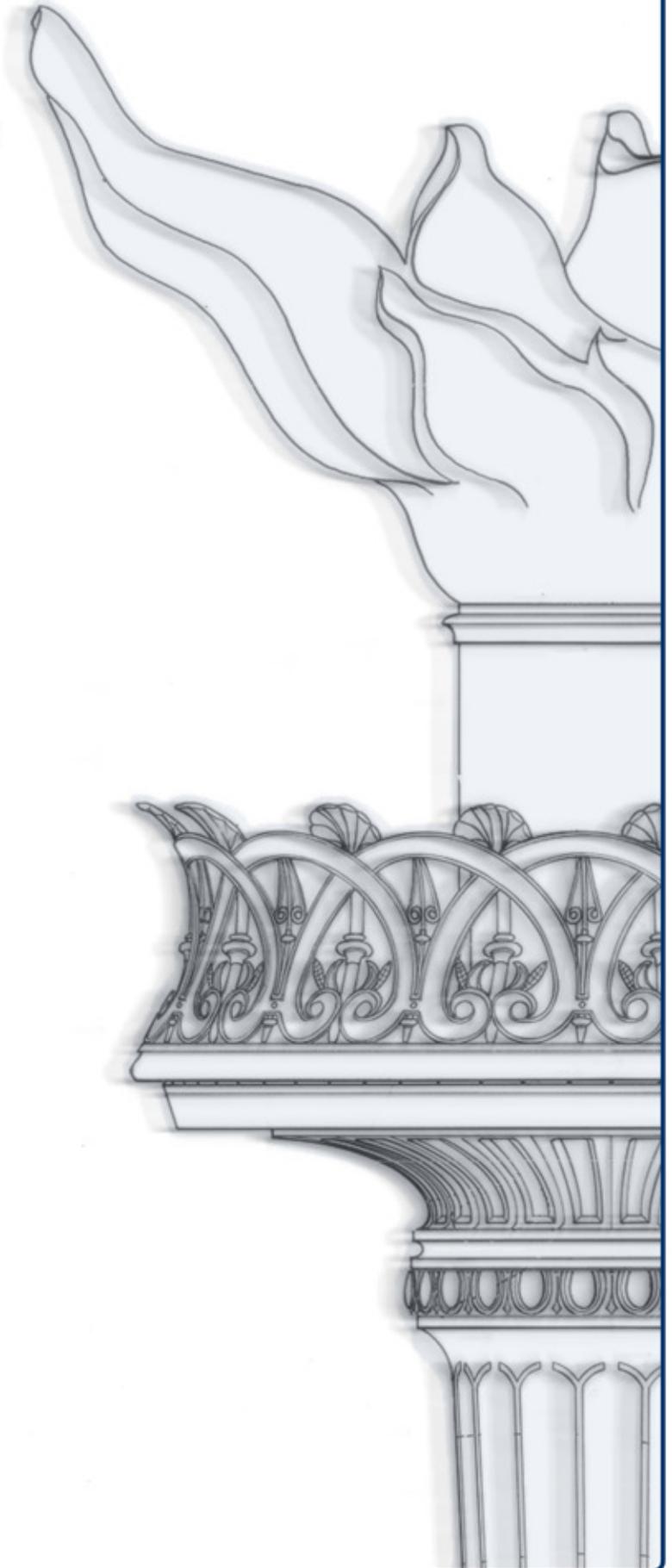


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Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom
Volume LXII Number 4

Quarterly eBulletin

Apr/May/June 2009



The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Apr/May/June 2009 - Volume LXII Number 4

In this quarter's TACT newsletter...

- Page 3 Letter from the President
by Gary Coulton
- Page 4 Letter from the Past President
by Dr. Debra Price
- Page 5 Executive Director's Report
by Chuck Hempstead
- Page 6 Why We Should Value
the Tenure System
by Thomas Palaima
- Page 8 Congrats to the New TACT Board!
- Page 9 GRF Contributors

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Sam Houston State University

Peter Hugill

Texas A&M

Executive Director

Chuck Hempstead
(512) 873-7404

Office Manager

Robin Mitchell
(512) 873-7404



Texas Association of College Teachers
5750 Balcones Dr., Suite 201 Austin, Texas 78731
tact@bizaustin.rr.com
[p] (512) 873-8195
[f] (512) 873-7423



The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

Index

The President's
Column

Past President's
Column

The Executive
Director's Report

Why We Should Value
the Tenure System
by Thomas Palaima

New TACT Board Pic

GRF Contributors

Membership
Application

Legislative
First Alerts

Past eBulletins



Letter from the President

by Gary Coulton
TACT President

Greetings! First I must say that I'm extremely proud to be the new President of such a respected and well established organization. As many of you know, TACT celebrated its 60th anniversary last year, which is no small accomplishment.

What that tells me is that, for over half a century a large number of academics in Texas have found considerable value in belonging to TACT. And why wouldn't they? TACT does an excellent job of making key Legislators aware of issues of interest to members of the academy, monitoring relevant issues, as well as keeping the membership well informed of the status of such issues via e-mailed TACT Legislative Alerts. In addition, included in our annual membership dues is our Educators' Professional Liability Insurance with \$2 million in liability coverage. But if you're reading this, you are most likely already a TACT member, so I am essentially "preaching to the choir" here.

However, perhaps the above will remind you of why you choose to be a TACT member. It may be useful to reflect on that, because I will need your help to achieve my primary goal during my term. That goal is to significantly increase our membership. As we've all heard many times "There's strength in numbers." That is certainly true in our case; the more members we have the more effective we can be. Here comes that part where I ask you do something specific to help the organization.

Please print out at least two copies of the membership application at <http://www.tact.org/msapp.htm>, and approach two of your colleagues (more would be great), give each of them a copy of the application, and discuss with them the advantages of belonging to TACT. From experience, if a colleague is willing to apply right away, I've found it very helpful to let them fill out the form on the spot and mail it in for them.

There's no reason to give anyone the hard sell, if someone is obviously not interested, perhaps you could try another colleague. (I realize that summer is not the best time to do this, as you and many of your colleagues will not be on campus as much as during the rest of the year, but please support TACT and give it a go.) We are depending on you and greatly appreciate your assistance.

Thank you and I hope you have a good summer.

Gary F. Coulton, Ph.D.

Texas A&M University – San Antonio

Contact us!

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The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

Index

**The President's
Column**

**Past President's
Column**

**The Executive
Director's Report**

**Why We Should Value
the Tenure System**
by Thomas Palaima

New TACT Board Pic

GRF Contributors

**Membership
Application**

**Legislative
First Alerts**

Past eBulletins



Letter from the Past President

by **Dr. Debra Price**
TACT Past President

What an honor and a privilege it has been to serve you during my two-year term as TACT President. Thank you to all of my fellow board members for your hard work and sacrifice. Traveling to and from Austin for board meetings and legislative visits isn't always easy, but I think you can all agree that it was well worth the time and effort.

We have had success over the past two years: we defeated the Academic Bill of Rights, TACT worked hard to protect higher education employee retirement and benefits, and we've instituted the new ORP report tool on the TACT website. This past November, TACT celebrated its 60th year of working for Texas higher education and, certainly, there have been many wins within that time.

It's easy to look at the past and reminisce on the good times that we have all shared and the fights that we have won. It's important to know where we have been, but TACT needs to always be looking forward. Even with the legislative session over, TACT must remain vigilant in making sure policy is implemented. We will study the effects of current legislation, and prepare for the next legislative session.

To do this, TACT needs your continued support. Our successes and triumphs would never have been possible without all of you. In the coming years, this will be no different.

So get your colleagues involved. Let them know how TACT has been working hard for them for the past 60 years and show them that we need their support to keep fighting for the benefits and academic freedoms that they may be taking for granted.

The fight for Texas higher education isn't ending this year. My term as TACT President may be up, but that won't stop me from giving TACT, and all of you, my continued support and diligence.

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The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

Index

**The President's
Column**

**Past President's
Column**

**The Executive
Director's Report**

**Why We Should Value
the Tenure System**
by Thomas Palaima

New TACT Board Pic

GRF Contributors

**Membership
Application**

**Legislative
First Alerts**

Past eBulletins



Executive Director's Report

by **Chuck Hempstead**
TACT Executive Director

Legislature Goes Home – For Now

The Governor has indicated no need for a special session, but the rumors say otherwise. In a session sandwiched between politics – a Speaker's race causing a slow start in the House and a conclusion marked by House Democrats chubbing to stop the Voter ID Bill – many initiatives deemed important weren't finalized – and the Senate is not happy about it.

All-in-all, TACT fared rather well, even in a tight budget year when predictions (at least by conservative Comptroller Combs) are that next session could be tighter. The \$7 Billion Rainy Day Fund is intact to grow, and the economy, slow as it is, outpaces the rest of the country.

Big success was our perennial issue of TEXAS Grant appropriations, which was increased 44 percent – allocating significant new money on campus. This increase will allow the State to offer assistance to roughly two-thirds of eligible students, up from about a half.

We won't have guns on campus, despite the editorial suggesting arming all the students attending the UT/Aggie football game. TRS participants will need to pay in a bit more, and ORP participants will get a bit less from the state. Seems time for TACT to again advocate for local and other funds to be used for ORP supplemental appropriation at the campus level.

Due to TACT's continuing vigilance, the Academic Bill of Rights was a no-show, and College Readiness Standards have not yet been the controversial issue we predicted. Tried to get some of that federal stimulus money, but the shell game hasn't fallen our way.

Thank you for your interest and assistance in these issues which affect your quality of life and ability to serve your students. We keep plugging away, and will begin immediately with the educational process encouraging further success in 2011.

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The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

Index

The President's
Column

Past President's
Column

The Executive
Director's Report

**Why We Should Value
the Tenure System**
by Thomas Palaima

New TACT Board Pic

GRF Contributors

Membership
Application

Legislative
First Alerts

Past eBulletins



Why We Should Value the Tenure System

by Thomas Palaima
Professor of Classics, UT

When a professor as distinguished as political economist Francis Fukuyama argues that the tenure system at American universities should be abolished, it pays for us to pay attention.

Most attacks on tenure and on the academic freedom that it is designed to guarantee come from the conservative side of the political spectrum, generally based on concerns about the damaging effects free-thinking professors have on students in the areas of traditional morals, religious beliefs and civic virtues.

Fukuyama, however, despite being a protégé of Paul Wolfowitz, presciently opposed the neoconservative Iraq war policy, which he called “utterly unrealistic in its overestimation of U.S. power.” And last October in Newsweek, he offered a devastating critique of the Reagan and Bush economic policies of tax cuts and deregulation that he believes are “at the core of” our current economic crisis.

Fukuyama thinks that “the rationale for tenure,” i.e., the need to protect academic freedom against powerful outsiders who have “tried to remove professors whose views they dislike,” is still valid, and that “the intellectual freedom guaranteed by tenure is precious.” But, as an economist, he argues that the cost of the tenure system is too high intellectually, and the freedom of thought it guarantees can be acquired in another market — think tanks.

In my opinion, Fukuyama has moved in Olympian realms too long and suffers from high-altitude bomber syndrome — an inability to see how the lofty proposals he is dropping on us play out on the ground.

Let's examine his idea that think tanks can provide havens for thinkers of politically or culturally controversial ideas. First, think tanks — with few exceptions like the New America Foundation to which Fukuyama belongs — are small partisan institutions where public intellectuals have their ideas reinforced by like-minded thinkers. If academic freedom is not guaranteed at our thousands of community and junior colleges, four-year colleges and research universities, public and private, even non-partisan or bipartisan think tanks will do us little good educationally.

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The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

Why We Should Value the Tenure System (cont'd.)

CONTENTS

Cover Page

Index

**The President's
Column**

**Past President's
Column**

**The Executive
Director's Report**

**Why We Should Value
the Tenure System**
by Thomas Palaima

New TACT Board Pic

GRF Contributors

**Membership
Application**

**Legislative
First Alerts**

Past eBulletins

Secondly, Fukuyama argues that the tenure system has made our educational institutions overly conservative. In his view, graduate students and assistant professors have to think in lockstep with their advisers and their senior faculty colleagues in order to advance. This stifles innovation and promotes group-think.

These tendencies do exist. But I can state categorically that in the many colleges and universities I have visited, I have seen widespread strong encouragement from senior faculty of young scholars and Ph.D. candidates with new ideas and new approaches, sometimes the very ideas and approaches that an educational world without tenure would not tolerate. Also it is hard to imagine that pressures to assimilate are not felt in think tanks, which lack the formal safeguards of extra-departmental and extra-institutional reviews when it comes to professional advancement.

Tenure is criticized for guaranteeing career-long employment to faculty members, a small percentage of whom become unproductive. But widespread systems of post-tenure review are correcting the problem of senior deadwood.

Moreover, the career-long security at a particular institution offered by tenure has several unacknowledged positive ramifications. It makes tenured faculty willing to put long hours into improving for the long haul what they rightly come to view as 'their' colleges and universities. This runs counter to what political economists like Fukuyama see as the harmful emphasis on short-term gains in American corporations and other institutions.

The ongoing major curricular reforms in undergraduate studies at the University of Texas have already taken seven years of study, planning, critiquing and first-stage implementation, beginning with the formation of the Commission of 125 in 2002. Like many other long-term changes, these improvements would have been unthinkable at an institution made of untenured careerist faculty members ready to spring off to the best job offers elsewhere and therefore unwilling to do hard work whose only reward is making the educational experience better for tens of thousands of young men and women of the state of Texas year after year.

The next time you run into tenured faculty members anywhere, thank them for their dedication to the future of our country.

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The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

Index

**The President's
Column**

**Past President's
Column**

**The Executive
Director's Report**

**Why We Should Value
the Tenure System**
by Thomas Palaima

New TACT Board Pic

GRF Contributors

**Membership
Application**

**Legislative
First Alerts**

Past eBulletins

Congrats to the 2009-2010 TACT Board



2009-2010 TACT Board From Left to Right:

Elizabeth Lewandowski (VP of Membership), Gary Coulton (President), Allen Martin (Member-At-Large), Mark Gaus (Member-At-Large), Debra Price (Past President), Peter Hugill (Member-At-Large), Cindy Simpson (VP of Legislative Affairs)

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The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

Index

**The President's
Column**

**Past President's
Column**

**The Executive
Director's Report**

**Why We Should Value
the Tenure System**
by Thomas Palaima

New TACT Board Pic

GRF Contributors

**Membership
Application**

**Legislative
First Alerts**

Past eBulletins

The James M. Puckett, Ph. D. Government Relations Fund

The TACT Dr. James M. Puckett, Ph.D. Government Relations Fund is a result of optional contributions made by those committed to TACT's heightened public affairs program. It is not used for candidate contributions, but is used for activities that will increase awareness of TACT among influences of public policy. Your contribution will assist in TACT's legislative efforts to improve Texas higher education. All expenditures are approved in advance by TACT's President, President-elect and Legislative Committee Chair.

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Contact us!

5750 Balcones Dr., Suite 201
Austin, TX 78731
tact@bizaustin.rr.com
[p] (512) 873-8195
[f] (512) 873-7423