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In this quarter's TACT newsletter...

p. 2

TACT President Elizabeth Lewandowski offers an open letter to the Legislature...

p. 4

Executive Director Chuck Hempstead: Home Again, Home Again.

p. 6

Higher Education Commissioner Dr. Raymund Paredes' Report to the Board...

p. 7

Guest Editorial writer Dr. W. Allen Martin on the push for higher graduation rates...



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The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Apr/May/June 2006 LIX No 4

Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

President's
Column

The Executive
Director's Report

Report to Higher
Ed. Board

Guest Editorial:
W. Allen Martin

Membership
Application

Upcoming Events

Legislative First
Alerts

Click here for
Past eBulletins



President's Column

by Elizabeth Lewandowski
TACT President

An open letter to the Texas Legislature

Congratulations on finishing a productive special session on education. You've submitted your bill and gone home for some well deserved relaxation. Before you get too comfortable, let me remind you of what lies ahead.

While you have made some inroads on balancing the funding of Texas schools and made progress on teachers' salaries, the main point of this special session has been overlooked. That point is - education! As a representative of higher education faculty across the state, I want you to know that we are concerned about the quality of education being received by students prior to admission to college.

As many as two thirds of college freshman in Texas require remediation before they can take college level courses. Two-thirds. These classes do not count towards a student's major but rather help them achieve the minimum necessary skills required for reading, writing and mathematics needed in the core curriculum and within their major. Two-thirds. These students may spend an entire semester taking these remedial classes so that they can begin to function at a college level. Two-thirds.

Some high schools offer, and the legislature supports, classes offered in the high school by high school teachers for college credit. These courses, which take students and teachers away from normal high school learning and development, help a few students begin their college careers early while setting up unrealistic expectations regarding the type of classroom and instruction to be expected in college. On many high school campuses these courses are not truly "more rigorous" because the classes are not taught by someone with qualifications equivalent to those held by a faculty member at a university.

Students who enter college at age 18 with their freshman year already completed may indeed be able to graduate from the university in three years. However, these students have missed the growth and maturity opportunities offered to those students who are enrolled on campus for four years. These students are more likely to experience poor social and communication skills.

continued on next page >>

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Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

President's
Column

The Executive
Director's Report

Report to Higher
Ed. Board

Guest Editorial:
W. Allen Martin

Membership
Application

Upcoming Events

Legislative First
Alerts

Click here for
Past eBulletins



President's Column

by Elizabeth Lewandowski
TACT President

An open letter to the Texas Legislature

[continued from previous page]

At one end of the spectrum we are doing high school students a disservice by not adequately preparing them for college so that they are required to take remediation courses. At the other end of the spectrum we are allowing students to take college credit classes in a high school setting, again not adequately preparing them for college.

It seems to me that comparing our high school graduation criteria with the other ten most populous states, we compare poorly. Rather than spending time and money, ill preparing a few students to get a jump on their college careers, we, the citizens of Texas, would benefit more fully from the investment of our tax dollars by having all our high school graduates reach a higher level of literacy.

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Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

President's
Column

The Executive
Director's Report

Report to Higher
Ed. Board

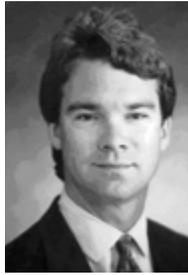
Guest Editorial:
W. Allen Martin

Membership
Application

Upcoming Events

Legislative First
Alerts

Click here for
Past eBulletins



Executive Director's Report

by Chuck Hempstead
TACT Executive Director

Home Again, Home Again.

Yes, our Texas Legislators are back home again after Special Legislative Session number 53. See you soon in seven-plus months for the next Regular. How do these guys make a living? Many haven't been, which is why there may have been an unprecedented number of retirements before the recent primaries to go along with a number of incumbents getting knocked off - an indication of voters' dissatisfaction with the previous stalemates over property tax reduction/school finance reform.

Call it the Sharp Commission plan, the Governor's initiative or the Lt. Governor and Speaker working well together, something was patched together in the nick of time to beat the Supreme Court's June 1 deadline for a constitutional replacement of Robin Hood, a patchwork approach more than ten years ago that was not intended to be in place this long and certainly outlived its usefulness long ago.

So what did "we" do? ("We" being the Capitol parlance of anyone who hangs around when the Legislators do and has an opinion - a large club.)

"We" passed House Bills 1-5. Together, the legislation schedules a reduction in school district maintenance and operations property taxes, yet leaves some local option discretion to the school districts and voters. They provide a \$2,000 raise for teachers and other school employees and pushes back into late August the first day of school beginning in 2007.

The new margins tax replaces the current franchise tax, which is successfully avoided by many businesses. It adds additional state revenues through a cigarette tax and a sales tax on used cars based on blue book value. (No more buying your brother's three-year-old Corvette for \$1,500.)

Of course, the big win for higher education was the approval of tuition revenue bonds for the construction and repair of campus buildings. The issue could not gain traction last session, possibly lost in the pique over deregulated and rising tuition. And we'll even have a funded Irma Rangel Pharmacy School at Texas A&M - Kingsville, now that the facilities are in place and all that are needed is faculty and students.

continued on next page >>

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Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

President's
Column

The Executive
Director's Report

Report to Higher
Ed. Board

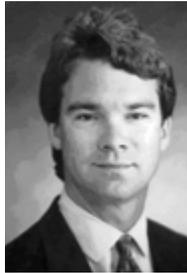
Guest Editorial:
W. Allen Martin

Membership
Application

Upcoming Events

Legislative First
Alerts

Click here for
Past eBulletins



Executive Director's Report

by Chuck Hempstead
TACT Executive Director

Home Again, Home Again.

[continued from previous page]

Not a bad solution for Texas and the Legislature that have been battling these issues for years. Take an opportunity to thank your elected officials. Maybe now that public education has had their decades long turn at bat, higher education will receive closer focus by the leadership when the new crew returns to Austin in January.

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For possibly the only time...

TACT's Educators' Professional Liability Insurance [E.P.L.I.] is now on sale!! For half price [\$29.50], you will be covered between now and Halloween [OCT. 31, 2006]. Why not try this out now at this bargain rate and see if you don't sleep better with \$2,000,000 of protection against charges of sexual harassment, discriminatory promotion and tenure decisions, and student grade grievances? For further information, please visit <http://www.tact.org/epli.shtml>, or call the TACT offices at 512-873-7404.

1. The price on the website does not reflect this promotional sale. Your discount will be given when your order is received at the TACT offices.
2. Current membership to TACT is required for EPLI to be in effect.



The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Apr/May/June 2006 LIX No 4

Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

President's
Column

The Executive
Director's Report

Report to Higher
Ed. Board

Guest Editorial:
W. Allen Martin

Membership
Application

Upcoming Events

Legislative First
Alerts

Click here for
Past eBulletins



Report to the Higher Education Board

by Dr. Raymund Paredes
Texas Commissioner of Higher Education

Developing a Statewide Strategy for P-16

Dr. Raymund Paredes, Texas Higher Education Commission, provides periodic written reports to the Coordinating Board. They may be accessed at <http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/Commissioner/>.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board is accelerating its cooperation with the Texas Education Agency on a variety of levels, all under the heading "P-16" - the buzz phrase for improving the transition of students from public schools to universities. The following report from Commissioner Paredes to the Coordinating Board tells of the most recent progress.

Go to: <http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/Commissioner/CommRep0406.pdf>

-Editor.

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Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

President's
Column

The Executive
Director's Report

Report to Higher
Ed. Board

Guest Editorial:
W. Allen Martin

Membership
Application

Upcoming Events

Legislative First
Alerts

Click here for
Past eBulletins

Guest Editorial

by Dr. W. Allen Martin
University of Texas at Tyler
TACT Northeast Region VP

The Push for Higher Graduation Rates

I had heard about the push for higher graduation rates from TACT some time ago. The idea is all about money, of course, and the argument that, if a student keeps on taking two and three courses per semester, that person is taking too many spots in too many classrooms! Hmm.

The pressure will increase, we must graduate more students faster. Let's think about the foundation that this speed is to be built on. Texas public schools rank 40th in per-student spending, ranks 33rd in teacher's salaries (16.6% less than the average teacher's salary.) Teacher drop out is huge at over 37,000 Texas teachers giving up each year. High school seniors take very few courses and are on their way to being bumps on a log as they enter junior colleges or our freshman classes. But the quality of the high school education is the most shocking feature of the high school morass. When was the last time that high school pupils wrote real term papers? Who among them has ever gone beyond the internet to gather research information?

Then they come here. Not surprisingly, every self-centered incentive pushes junior college faculty to use only As, Bs, and a few Cs, and this is inevitably coupled with Scantron tests and only an occasional paper using the internet. Yes, administrators focus on efficiency, meaning large classes. But what are we to do? Two directions are at the heart of the dilemma. We do best for our own personal goals if we respond to the incentives and make the courses easy and reward the sloth with good grades. The opposite direction is subject to ridicule: Hold to standards of the 1980s in the assignments and grading. As everyone knows the 1980s and even the 1970s were part of the glide path to the folly we have today. Folly? Yes, because the glide path will continue downward until something stops it perhaps suddenly and hard.

Serious forces, that is, people with real power inside and outside of the academy are speaking directly and unabashedly about standardized testing of college students, entering and graduating, to determine the value added to the product, "students." It is not just about innumeracy these days (my university did not teach anything so elementary as basic algebra), but also reading and writing. Most college graduates cannot read complex arguments and develop reasoned responses (Council on Adult Literacy). We must think about the simple admonition: We can police ourselves or be policed by others.

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Apr/May/June 2006 LIX No 4

Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

President's
Column

The Executive
Director's Report

Report to Higher
Ed. Board

Guest Editorial:
W. Allen Martin

Membership
Application

Upcoming Events

Legislative First
Alerts

Click here for
Past eBulletins

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The Push for Higher Graduation Rates

[continued from previous page]

How terrible! What about academic freedom? As I have watched the disaster unfold, I have also seen that faculty members are less and less likely to join the associations that have argued the faculty side (AAUP, TACT). Anyway you look at it, the nation's faculty have punted, repeatedly.

Despite coddling, or maybe because of it, people are not graduating from college at a very high rate because, these days, they have seen the world of work and the way things work, concluding that they are not learning much of importance in college, it's basically high school all over again, and it costs too much money for the reward of a degree. Our graduates need to be ready for the world of work and life's problems, not just left holding the degree. The story about the boss and the new employee rings true: "Young man, I see you have a college degree, here is a broom...but that's okay, we will train you." We must add a lot to students' lives in four, five, or six years.

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