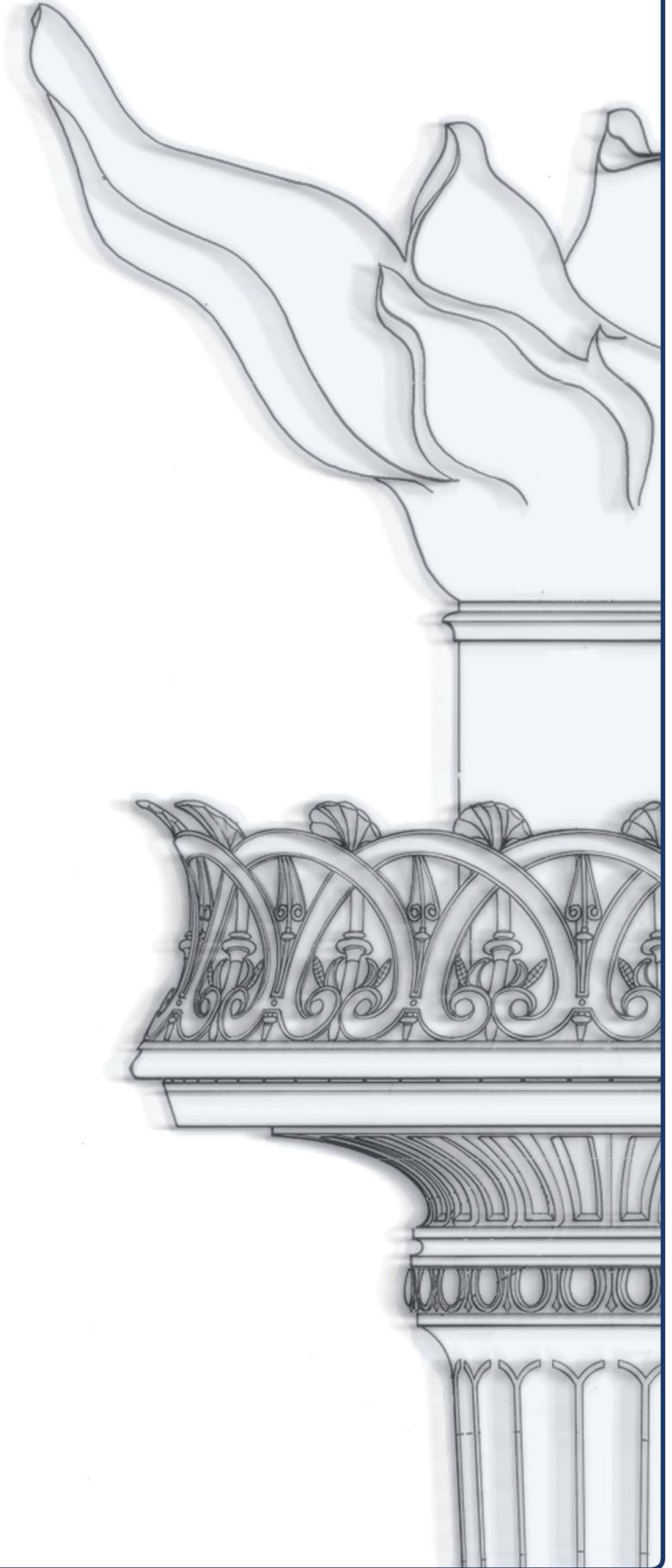


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Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom
Volume LXXI Number 2



Quarterly eBulletin

October/November/December 2017

The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

October/November/December 2017 - Volume LXXI Number 2

In this quarter's TACT newsletter...

- Page 3 President's Message
by Donna Cox
- Page 5 Sleepy Time for Texas Politics
by Chuck Hempstead
- Page 6 To Email, Text or Tweet? That is a Good Question!
by Gaines West
- Page 10 One of Texas' Most Valuable Natural Resources: Higher
Education Faculty
- Page 15 TACT Legislative Issues
- Page 16 Government Relations Fund
- Page 17 Membership

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The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

Index

President's Message

Sleepy Time for Texas Politics

To Email, Text or Tweet? That is a Good Question!

One of Texas' Most Valuable Natural Resources: Higher Education Faculty

TACT Legislative Issues

Government Relations Fund

Membership

Contact us!

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President's Message

by Donna Cox
Sam Houston State University

that higher education must be proactive in encouraging safe opinion-sharing among all its constituents.

The question is: Who are we actually lobbying for? In a nutshell, we lobby for our students.

We in higher education cuss and discuss the perceived lack of funding from our state government. It isn't just about faculty raises, which, according to an April 11, 2017 article by Peter Schmidt in The Chronicle of Higher Education, states that "With appropriations for higher education still lagging behind prerecession levels, faculty should expect a prolonged period of little growth in salaries." Without appropriate compensation, Texas universities run the risk of being unable to retain current faculty nor recruit outstanding professors for their students. Many bright and talented young professors have figured out the only way to stay ahead of inflation or to earn decent, not extravagant, raises is to steadily move from university to university in order to consistently renegotiate their salaries. Very often, these professors move to other states.

Members of TACT had the opportunity to lobby at our state capitol on Friday, October 27th. We divided our members up into two teams in order to visit with twice as many legislative aides. The purpose of our visits was to discuss the three issues that TACT has chosen to focus on this year: higher education funding, public education funding, and freedom of expression. Specifically, TACT supports increasing appropriations investments over the current budget levels to fund faculty salary parity, Hurricane Harvey rebuilding, and the growing unfunded mandate of the Hazelwood Act Legacy Program. Further, we support increasing appropriations investments in public education to increase the number of college-ready freshmen prepared to prosper in higher education. Finally, because universities are increasingly the sites of demonstrations and counterdemonstrations regarding the important societal issues of the day, TACT maintains



The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

Index

President's Message

Sleepy Time for
Texas Politics

To Email, Text or
Tweet? That is a
Good Question!

One of Texas' Most
Valuable Natural
Resources: Higher
Education Faculty

TACT Legislative
Issues

Government
Relations Fund

Membership

President's Message

by Donna Cox

Sam Houston State University

Additionally, when students pay their tuition each semester, more than a quarter of them will be getting an adjunct professor as their course instructor. The pay for adjunct faculty is abysmally low and universities have to scramble each year to find quality adjuncts willing to teach for very little money. Is not a commitment to offer the students of Texas the promise of a quality education also a commitment to pay the providers of that education adequately?

In the article "Texas families are struggling to pay for college — but so is the state" published in the Texas Tribune, authors Matthew Watkins and Annie Daniel share that from 2010 to 2015, Texas ranked last in the nation in total per-student revenue growth at its colleges and universities, according to a study by the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association. That's thanks in part to the shrinking number of dollars per student that Texas is sending its universities. Many Texas lawmakers are unwilling to continue funding students' educations at the same rate as a generation ago.

This and additional unfunded mandates, such the Hazelwood Act Legacy Program, have forced universities to increase tuition to make up the difference and to avoid layoffs and reductions in course offerings. The burden of supporting higher education has shifted. For decades, Texas and its taxpayers showed families a commitment to quality education as the top funders of public universities. But as tuition went up and state appropriations went down, students and their families now have that distinction. So when we in TACT argue for more and better funding from our legislators, we are not speaking for ourselves alone. We are asking the state to do what is ethical and pragmatic by not only equitably funding our public schools, but also investing in our state's future by generously funding higher education institutions. 🇹🇽

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The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Texas Association of College Teachers

Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

Index

President's Message

Sleepy Time for Texas Politics

To Email, Text or Tweet? That is a Good Question!

One of Texas' Most Valuable Natural Resources: Higher Education Faculty

TACT Legislative Issues

Government Relations Fund

Membership

Contact us!

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Sleepy Time for Texas Politics

by **Chuck Hempstead**
TACT Executive Director

The Holiday Season in a non-election year – what is on the minds of your Texas Legislators?

Like Legislative Sessions, no two interims are alike. After the summer special session, many Texas Legislators – and Congressmen – have been involved with hurricane relief, both the physical rehabilitation and trying to pry some money from the feds. Several committees, including House Public Education, have been meeting to evaluate how state policy can be relaxed to assist victims. And we have reported to you the higher education-related interim charges released by the Lt. Governor and Speaker, most of which will not see hearings until the new year.

Another unusual development this Fall is the growing number of re-

tirements among elected officials, which creates a flurry of folks wanting to move up from the House to the Senate to Congress. This is when the candidates are looking for friends (and money) and we can grab their attention long enough to remind them that higher education paves the way to the future. Public service may not be as much fun as it used to be, so when people like



House Speaker Joe Straus and committee chairs have had enough, for now, the domino effect promises new dynamics in 2019. This can create opportunities for us, an example being Dr. John Zerwas running for Speaker after consecutively chairing House Higher Education and Appropriations.

He knows our issues.

Fundraising has returned in earnest. I will attend a few events to support my favorite candidates. Amazing what a small contribution can do when one later asks for a meeting. 



The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

Index

President's Message

Sleepy Time for
Texas Politics

To Email, Text or
Tweet? That is a
Good Question!

One of Texas' Most
Valuable Natural
Resources: Higher
Education Faculty

TACT Legislative
Issues

Government
Relations Fund

Membership

Contact us!

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To Email, Text or Tweet? That is a Good Question!

by Gaines West, Attorney-at-Law
West, Webb, Allbritton & Gentry



Today our communication with, or from, others comes to us mostly in an electronic form - and in starts and stops. Sometimes may-be just in spurts, now and then. Often they are sent or received in the wee hours of the morning {which can be easily proved by getting the phone logs on your phone or history of contacts from and to your electronic device}. Lots has been written about how, with all these new "tools," we should be communicating better and with greater clarity - but unfortunately, it seems that we are not! Some say it's because the recipient can't really understand, or "get," the context or tone of the email, text or tweet. Some say on some days managing electronic communication can be like drinking water out of a fire hydrant, and it is just impossible to keep up!

Well, as you are well aware, the halls of Higher Education are full of all three: emails, texts and tweets! In this column I want to warn you about a trend I have noticed. More

of you are emailing, texting and tweeting your students - often in response to their communication to you - on a fairly regular basis. After all it's easy and efficient to do it - and then you can move on to the next group of emails, texts and tweets that grab your attention. There is one problem: most of you don't retain copies of this communication - but guess what? - the student seems to always keep copies of what you are writing them.

This issue becomes starkly clear when a student alleges harassment {sexual or otherwise}, or retaliation for the student's unwillingness to participate in some asserted fraud or sexual contact - and the list of possible allegations goes on and on.

My professor clients who stand ac-



The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

Index

President's Message

Sleepy Time for
Texas Politics

To Email, Text or
Tweet? That is a
Good Question!

One of Texas' Most
Valuable Natural
Resources: Higher
Education Faculty

TACT Legislative
Issues

Government
Relations Fund

Membership

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To Email, Text or Tweet? That is a Good Question! (continued)

cused are often clueless about a student's allegation until we go and review the contents of the complaint file. The answer I nearly always get is: he/she {student} cherry picked our communication to make an innocent exchange look really bad! Of course by now we are in the Dean of Faculties office {often} having to explain just why it is that NO ONE seems to understand this {communication} was all innocent and that YOU were simply trying to encourage, support, or offer helpful advice. The problem in today's "climate" of dealing with student complaints by colleges and universities is they treat EVERY ONE of the complaints they get very seriously. And to "demonstrate" they take these complaints seriously {too} OFTEN you will at least get put on probation – if not worse - when literally the alleged "abuse" amounts to nothing more than a swearing match. As you know, {even} such probationary "sentences" are not helpful in your attempt to get tenured, get a promotion, or get a title {like Assistant to the Dean of Faculties, or Assistant Provost, etc.}

So, what do you do? Be very

MINDFUL of your communications style, content and type. My recommendation is that tweeting and texting should be relegated {I guess these days} to only the political arena! BUT, however you communicate KEEP copies {either electronic or paper} of all such student communications. I know – sounds unrealistic doesn't it? But maybe, just maybe, if it is unrealistic enough {for you to keep up with emails, texts and tweets} you won't do it.



Now, lest you think I am trying to say: stop being nice and helpful to your students, that's not my message here at all. My message is to be more careful and make sure you keep either an electronic or paper trail of all such communications – and keep them for a good while. I recommend holding the communications in retrievable form for at least two years. I know



The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

Index

President's Message

Sleepy Time for
Texas Politics

To Email, Text or
Tweet? That is a
Good Question!

One of Texas' Most
Valuable Natural
Resources: Higher
Education Faculty

TACT Legislative
Issues

Government
Relations Fund

Membership

Contact us!

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(512) 419-9275

To Email, Text or Tweet? That is a Good Question! (continued)

– another difficult assignment, but again maybe that will figure into your own personal “equation” as to whether you will continue responding to students in this way.



They aren't all out to get you – but I have seen enough of these cases to know that some are! Here are some rules to go by:

- When meeting with students in your office – keep the door open and make sure others are in line of sight and within earshot of what is being said.
- Don't take students on rides in your vehicle alone with you – ever – for any reason.
- Put a sticker on your phone that reminds you the person

with whom you are speaking may likely be recording your conversation {perfectly legal in Texas without telling you that are doing it – same goes for that in office conference – it is very easy on a smart phone to secretly record a conversation}.

- Never trade personal pictures of any kind with a student {yep, some of my clients have and have regretted it}.
- Limit your communication “type” – don't text or tweet, and if you email with a student keep retrievable copies for at least two years.
- Think about the fact that your student may be from a very different culture than your own and as a result may interpret your communication quite differently than you intend.
- Never share your own personal or family details with any student for any reason.



The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

Index

President's Message

Sleepy Time for
Texas Politics

To Email, Text or
Tweet? That is a
Good Question!

One of Texas' Most
Valuable Natural
Resources: Higher
Education Faculty

TACT Legislative
Issues

Government
Relations Fund

Membership

To Email, Text or Tweet? That is a Good Question! (continued)

- Don't ever put anything in any communication {paper or electronic} that you wouldn't mind your Dept. Head, Dean, President or Regent or Trustee reading. This would even include making sure you wouldn't mind your spouse, or significant other, reading what you wrote. Many times a combination of one or more, or all of these, will be reading your communication!

These are just a few practical recommendations that can and will keep you from experiencing the real pain of having to explain to

others why it is your student is alleging harassment.

So, to answer my question that started this discussion: Should you email, text or tweet? I think you now know my answer: you can do it, but you had better be very careful. 🗺

"The information in this column is intended to provide a general understanding of the law, not as legal advice. Readers with legal problems, including those whose questions may be addressed here, should consult attorneys for advice on their particular circumstances."

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The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

Index

President's Message

Sleepy Time for
Texas Politics

To Email, Text or
Tweet? That is a
Good Question!

**One of Texas' Most
Valuable Natural
Resources: Higher
Education Faculty**

TACT Legislative
Issues

Government
Relations Fund

Membership



One of Texas' Most Valuable Natural Resources: Higher Education Faculty

Lisa D. Hobson, Ph. D.

TACT Director at Large

When individuals typically envision Texas' natural resources, many automatically think of the rich minerals, oil and gas, the parks, wildlife estuaries and reserves, natural water springs, coastal marine life, agricultural commodities, and abundant land and ranches. An additional natural resource exists in the form of the valuable human capital Texas has to offer, specifically higher education faculty members. Not only do faculty members in Texas institutions prepare the next generation of the state's and nation's workforce, but they address important issues that impact citizens regionally, nationally, and globally. Texas higher education faculty are the lifeblood of the institutions that produce the state's and nation's leaders, engineers, educators, doctors, geophysicists, lawyers, etc.

As examples, Texas higher education faculty members are conducting ground-breaking research impacting many professions including health, education, science,

technology, engineering, and mathematics (*STEM*), architecture and construction. One of Texas' flagship research institutions, The University of Texas-Austin (*UT Austin*) houses the Jackson School of Geosciences and the Department of Geological Sciences which has one of the oldest, most prestigious, and largest geoscience programs in the nation and world (*UT-Austin, 2017, ¶ 1*). Faculty members in the College of Education and Human Development at Texas A&M University have secured millions of dollars in grant funding to conduct programs and utilize experiential learning strategies, instructional manipulatives, and technology in schools in the Aldine Independent School District (*Aldine ISD Central Administration, personal communication, 2016*). Professors and researchers at the University of Texas-San Antonio produce some of the nation's future cybersecurity experts and have received a \$5 million dollar grant from the National Science Foundation to create a center that examines cybersecurity and cloud computing. For approximately 20 years, cybersecurity professionals and associations rec-

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(512) 419-9275



The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

Index

President's Message

Sleepy Time for
Texas Politics

To Email, Text or
Tweet? That is a
Good Question!

**One of Texas' Most
Valuable Natural
Resources: Higher
Education Faculty**

TACT Legislative
Issues

Government
Relations Fund

Membership

Contact us!

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Suite 201
Austin, TX 78731
office@tact.org
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One of Texas' Most Valuable Natural Resources: Higher Education Faculty (continued)



Recognize UTSA as a national leader in cybersecurity (*Carver, 2017*). Students enrolled in these programs and classes have access to best-in-class, first-in-class, top-tier knowledge and information to be better prepared for their respective programs and career fields.

Additionally, Texas universities rank in the top schools in the nation for graduation success, career readiness, and academic preparation. Rice University ranks #14 and UT-Austin ranks #56 in the top universities in the nation (*U. S. News and World Reports, 2017*). UT Austin is also a member of the University Innovation Alliance (UIA), a national, 11-member consortium of public universities with the goal of increasing the completion and graduation rates of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (*Smith, 2017*). In comparison to the Ivy League institutions

and top 50 liberal arts institutions in the nation, UIA schools produce more college graduates, yet the percent of students receiving Pell Grants is double the Ivy League and liberal arts colleges and universities (*Smith, 2017*).

Even the recent impact on natural disasters has a direct link to the work of higher education faculty. Faculty members are producing innovations to address and alleviate the impact of natural disasters on communities. Since Hurricane Harvey, in viewing the position vacancies for several areas and cities in Texas, there was a significant increase for jobs in the construction management, construction support, and construction supply fields. Texas A&M University – College Station has a thriving construction science program and Prairie View A&M University has a recognized construction science and architecture program as well. The Texas Hurricane Center for Innovative Technology in the Cullen College of Engineering at the University of Houston produces research, protocols, and tools to address and mitigate hurricane



The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

Index

President's Message

Sleepy Time for
Texas Politics

To Email, Text or
Tweet? That is a
Good Question!

**One of Texas' Most
Valuable Natural
Resources: Higher
Education Faculty**

TACT Legislative
Issues

Government
Relations Fund

Membership

Contact us!

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Austin, TX 78731
office@tact.org
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One of Texas' Most Valuable Natural Resources: Higher Education Faculty (continued)

damage on communities. The faculty also work to develop strategies and protocols to speed recovery and restoration (*Texas Hurricane Center for Innovative Technology, 2017a and 2017b*). Higher education institutions have the potential to produce programs and tools to even address the drainage issues faced by the City of Houston residents for city development, growth, and redesign.

Support of higher education institutions aligns with the gubernatorial charge established in 2016, whereby, "Gov. Greg Abbott charged three state agencies, the Texas Education Agency, the Texas Workforce Commission, and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, with developing a set of recommendations that would create greater collaboration among them, raise educational attainment and economic competitiveness, and place Texas on a clear path to achieving the goals of the state's higher education strategic plan, 60x30TX, whose major goal is that 60 percent of young Texans will hold a certificate or degree by 2030" (Paredes, 2017,

p. 1). The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (*THECB*) has compiled comprehensive data on the graduation outcomes, diversity, faculty salaries, top undergraduate majors, degrees awarded of Texas higher education institutions (*THECB, 2017; see References section*). Although I have only mentioned a few institutions in this article, community colleges, colleges, and universities across the state are thriving and highly productive.



It's important to provide adequate funding to Texas colleges and universities so they remain cutting edge and competitive in contributing to the nation's workforce and global prowess. It's vital for Texas colleges and universities to receive adequate funding to continue providing innovations that impact local, national, and global



The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

Index

President's Message

Sleepy Time for
Texas Politics

To Email, Text or
Tweet? That is a
Good Question!

One of Texas' Most
Valuable Natural
Resources: Higher
Education Faculty

TACT Legislative
Issues

Government
Relations Fund

Membership

Contact us!

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One of Texas' Most Valuable Natural Resources: Higher Education Faculty (continued)

communities. It's economically sound to provide adequate funding to Texas colleges and universities so that Texas children are the best and the brightest and have the best education to become and/or remain productive citizens. Texas A&M University-Galveston is a coastal institution and universities such as Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi evacuated during Hurricane Harvey. Additional funding is needed to build infrastructure for institutions in the coastal areas along with additional funding to support universities with construction, architecture, and engineering programs.

Again, collectively, Texas higher education faculty are one of Texas' most valuable natural resources. Faculty members are by no means aloof individuals hiding out in the ivory tower, but we play a significant role in the productivity and sustenance of our communities. Quite the contrary, academia and the professoriate are vital to the overall physical, economic, financial, and social health of Texas communities. As researchers, teachers, and scholars, our work is

valuable to improving, supporting, undergirding, and enhancing the well-being of the community. For the links to all references cited in this article, please contact Dr. Hobson at lisadhobson@gmail.com.

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The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

Index

President's Message

Sleepy Time for
Texas Politics

To Email, Text or
Tweet? That is a
Good Question!

**One of Texas' Most
Valuable Natural
Resources: Higher
Education Faculty**

TACT Legislative
Issues

Government
Relations Fund

Membership

One of Texas' Most Valuable Natural Resources: Higher Education Faculty (continued)

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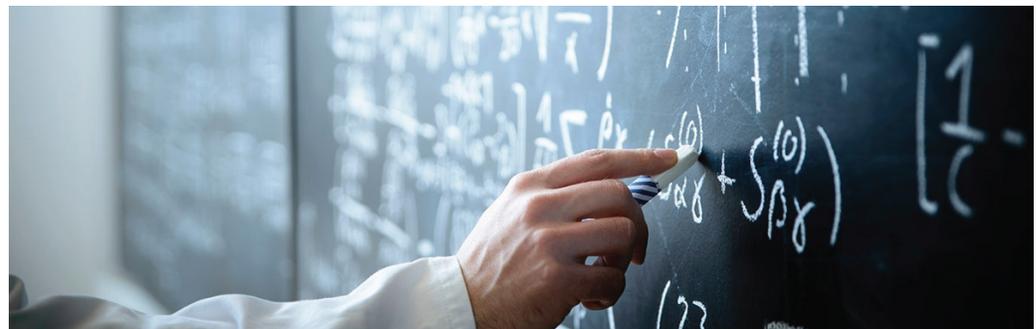
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The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

TACT Legislative Issues: 2017-2018

CONTENTS

Cover Page

Index

President's Message

Sleepy Time for
Texas Politics

To Email, Text or
Tweet? That is a
Good Question!

One of Texas' Most
Valuable Natural
Resources: Higher
Education Faculty

TACT Legislative
Issues

Government
Relations Fund

Membership

1. Higher Education Funding. TACT supports increasing appropriations investments over the current budget levels to fund faculty salary parity, Hurricane Harvey rebuilding, the growing unfunded mandate of the Hazelwood Act Legacy Program, TEXAS Grant scholarships to an increasingly poor student enrollment and continuing progress of the 60X30 TX goals of a better educated populace.

2. Public Education Funding. TACT supports increasing appropriations investments in public education to increase the number of college-ready freshmen prepared to prosper in higher education.

3. Freedom of Expression. Universities are increasingly the sites of demonstrations and counterdemonstrations regarding the important societal issues of the day. Higher education must be proactive in encouraging safe opinion-sharing among all its constituents.

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The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

Index

President's Message

Sleepy Time for
Texas Politics

To Email, Text or
Tweet? That is a
Good Question!

One of Texas' Most
Valuable Natural
Resources: Higher
Education Faculty

TACT Legislative
Issues

Government
Relations Fund

Membership

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

For over 70 years, TACT has been on the front lines of higher education issues in Texas. The GRF assists TACT with a key component of our mission, **communicating TACT's legislative agenda** in order to improve Texas higher education.

Your voluntary contribution to the GRF allows TACT to present its members' agenda to key lawmakers and legislative committees. The GRF is never used for candidate contributions, only for activities that increase awareness of issues concerning faculty statewide. All expenditures are approved in advance by TACT's President, President-Elect and Legislative Committee Chair.

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The TACT Quarterly eBulletin

Texas Association of College Teachers
Defending Academic Freedom

CONTENTS

Cover Page

Index

President's Message

Sleepy Time for
Texas Politics

To Email, Text or
Tweet? That is a
Good Question!

One of Texas' Most
Valuable Natural
Resources: Higher
Education Faculty

TACT Legislative
Issues

Government
Relations Fund

Membership

TACT Membership and EPLI

In the current climate of uncertainty in Texas' system of higher education, it's important to have strong advocates. Since 1948, the Texas Association of College Teachers has served university professors in the areas of academic freedom, statistical research, tenure implementation and protection, professional standards, and working conditions. We invite you to take a key career step by [becoming a member of TACT today](#) for \$158 (which includes professional liability insurance).

Your membership in TACT lets your voice be heard beyond your classroom and campus. We vigilantly monitor all agencies that affect faculty members to ensure your interests are represented. Our First Alert emails and quarterly eBulletins provide you with current developments on educational public policy issues, and we are always soliciting articles from you, our members. We also maintain a regular presence at the Capitol, where we lobby policymakers on your top concerns.

All TACT memberships include Educators Professional Liability Insurance (EPLI). EPLI provides up to \$2 million in coverage, plus legal fees for damages. EPLI is an important benefit for our members that has proven invaluable over the years.

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