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President's Column

by Elizabeth Lewandowski
TACT President

Morning Routine? ...Anything But.

Like most of you, I have a morning routine. While I'm preparing for my day, I listen to NPR, catching up on what happened in the world while I was sleeping. Some mornings I am amused by a silly story, others my heart is touched by a tragic story. Occasionally I find myself talking back to the radio, even yelling at it.

A few days ago I got caught up in a story on Marketplace. The reporter interviewed someone who had done a study on the relative financial value of a college education in the modern world. After extensive discussion regarding the increasing cost of higher education and how long it takes to pay off student loans, the reporter made a few brief statements about the short term financial value of higher education and ended the discussion. Now I admit that this is a program that focuses on money, but we all know that in discussing the value of any investment it is important to review both short and long term values. Not to mention the intangible values that are harder to evaluate like quality of life and the value of an educated citizenry.

I found myself talking back to the radio, "What value, other than money, is a part of getting a college education?" "How about some discussion regarding why the cost of higher education paid by the individual is going up?" "Why aren't you looking at the whole picture?" As my frustration rose at hearing the same old story reported by a usually very fine reporter, I thought about how pointless was my frustration and even more pointless my yelling at the radio.

As a beginning teacher many years ago, a colleague gave me some valuable life advice "Complain up". It does no good to complain to each other, to ask for solutions from our neighbors, to tell the students about the brutal reality that the reason individuals are paying more for higher education is that the states are cutting the funding every year. Many states, like Texas, have cut the state funding to higher education by half in the last 25 years. You know that and I know that. The NPR reporter might not know that. Our local newspaper probably doesn't have that information.

Who can make a difference? You can. If you aren't a member of TACT, join now and make your voice one of ours as we work as one voice with the Legislature.

If you are already a member, write a letter to your local newspaper, Write NPR. Make your voice heard by the people who can make a difference.

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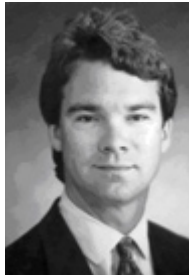
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Executive Director's Report

by Chuck Hempstead
TACT Executive Director

Springtime in Texas: Bluebonnets and School Finance

After several non-starter special sessions on school finance reform (or was it property tax reform?)...after the Supreme Court ruling ("do something, anything, to create fairness")...after interim charges were delayed (then ignored)...after the March primaries (don't want those incumbents to make hard votes before elections)...after the John Sharp Tax Commission report (they keep asking the plaintiffs what solution they'll accept)...whew!, let's have another special session!

Texans are getting their money's worth of out of the \$600 per month legislative salaries, if you count hours worked instead of solutions accomplished. In fact, incumbents by the droves chose not to file for the primary elections, so unless the April/May special session reaches consensus, there will be a whole new educational process required in January on the fine points of Robin Hood, recapture, truth in property appraisals, executive orders of "money to the classrooms" (sorry, libraries), teacher compensation theory, implementation of No Child Left Behind and the many other elements of where we get school money and how we spend it.

What does this mean to university professors? TACT has always stood up for quality in education, and that starting point is for Texas public school graduates to be prepared for college curriculum. It's old news that many are not. TACT has offered the expertise of its members to the staff of the Coordinating Board, who are experimenting with developing teams of public school and college faculty to enhance the readiness of college freshmen.

As always, TACT will be present at the Capitol when these issues are discussed. Suggestion: When the primaries are finished, how about inviting the candidates for the general elections in November to come to your campus for a discussion of these issues? It's not so much so that you can compare their answers and decide whom to support - it's so that they listen to you for your good ideas and learn that university faculty are an excellent resource for the knowledge needed in developing appropriate public policy on a variety of issues.

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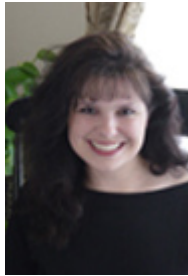
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Guest Editorial

by Dr. Cindy Simpson
Assistant Professor, Sam Houston State University
TACT VP Legislative Affairs

New Challenges Ahead: Public Policy 2006

At the close of each legislative session advocates around the state reflect over the legislation passed and debate whether or not their voices were clearly heard. TACT members recognized that not every issue or every piece of legislation moved forth, but it was made evident that the voice for higher education initiatives was a strong one. TACT members worked diligently in making legislative visits and clearly articulating the need to strengthen higher education legislation relating to compensation, retirement benefits, tenure, academic freedom, promotion, legal protection and a variety of other issues. During these visits it became clear that many of our representatives and legislatures were listening and eager to work with us in our quest. The descriptions and status of several bills addressed in the 79th legislative session can be found on the TACT website under First Alerts and Legislation. As we move forth and legislatures face special interim committee charges, it is imperative that we, as TACT members, begin to articulate our needs on several key issues. Senate committee charges were released by Lt. Governor Dewhurst. Those charges most relevant to TACT membership were reported by Chuck Hempstead in brief form as follows:

Senate Education Committee:

1. Study and make recommendations on educational reforms necessary to focus high schools and student performance on post-secondary readiness and success.

Subcommittee on Higher Education:

1. Study the impact and costs associated with distance learning on traditional higher education.
2. Study the cost of (higher) education, specifically, tuition deregulation and student fees.
3. Study the impact any changes to the percentage requirements of the Top 10% Law could have.....
4. Monitor Closing the Gaps and recommend changes....
5. Study the relationship of College of Education coursework on teacher effectiveness and student performance....

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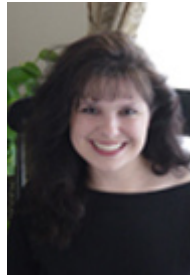
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Guest Editorial

by Dr. Cindy Simpson
Assistant Professor, Sam Houston State University
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New Challenges Ahead: Public Policy 2006

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Joint Charge with Senate Finance Committee:

1. Recommend changes to new higher education funding formulas by adopting a cost-based formula matrix....

Subcommittee on Capital Funding for Higher Education:

1. Study capital funding, including tuition revenue bonds, PUF and HEAF...

Subcommittee on Economic Development & Emerging Technologies:

1. Study commercialization of intellectual property.

TACT will continue to advocate for higher education faculty during interim and special sessions, as well as to develop a new 2007 legislative agenda. Members are encouraged to speak out on the above listed issues and become active in vocalizing the needs of higher education faculty. For assistance or support on contacting legislatures, either through written communication or personal visits, please contact Dr. Cynthia Simpson, TACT VP of Legislative Affairs, or Chuck Hempstead, TACT Executive Director.

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TACT regional conference offered the opportunity for Representative Lois Kolhurst to present her views on senate committee interim charges. Specifically, Representative Kolhurst provided clarification on those issues directly impacting the higher education community. Building funds, tuition revenue bonds, costs, and accountability were discussed in an open forum. Representative Kolhurst stressed the need for legislatures to deal specifically with public school finances before addressing higher education. She stated and reinforced her strong commitment to higher education issues and faculty needs. The session was informative and provided members with a wealth of new information.