



The Advocate

Let's Stop Covid (LSC)

In our November – December, 2021 issue of The Advocate, AFT – Lone Star College announced that we would be launching a campaign with the start of Spring Semester to encourage everyone in the Lone Star community to voluntarily step up and sign a pledge to keep each other safe from Covid.

We call our campaign Let's Stop Covid! (LSC)

We are excited to say that our campaign is off to a great start. Starting before the beginning of the semester we have been contacting every employee of Lone Star College by email inviting everyone to take the pledge to:

1. Wash your hands!
2. Maintain social distance!
3. Wear a mask!
4. Stay home if you feel sick!
5. Get vaccinated (if it is medically possible for you to do so)!
6. Encourage others to take the pledge!

Since the start of the semester, AFT has visited campuses and centers all across Lone Star and set up sign up tables so we could meet both employees and students. We want their involvement, too. We have had wonderful conversations, given away mountains of "swag" (masks, buttons, stickers, lanyards, note

pads, pens, first aid kits, and more), generated lots of awareness, and had a lot of fun in the process. Take a look at the photos we have posted with this article of some of our events on campus.

We are proud to report that, as of the writing of this article, 867 faculty, staff, and students have signed our pledge so far.

If you haven't signed the pledge yet, it's not too late by any means! You can be part of the movement, too. You can scan the QR in the graphic you see here, you can watch for emails about the next in person sign up event at your campus or center, you can look for our posters around campus, or you can access the pledge directly at:

<https://bit.ly/AFTLSC-pledgetostopcovid>

Sign-ups continue all through the



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Join Today!

<https://join.aft.org>

We're on theWeb!

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month of March and we will have an end of campaign celebration over Zoom on the evening of April 14. We'll be giving away \$200 Amazon gift cards. (Every time someone references you as the person who encouraged them to sign the pledge you get a virtual raffle ticket to win.) And we're putting together some fun activities. Watch your email for more information as we reveal it!

Back in November, we wrote, "We may be sick and tired of Covid, but Covid isn't sick and tired of us." Just when it began to feel safe again, Omicron appeared and sent infection rates sky high just as we were all coming back to campus for Spring Semester. Thankfully, at least for now, it looks like the latest wave is subsiding but let's not quit before the game is over. We like to think that our efforts to raise awareness have helped in some small way. Continuing to be vigilant could prevent another wave and get us closer to moving past this pandemic once and for all. So let's see this through to the end and not grow tired of doing the right things.

Special thanks to AFT- Lone Star's faithful and wonderful organizers who have been to every campus event both setting up the tables and visiting with students and employees:

Mark Gurrola & Daler Wade



Our Covid Task Force who designed and organized our campaign:

- John Burghdoff, CyFair
- Britney Hall, University Park
- Cindy Hoffart-Watson, CyFair
- Cliff Hudder, Montgomery
- Adrienne Patton, CyFair
- Kat Kupelian, Texas AFT

What is in this issue of The Advocate?

AFT – Lone Star College has never been afraid to tackle the big issues within the college and out in society as a whole that impact our employees and our students. In this edition we address some really, really big issues.

The union is very excited to introduce you to the very first installment of a new and ongoing column written by Dr. Steve Davis, Professor of History at Lone Star College – Kingwood. Steve calls his column Dispatches from the Front. He will be covering a wide range of topics in his column important to society at large and to us and our students out on the front lines of public education. In his first article, Steve writes about the dangers of conspiracy theories and the positive impact we in community colleges can make in countering those dangers.

Next, you will read an article by Stephen King, Professor of Developmental English at Lone Star College – North Harris in which he challenges us to examine critically whether we as a college are fulfilling our purpose to help students succeed and thrive, and to explore what still must be done to be more faithful to that purpose.

Following next is an article by Dr. John Burghdoff, Professor of Mathematics at Lone Star College – CyFair tackling the controversy around Critical Race Theory, challenges to the teaching of uncomfortable truths about race, gender, and sexuality, and why those challenges are important to Lone Star College.

Finally, this issue of The Advocate closes with our ongoing column Know Your Rights. This column follows up on John's article by exploring tools available to us through state and accrediting board regulations and Lone Star College policy on Academic Freedom to help us fulfill our obligations to teach uncomfortable truths when we need to.



What's Coming Up?

In addition to finishing our campaign Let's Stop Covid and celebrating in April, AFT will be working on other important issues in the upcoming months.

Among those is a disturbing data point we discovered in the employee survey we conducted last fall that a significant number of employees (nearly half of all staff and over a quarter of faculty) feel that faculty and staff at the college are treated unequally. That sense of inequality seems to have taken hold in a major way as we moved through the Covid pandemic. This mirrors trends in industries all across the economy. Rectifying this discrepancy is essential to the long-term success of Lone Star College. Doing so will take work and time beginning with a thorough understanding of what is happening and why. At least part of the concern clearly revolves around the changing nature of work as society at large explores issues like remote work and work / life balance. This will be big and will not happen overnight.

We want our college to be a great place for all workers. Watch for how you can participate with us in this quest. If you are not a member of our union yet, please join AFT – Lone Star College and help us expand the voice of employees.

**We Care.
We Show Up.
We Advocate Together.
AFT-Lone Star College**



Dispatches from the Front

Dr. Steve Davis

Professor of History, Lone Star College - Kingwood-Conspiring

On the fiftieth anniversary of the Kennedy assassination, I gave a talk on the subject in the Teaching Theater at LSC-Kingwood. The room was packed with folks standing in the back and even a dozen or so students sitting on the floor in the front on either side of where I was speaking. The timing was perfect as the program started at 12:30 on a Friday, the exact day and time that the shots were fired in Dallas. We had encouraged attendance by advertising that those present would learn “the truth” of what had happened on November 22, 1963. During the Q and A, an older man got so angry with me that he stormed out of the auditorium after loudly stating his objection to what he had heard. My students thought that was the funniest thing they had ever seen, witnessing their professor get publicly called out that way!

What had provoked it? He was upset that I had argued that the truth of the assassination was that the Warren Commission had basically gotten it right, that there was no conspiracy behind the president's killing, and that Lee Harvey Oswald was the sole gunman in Dealey Plaza. I'm sure many others were surprised and disappointed that day that I hadn't proclaimed which conspiracy theory of the assassination I found most convincing.

Almost a decade later, conspiracy theories are even more endemic. Some of them are literally killing us as in the outrageous claims that COVID is a government-sponsored hoax or that Bill Gates has put a microchip into the vaccines to track its recipients. Equally disturbing are the baseless assertions that the 2020 presidential election was stolen by means of purloined ballots or Venezuelan voting machines. This Big Lie adhered to by a frightening percentage of the population threatens American democracy.



On one level, this is nothing new as the United States was founded on a conspiracy theory. In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson detected “a design” on the part of the British government to put the colonists under “absolute Despotism.” A new biography of George III by Andrew Roberts concludes that the majority of the grievances Jefferson lists against the crown were bogus. Had Jefferson himself become so paranoid about British actions that he had convinced himself the conspiracy against liberty was real or was he cynically using his lawyerly skills to make the best case possible for the rebellion? Whatever the conclusion, any objective student of the American Revolution will conclude upon examining its origins that collecting taxes rather than establishing tyranny was the main offense of the British regime toward its American subjects.

The historian Richard Hofstadter more than a half century ago wrote about the “paranoid style” and conspiratorial thinking behind many popular movements (such as Anti-Masonry, Populism, and McCarthyism) since the country’s founding. But something is different about the conspiracy-mongering we encounter today. It’s never been more pervasive or dangerous. What’s behind this and what are we to do about it, especially when we encounter the problem in our classes?

Conspiracy theories can provide a measure of psychological comfort. History is messy and people naturally seek overarching explanations to complex problems. Sometimes coincidence or contingency

determine outcomes. Sometimes chronic underachievers like Lee Harvey Oswald accomplish the unexpected. This is reflected in Jackie Kennedy’s doubt that on his own a “silly little Communist” could have killed her husband. In an age in which experts are distrusted, conspiracy buffs bolster their self-esteem by claiming possession of esoteric knowledge to which trained elites like college professors are oblivious.

It’s obvious that social media has exacerbated the problem. Not so long ago, each village had its idiot who voiced preposterous notions. Now, the technology enables all the idiots to congregate in some very dark corners of the internet, thus multiplying the volume and influence of their voices.

And we have to be explicit about another source of the phenomenon: never in our history have we had a president who trafficked in conspiracist notions. Donald Trump made his initial political pitch in the “birther” lie that Barack Obama wasn’t born in the United States, insinuating that he was some sort of Manchurian Candidate groomed to pursue a nefarious agenda. Trump couldn’t be so dumb as to actually believe this garbage. He has an instinctive genius however for touching the buttons of the aggrieved, appealing to a segment of our population that longs for a vanished America (the country some of us remember from the 50s into the 60s) and using this demographic to forge a political base. During his 2016 primary campaign, he went onto the Alex Jones radio show to praise the host in these words: “Your reputation is amazing. I will not let you down.” Part of Jones’s reputation was based on claiming that the Sandy Hook school massacre of 2012 was a false flag operation designed by the Obama administration to confiscate guns and that the children who were “murdered” were actors enlisted for the project. Is nothing sacred? I would say to Trump and Jones and their ilk what Army counsel Joseph Welch said to Senator Joseph McCarthy during the 1954 televised hearings: “have you no sense of decency?” We know what the answer to that would be.



Nor are kooky conspiracy theories limited to the political right. In 2013, while at a historical conference, I made the mistake of trying to engage some “truthers” on a street corner in San Francisco. These are the people (mostly on the left) who believe that 9/11 was an “inside job” engineered by President George W. Bush to bolster his low approval ratings and provide an excuse to invade outlaw regimes in the Middle East. Several of the demonstrators swarmed me with DVDs, pamphlets, and impassioned rhetoric when I asked how in the world they could believe such nonsense. They were clearly articulate, well-educated people. The episode left me shaken as to the levels of gullibility in this society.

What is to be done? The teachers among us have an awesome responsibility to confront and eradicate this poison. We need to work without respite to raise educational levels in this country. Community colleges like ours are on the front lines of this effort. I write early in a new semester in which we resume our “forever war” on ignorance. All of us who play any role as teachers (whether or not that’s your job description) can continually impart the necessity of factual truth and critical thinking. We should inculcate love of books and reading which is the surest antidote to the toxicity found in so much of social media and the internet. We should do all we can to broaden horizons and encourage knowledge of the wider world, combatting provincialism and bigotry in the process. Trump was right when after winning the 2016 Nevada primary, he stated how much he loved the “poorly educated.” In this instance, his “gut” was right in this understanding that Americans in that category were more susceptible to his delusions and demagoguery.

We have to model critical thinking and intellectual independence for our students. To me, that implies markedly limited tolerance for conspiracy extremism when it surfaces in class. A few years ago, I was teaching an EDUC 1300 section when a bright young man wanted to argue his case that the moon landings were faked. He was passionately citing the

usual YouTube sources and not open to reason. At a certain point, I shut down the discussion, telling the student that if he continued to voice such notions, no one would take him seriously, that he would be perceived by prospective friends or employers as a nut. Did my admonition get through? Who knows, as it’s rare that we teachers see the ultimate fruits of our labor. Apparently, no teacher ever managed to get through to the loathsome Alex Jones, whose formal education ceased when he dropped out of Austin Community College.

To be sure, real conspiracies have existed. As well-documented ones in the history of assassinations, one could cite those of Julius Caesar, Abraham Lincoln, and the Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Nor are all conspiracies bad. Noting that the root of the term is the Latin “conspirare” for “breathe together,” I would like to think that I’ve engaged in many beneficent conspiracies during my time at Lone Star. On many occasions, I’ve “breathed together” with colleagues (sometimes plotting behind closed doors!) in an effort to better the college. And I truly believe that our union, the AFT, is the finest kind of conspiracy in its ongoing pursuit of “democracy in education; education for democracy,” though that objective has never been a secret.

Steve Davis
LSC-Kingwood
February 14, 2022

AFT Lone Star College



A Union of Professionals



Are We Fulfilling Our Purpose?

Stephen King, Professor of Developmental English, Lone Star College – North Harris

Conventionally, community colleges are the ticket to job training and higher education for lower-income groups in America—more affordable paths to material stability for anyone in post-secondary education. Yet it is well known that, throughout America, most community college students never finish a degree or certificate program. The Texas Higher Education Almanac (Summer 2021) provides numbers that indicate Lone Star College is no exception to this rule. For my own campus, North Harris, the graduation rate after three-years is 18.4 percent for full-time students; for part-timers, which of course most of our students are, is 10.6 percent. After six years for part-timers, it's 15.9%. Transfer rates are not much better: at North Harris, the transfer rate is 11.4%. For most faculty, most of the students on our class rolls, by far, will never get a degree. This is true of *all* Lone Star College campuses.

A rather shallow response to this is that these numbers do not truly reflect our success with students. After all, not all of them intend to get a degree or certificate or transfer. True. But do we know how many students enroll with no such desire? It is hard to believe their numbers are sufficient to dismiss the importance of the numbers we *actually have*.

It might also be said that many drop out for non-academic reasons that have little or nothing to do with us and therefore shouldn't count against us. Yet our refusal to keep track of such reasons and communicate them to the greater public and especially to office holders helps conceal an ongoing tragedy in American life, that the conventional and accepted path out of poverty simply doesn't work anymore for a large majority of

those who attempt it. In fact, our yearly celebration of our graduates—and our ignoring of our dropouts—supports the rose-colored narrative that all is well, that the system is working, when, again, the numbers we have strongly suggest that it is not.

We rarely see these numbers discussed in system-wide messaging. Instead, the tone is virtually always positive, upbeat, celebratory of our perceived status as one of the leading community college systems in the state or even the country. SACS tells us we are. The "Great Colleges to Work For" survey tells us we are. Who could doubt it?

"...the conventional and accepted path out of poverty simply doesn't work anymore for a large majority of those who attempt it."

This upbeat tone certainly contrasts with messages I receive from students. As a composition instructor, I may receive more frequent glimpses into student lives than instructors in other disciplines. Students frequently write of depression, anxiety, stress, bad family situations, bad

work situations and on and on. My class numbers, especially during the pandemic, reflect the impact of such situations, with many dropouts and failures. From semester to semester, I am confronted by the reality of the student lives that produce our objectively terrible graduation and transfer rates. There seems little to celebrate in this.

And it is entirely demoralizing as a faculty member to look at a class roll and realize that very few of its students will, as far as we know, ever accomplish the academic goals they've set out for. This gets to the core meaning of our work at an educational institution for staff, faculty and administration alike. It raises the following question: does the way we're doing what we do truly put the needs of our communities first, or does it primarily serve institutional goals such as enrollment growth and the wealth and status that come with it? It should go without saying that



increasing the number of college dropouts in our service area serves little positive purpose.

How do we reconcile the disjunct between how wonderfully we apparently think we're doing with how poorly our students actually do, according to the numbers?

That we probably do no worse than many American community colleges should be no comfort.

American history, including very recent American history, is replete with examples of institutions of one sort or another doing very well for the people who run them while rather viciously exploiting the people they purportedly serve.

The still fairly recent housing crisis of 2008-2009 is perhaps the most recent example: before the housing bubble built on misinformation given by unscrupulous lenders to subprime mortgagees collapsed, the housing industry was celebrated for its apparent unbounded spiral upward. The ongoing crisis in American health care—perhaps not recognized as a crisis by its beneficiaries: insurance companies and their stockholders—provides another example of an American industry that is apparently thriving while millions go underserved or barely served at all. In America, an institution's perceived success, especially as defined by income or size, is no guarantee at all that its practices are ethical, moral or even successful at fulfilling its ostensible purpose.

The conventional explanation for our dropouts is that it's *their* fault. They aren't serious; they overcommit themselves; they're immature; they don't work hard; some of them just aren't very smart.

Such an answer will immediately raise warning bells to anyone knowledgeable about the history of minorities in this country, whose lack of comparative success has often been explained by char-

acter defects supposedly intrinsic to certain cultural or racial groups. Such bigoted slurs have acted to conceal or ignore systemic obstacles of many sorts that provide much more accurate reasons for a lack of progress. When we fail to examine or acknowledge the reasons for our students' failure, we leave the door open for others to supply such explanations.

Faculty know that non-academic problems, espe-

cially ones that afflict those on the economic margins, are frequently the cause of student failure. This is particularly frustrating when some entirely predictable life event—loss of childcare, the breaking down of a car, a change in

a work schedule, and on an on—convert an up-to-that-point successful student to a no-show and subsequent drop or failure.

Seen in this light, our graduation and transfer numbers raise questions:

- Are most of our successful students those who came to LSC already having the material resources necessary to succeed?
- If that's the case, is it true that our poorer students make up the largest group of our dropouts and failures?
- Are we more or less content with these outcomes because of thoroughly conventional if unacknowledged biases against the poor, especially poor people of color? At least, are we unwilling to change conventional policy and practice in order to serve these students better?
- On the whole, does LSC act primarily to diminish American income inequality or sustain it? If most of our graduates and transfers are those who arrive at LSC already having the resources needed to succeed while most of our dropouts don't, it would seem we're making things worse, not better.

"In America, an institution's perceived success, especially as defined by income or size, is no guarantee at all that its practices are ethical, moral or even successful at fulfilling its ostensible purpose."



Again, it clearly seems to be true that most of the money that pays our salaries, keeps our buildings cleaned up and maintained, and funds all our programs comes from students who never get a degree or certificate. Do they act as a sort of educational cannon fodder, essential to our success while seldom partaking in it?

We must remember that those who take out student loans but never complete a program are in worse shape than when they started. Far from boosting a community's wealth, such students often

reduce it. Additionally, these are hardly the sorts of outcomes that promote our own long-term growth; such students have neighbors, families and friends less likely to try college when they see these common results.

It may of course be that the causes and conditions that give rise to this situation are far beyond a community college's powers to remove. The meagre American social safety net—worse in Texas than in almost any other state—certainly plays a role here—as do our minimum wage laws, high costs of child care and so on. Yet that should not let us off the hook. We have to play the hand we're dealt. We have to educate the students we get. And that would seem to require shaping policy and practice to fit *their* situations.

One college that seems to be doing this well is Valencia College in Florida. In 2011, it received the first Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence in 2011 largely because fifty-one percent of its full-time students had completed associate degrees in three years of schooling, this even though of its 50,000 students, almost half belonged to households that qualified for poverty-level benefits. Sanford Shugart, now president emeritus of Valencia College (and former president of North Harris College), was reported to say the following at the time: "For a long time, Valencia concentrated on 'volume,' just enrolling students . . . *but over the years officials began to*

think more about how to help students succeed. Rising enrollments no longer defined success" (italics added); rather, "Enrollment became a means to an end."

It is rather telling that Dr. Shugart suggests that community college administrations conventionally consider enrollment growth their primary purpose, *not* student success. If community colleges were businesses, this would of course be expected: businesses exist to grow: that is, to increase profits at least to the extent that its owners desire. But we're not a business. We're a federal, state and local taxpayer-funded educational institution provided a monopoly within our service area for the purpose of providing affordable post-secondary education and training. To the extent that growth serves that purpose, all is well and good. But it's hard to believe insufficient growth is our biggest challenge when our graduation and transfer rates are so low. In fact, if growth—for example, the opening of new campuses and colleges with all their attendant costs—makes us all the more dependent on educational cannon fodder, then that growth betrays our obligations to our communities. Do those communities exist to serve us, or is it the other way around?

Perhaps Lone Star could learn something from Valencia. The Aspen Institute noted that Valencia altered "policies and procedures that peer institutions tend to see as fixed," and Shugart stated that "all the failure starts at the front door." He was referring, among other things, to advising and enrollment policies that did not prioritize student success.

One such LSC practice that might profit from closer examination is the advice given to students—or not—when they enroll each semester. I note that the LSC websites' own course load advice for students is scanty and questionable. It makes the

"The meagre American social safety net—worse in Texas than in almost any other state—certainly plays a role here—as do our minimum wage laws, high costs of child care and so on."



standard recommendation that students study two hours outside of class for every hour in class—thus, twenty-four hours of study time for a twelve-hour course load, adding up to 36 hours per week devoted to college duties. It also suggests that students taking twelve hours *can work twenty hours a week*—making for a fifty-six hour commitment each week for, say, fourteen weeks out of the sixteen-week semester. Add in commutes to and from work, to and from school; add in rushed meals; add in sleep, and it is not hard to understand why so many students can't keep up. Of course, the course load guidelines say nothing about the need for sleep or good nutrition. They say nothing about childcare or reliable transportation. They say nothing about dealing with stress and little about the dangers of taking on too much at one time. All in all, they say very little about the actual conditions required for success as a student.

One might reply that students are taught time-management skills and course load considerations in EDUC 1300. The question then becomes whether that approach is working. Do we have evidence that our graduation and transfer rates improved following the implementation of the EDUC 1300 requirement? There's no question that EDUC 1300 serves an important purpose. But are we using it to excuse ourselves for not continuing to do what's needed to support students past their initial semester? To wash our hands of student failure?

This entire discussion fits altogether too well within a larger social discourse about American institutions and conventional thinking in which the public distrusts institutional leadership to fulfill its duties to us, to our communities. To provide just two examples, a recent Pew Research Center survey (<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/05/17/public-trust-in-government-1958-2021/>) reports that just “about one-quarter of Americans say they can trust the government in Washington to do what is right ‘just about always’ (2%) or ‘most of the time’ (22%),” noting

that “[p]ublic trust in government [is] near historic lows.” Gallup reports (<https://news.gallup.com/poll/352316/americans-confidence-major-institutions-dips.aspx>) that it has tracked 14 core institutions since 1993, and the public's confidence in them has remained relatively low—particularly over the past 15 years, when the average has not risen above 36%. Before 2006, averages at or above 40% were more common.” How long until our poor student outcomes so degrade the public's trust in the promise of community colleges that it affects our enrollment? A recent article in the Hechinger Report (<https://hechingerreport.org/its-just-too-much-why-students-are-abandoning-community-colleges-indroves/>) suggests this is already occurring.

Additionally, recent scholarship and journalism have made clear how conventional thinking within the American context has often concealed systemic prejudice against minorities—not always, perhaps, with intent, but with such results anyway. In light of such research, *every* American institution has the obligation to re-examine its policies and practices to make sure it truly fulfills its obligations to its communities. This goes double for an institution privileged with millions in tax-payer dollars and monopoly status charged with the purpose of diminishing income inequality. If, on balance, LSC is *extracting* more money from surrounding communities, especially the poorer ones, than it's eventually returning through the improved wages and salaries resulting from the credentials we provide, that of course is a problem. If we're actually increasing or sustaining income inequalities, especially across racial lines, (or if we don't know one way or the other), that's a horrible shame.

¹ Samples of such work include the following : 1) Nikole Hannah-Jones *The 1619 Project*; Heather McGhee's *The Sum of Us*; Tressie McMillan Cottom's interview of sociologist Louise Seamstress on the *New York Times*' Ezra Klein podcast: <https://podcasts.google.com/feed/aHR0cHM6Ly9mZWVkcY5zaW1wbgVjYXN0LmNvbS84MkZlMzVQeA/episode/Yik1MmYyNjYtOTc0MyQ0NmVjLWE0ZDUtMTM4MDYyZGM2MGQx?hl=en&ved=2ahUKEwiNpyZsYLOAhUwT98KHWWWhDFEQjrkEeqQIAHAL&ep=6>



TSB3, CRT and LSC

John Burghduff

Professor of Mathematics, Lone Star College - CyFair

Critical Race Theory: an academic construct earnestly discussed in law schools for more than a generation that suddenly is on the front lines of Culture Wars, 2022. The primary battleground is the public schools. Overnight, it would seem, CRTers are everywhere indoctrinating little children with, well, whatever it is.

A thorough exposition of what Critical Race Theory actually is would be a very valuable endeavor. That will need to wait for a later date and a writer with greater expertise than the author of this article. For the moment, let's consider the definition offered by the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund:

"Critical Race Theory, or CRT, is an academic and legal framework that denotes that systemic racism is part of American society — from education and housing to employment and healthcare. Critical Race Theory recognizes that racism is more than the result of individual bias and prejudice. It is embedded in laws, policies and institutions that uphold and reproduce racial inequalities. According to CRT, societal issues like Black Americans' higher mortality rate, outsized exposure to police violence, the school-to-prison pipeline, denial of affordable housing, and the rates of the death of Black women in childbirth are not unrelated anomalies." <https://www.naacpldf.org/critical-race-theory-faq/>

To this author, observing that laws and practices past and present have created systemic dynamics that continue to negatively impact people of color should be about as uncontroversial as observing that the quadratic formula has been a useful tool in algebra. This framework opens the door for honest dialog about understanding and addressing ongoing ills in American society. There are uncom-

fortable truths about our society that hold us back from living up to the ideals the founders of our country enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. Race is at the heart of many of those truths. There is no better place to explore those uncomfortable truths than in a public K-12 school, university, or community college.

The way CRT is presented and argued against by some, however, has nothing to do with what it actually is. Many have substituted a straw man caricature of CRT to generate fear and anger (and votes and political contributions). To understand the caricature of CRT that is popularly presented, we need go no farther than the words of our own Lieutenant Governor, Dan Patrick:

"You're not going to teach a theory that says, we're going to judge you when you walk in the classroom by the color of your skin. That if you're white, you're born a racist. That that's normal, not an aberration, and you're an oppressor. And if you're a person of color, you're a victim." ("Patrick targets tenure, critical race theory", Houston Chronicle, February 19, 2022)

With perverse allusion to Martin Luther King, Patrick articulates the scary specter of an attack on white people, the reaction to which largely swayed the governor's election in Virginia and inspired scores of anti-CRT bills in state legislatures around the country aimed at public schools, including Senate Bill 3 here in Texas. Although there are many important things we could discuss about CRT, in this article we are going to focus in on one concern: how fear of this caricature of CRT is impacting education in Texas schools and what that means to us at Lone Star College. In particular, in this article we are going to address two questions:

1. What is Senate Bill 3 (SB3) and how does it impact schools?
2. Why does SB3 matter to Lone Star College?

Please also read this month's installment in the



series Know Your Rights. In that article we will explore the rights that faculty and other employees have if they are targeted by forces that want to squelch the content of what we teach.

1) What is SB3?

Senate Bill 3 was passed by the 2021 Texas Legislature and signed into law by Governor Greg Abbot. The language of SB3 is now integrated into the Texas Education code in Chapter 21, Subchapter J, Section 21.4555 and in Chapter 28, Section 28.002.

SB3 applies to all public K-12 schools and all open enrollment charter schools. It does NOT apply to public community colleges and universities. Since dual credit classes are college level classes taught under the auspices of public community colleges and universities, SB3 does not apply to dual credit classes. Although not directly mentioned in the bill, early college high schools, as open enrollment charter schools appear to be bound by SB3.

SB3 never explicitly mentions the phrase Critical Race Theory or the acronym CRT but the provisions of the bill do explicitly regulate the teaching of issues related to race. Although race is the theme of CRT, SB3 also regulates the teaching of sex, sexuality, and gender – for good measure.

SB3 can be read in its entirety at <https://legiscan.com/TX/text/SB3/id/2425091>. Anyone interested in education in Texas at any level should read the bill in its entirety.

SB3 explicitly prohibits certain actions including:

- A teacher cannot be compelled to discuss a particular current event or widely debated and currently controversial issue of public policy or social affairs.

- A teacher who chooses to discuss a currently controversial issue shall strive to explore that topic from diverse and contending perspectives without giving deference to any one perspective
- A teacher / school district cannot make a course requirement (including extra credit) for individual participation in or involvement with a group or agency that participated in social or political activism, lobbying, or persuading public officials on a social or political issue.

These provisions will raise questions in the minds of the most casual of readers. Some of these include:

- What constitutes a currently controversial issue? To some, whether the Holocaust actually

“What constitutes a currently controversial issue? To some, whether the Holocaust actually happened is controversial. To others, whether NASA really put a man on the moon is controversial. Will teachers who believe these conspiracy theories be excused from teaching about historical realities like these?”

happened is controversial. To others, whether NASA really put a man on the moon is controversial. Will teachers who believe these conspiracy theories be excused from teaching about historical realities like these?

- Would teachers be compelled to teach, say,

both sides of the Holocaust with no deference shown to either side? (A viral video involving a school administrator saying this very thing arose from an attempt to explain this provision.)

- The superintendents of most school districts participate in lobbying and persuading public officials. So, are teachers forbidden to require students to be involved in activities of the school? Is this section so broad that it would essentially include any group or agency?

More explicitly, SB3 directly forbids the teaching of certain content:

- One race or sex is inherently superior to another race or sex
- An individual, by virtue of the individual's race



or sex, is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously

- An individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment solely or partly because of the individual's race or sex
- An individual's moral character, standing, or worth is necessarily determined by the individual's race or sex
- An individual, by virtue of the individual's race or sex bears responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex,
- An individual should feel discomfort, guilt, or anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of the individual's race or sex
- Meritocracy or traits such as hard work ethic are racist or sexist or were created by members of a particular race to oppress members of another race
- The advent of slavery in the territory that is now the United States constituted the true founding of the United States,
- With respect to their relationship to American values, slavery and racism are anything other than deviations from, betrayals of, or failure to live up to the authentic founding principles of the United States, which include liberty and equality

Although many of these points raise concerns, we will mention three specifically.

First, with slaves enshrined as fractions of human beings in the very Constitution of our country and with centuries of laws and legal decisions endorsing first slavery and then segregation, how can we possibly write off slavery and racism as mere deviations?

Second, in saying that it is forbidden to teach that an individual's moral character is *necessarily* de-

termined by race or sex are we implying that it would be all right to teach that his or her moral character is determined in some coincidental way by race or sex?

Third, it is obvious that telling a student directly that they should feel discomfort or psychological distress because of their race or sex would be a condemnable thing to do. Aside from that extreme, however, how much control does a teacher have over the level of students' discomfort and to what degree is the teacher responsible? This author's ancestry is partially German. I am dis-

"The bill explicitly states that teachers and schools are not allowed to use the 1619 Project, the Pulitzer Prize winning New York Times curriculum that traces the role of race and racism in American History."

tressed that a society that produced so much wonderful art, music, and philosophy also birthed Nazism. Should schools not teach about the Third Reich so people like me don't feel distressed? Recently I talked to a parent whose child, the only Muslim student in a 5th grade class, was feeling

uncomfortable about a lesson on 9-11 because the teacher identified the hijackers as Muslims. How does this bill apply to this situation? What about the distress of students whose ancestors were slaves, or interned in concentration camps, or driven off of their land? What happens when protecting one group of students from distress so marginalizes another group that they feel even greater distress?

In addition to the prohibitions above, SB3 includes one more. The bill specifically names one particular curriculum as forbidden and no other. The bill explicitly states that teachers and schools are not allowed to use the 1619 Project, the Pulitzer Prize winning New York Times curriculum that traces the role of race and racism in American History.

These are only some of the provisions of SB3. There are various "founding documents" that are required to be taught along with a number of specific laws, Constitutional Amendments, and other



topics. The State Board of Education is required to rewrite the state curriculum (the TEKS) for social studies to reflect all these mandates. The Texas Education Agency will develop training for teachers and administrators in the curricular changes. Each school in Texas must send at least one teacher and one administrator to a formal face to face training on implementing the curriculum.

2) Why does SB3 Matters to Lone Star College?

Someone from outside of higher education might ask, "Since SB3 applies only to K-12, why should

people at Lone Star College care what it says?" Actually, I think we could let the reader write this section of the article for themselves because the concerns are obvious.

The most obvious answer is that, whoever one may be, we ought to agree that young people deserve to know the whole truth – both good and bad - about our history and about the functioning of our society. They inherit the world we leave behind, and it would be cruel to deny them a full understanding of how we got where we now are.

Also, as fellow educators alongside our brother and sister K-12 colleagues, we cannot accept that teachers would be forced to withhold relevant essential information in class because doing otherwise would risk their employment.

In addition, as time goes on, we in community colleges will increasingly be admitting students with twelve years of exposure to a gauzy romanticized understanding of society who have been denied the dignity of being allowed to be uncomfortable in the face of uncomfortable truths. At the same time, we will be admitting other students who, for twelve years, have suffered the trauma of having their experiences and those of their families marginalized to preserve the comfort of others.

Whether pampered or traumatized, all of them will be woefully far behind both in terms of knowledge and critical thinking skills. How will either group react when, for perhaps the first time in their lives, they are asked to openly consider, discuss, and write about uncomfortable truths regarding race, gender, and sexuality?

We should also consider that classroom teaching faculty are not the only employees who should be concerned. Already, libraries at the K-12 level are under increasing demands to remove books that could be considered offensive with books focusing

on race, gender, sex, and sexuality at the top of the list. It will only be a matter of time (if it hasn't already happened) before such demands became widespread at college libraries, especially at libraries like those at LSC – CyFair and LSC – Tomball that are joint ventures

with public library systems. The first line of employees to whom enraged students or members of the public would complain would be deans, vice presidents, higher level administrators, counselors, and advisors. Even our Board of Trustees could be subjected to harangues from long lines of angry speakers (just as many K-12 school boards already are) demanding a crackdown on the teaching of uncomfortable truths.

All of these concerns aside, how do we feel about politicians dictating what young people are allowed to learn? Haven't we seen this story before in history? Wasn't the outcome pretty much catastrophic? Would we not consider it bizarre if not outrageous if legislators micromanaged the content of, say, College Algebra?

One final concern: the legislature meets again in 2023.

In case anyone was thinking that the legislature would not bother higher education, the lieutenant

"All of these concerns aside, how do we feel about politicians dictating what young people are allowed to learn?"



governor has disabused us of that hope. In the Saturday, February 19 article referenced before, Dan Patrick announced that he would introduce legislation next session to revoke the tenure of professors who teach Critical Race Theory. In fact, he announced that he will introduce legislation to require that tenured professors go through a tenure review every year. Tenure review is on a six year cycle; a one year cycle would mean that professors would spend all of their time preparing for review. He even proposes to end tenure all together for newly hired professors.

Now, Patrick has made clear that his primary target is “looney (sic) Marxist UT professors” but restrictions would likely be in place for all of higher education, even colleges like ours that don’t offer tenure. We, too, could face perpetual review. In fact, targeting community college faculty would be easier without tenure protections.

Of course, concerns about political intrusion into schools and colleges would largely go away if the fall elections resulted in different people in charge in Austin. However, if that does not happen, everyone who cares about a well-educated citizenry will need to be prepared to speak up to reverse the negative effects of SB3 and to keep those effects from spreading further.

There are tools at our disposal to aid in our task. Please be sure to read this issue’s installment of the series Know Your Rights to learn more.



Know Your Rights –

Protecting Academic Freedom

This month’s installment in our ongoing column Know Your Rights is somewhat of a companion piece to the article SB3, CRT and LSC which appears earlier in this issue. The current flashpoint in the public eye is CRT, Critical Race Theory, but the truth is that both the content of what professors teach, and the methodology by which they teach that content will be called into question from time. In this article, we will look through the lens of teaching “uncomfortable truths” about race, ethnicity, gender, sex, and sexuality but the same principles apply no matter what the flashpoints of the day may be.

Although the group of Lone Star employees most directly impacted over the teaching of material that some might find objectionable is the teaching faculty, there are other groups of employees who may find themselves targeted as well. Librarians come to mind especially as more and more books and other resources are challenged by people who are disturbed by their content and want to see them banned. For this reason, as we will see later, Lone Star College policy about Academic Freedom refers to Instructional Employees rather than just Faculty.

Aside from looking for long term political solutions, it is important to know that there are tools at hand now to protect those of us in higher edu-



cation in general and those of us at Lone Star College in particular who need to speak uncomfortable truths in order to be true to our academic obligations. As we outline those tools, it will be clear that some of those protections are rather fragile and will have to be constantly defended. Nevertheless, these tools are real and practical, and we should be ready to employ them for our own protection and to protect the learning of our students.

Some of those tools come from outside the college (state regulations and accrediting board guidelines) and others come from inside the college (Lone Star policy). We will look at both sets of tools.

1) What do existing State and SACS guidelines tell us about uncomfortable truths and academic freedom / obligation?

One line of defense comes directly from the State of Texas itself.

In the Academic Course Guide Manual (ACGM) the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board mandates course descriptions and student learning outcomes for all academic courses taught at the community college level. We are mandated to cover these learning outcomes and we must verify to the state that we are doing so. (Similar requirements exist for workforce courses in the Workforce Education Course Manual – WECB.) In some courses where controversy is most likely, the ACGM *requires* the teaching of uncomfortable truths and thereby gives faculty a level of protection.

Here are a few examples from the ACGM showing how such topics are mandated in either course descriptions or student learning outcomes:

- SOCI 1301 Introduction to Sociology
Analysis of social issues in their institutional context may include topics such as social stratification, gender, race/ethnicity, and deviance.
- SOCI 2319 Minority Studies
Core concepts to be examined include (but are not limited to) social inequality, dominance/subordination, prejudice, and discrimination. Particular minority groups discussed may include those based on poverty, race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, or religion.
- HIST 2327 Mexican American History I
5. Evaluate the relative impact of mestizaje, slavery, global economics, and frontier settlement on the creation of Mexican identity.
6. Connect independence movements, imperial conflict, class formation, and regional resistance to the making of independent Mexico.
- HIST 2382 African American History II
African American History II examines segregation, disenfranchisement, civil rights, migrations, industrialization, world wars, the Harlem Renaissance and the conditions of African

"In all of these examples and others, the teaching of uncomfortable truths about race, gender, sex, and/or sexuality is actually not just a matter of academic freedom but of academic obligation."

Americans in the Great Depression, Cold War and post-Cold War eras.

- PSYC 2306 Human Sexuality
2. Identify human sexual behaviors and sexual responses.
5. Describe the principles of effective communication and the specific barriers to effective communication about sex and sexuality.
7. Discuss cultural differences in sexual attitudes and behaviors.
8. Identify the occurrence and causes of sexual variations.

In all of these examples and others, the teaching of uncomfortable truths about race, gender, sex, and/or sexuality is actually not just a matter of academic freedom but of academic obligation. If



questioned, professors that teach these courses have as their first line of defense that they are simply doing their jobs.

It would be a good idea for every curriculum team across the college to take a close look at any course in their discipline in which uncomfortable content might be taught to take a critical look at the ACGM and, if necessary, to look at the Coordinating Board's process for periodically reviewing and revising these course descriptions and student learning outcomes.

Bear in mind, also, that there are many, many topics outside of CRT that could anger someone and lead to controversy. Biology, for example, is particularly vulnerable and strong student learning outcomes can be helpful. Even this author's own beloved discipline of Mathematics can be vulnerable. We, too, can look to protection from the ACGM. Here is an example for us:

- MATH 1332 Mathematics for Liberal Arts
2. Determine the validity of an argument or statement and provide mathematical evidence.

Try constructing a truth table to analyze a statement from a public figure. It can be a great exercise in critical thinking.

Another tool available from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to protect faculty is the set of Core Curriculum Objectives. The Coordinating Board mandates that a certain set of broad objectives must be taught at some point as students complete their core curriculum. Not all objectives need to be taught in all courses but, as a college, we have the opportunity to identify which objectives we commit to cover in every course in

the core. One of those Core Curriculum Objectives is Social Responsibility:

- Social Responsibility (SR) – intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national and global communities.

Issues in the broad category of diversity, equity, and inclusion fall neatly into this objective and can be defended using this objective if it is adopted for classes that deal with these issues.

"Studying and teaching about uncomfortable truths falls under the broad but often amorphous category of Academic Freedom. Academic Freedom is one of those concepts, like Shared Governance, that everyone agrees is good, but often consensus on exactly what is meant is lacking."

Studying and teaching about uncomfortable truths falls under the broad but often amorphous category of Academic Freedom. Academic Freedom is one of those concepts, like Shared Governance, that everyone agrees is good, but often consensus on exactly what is meant is lacking.

We get some help on this from our accrediting board, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools – Com-

mission on Colleges (SACSCOC). Here is their statement on Academic Freedom:

- The essential role of institutions of higher education is the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge. Academic freedom respects the dignity and rights of others while fostering intellectual freedom of faculty to teach, research, and publish. Responsible academic freedom enriches the contributions of higher education to society.

Whenever a college or university is up for accreditation review, as Lone Star has been recently, a SACSCOC team asks that school to answer and document a lengthy list of questions. A school



found to be lacking in the answers to any of these questions risks loss of accreditation. Among those questions are questions related to Academic Freedom:

- How does the institution define academic freedom?
- What are the institutional policies and procedures for safeguarding and protecting academic freedom of faculty?
- How are these policies approved or modified?
- How does the institution publicize its policies on academic freedom for faculty?
- If there have been any instances in which issues involving academic freedom have emerged, how have these issues been resolved?

In preparing policies and procedures that answer these questions, each college or university must address the institution's support for academic freedom and establish a mechanism defending against unwarranted attacks on faculty (or librarians or anyone else) targeted for teaching uncomfortable truths. In this next section, we will explore what those policies look like here at Lone Star College.

2) What academic freedom protections do faculty and others have in Lone Star College Policy?

Lone Star College Policy actually has a very strong definition of academic freedom. Faculty and others who are concerned about whether the content of their classes could come under attack should take courage from the explicitness of this definition. It is located in Section V.I of the Policy Manual:

- Institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good, which depends upon a

commitment to the values of free inquiry and the free expression of ideas. The College embraces these values. Academic freedom is not only a policy giving faculty latitude in addressing their academic subjects but remains a crucial component of a larger commitment to the free search for truth. Academic freedom is accompanied by equally demanding responsibilities. Instructors, therefore, have both rights and responsibilities.

The complete Lone Star College Policy Manual is available online at www.lonestar.edu/policy. The Policy Manual is basically the Constitution and Magna Carta of our institution. All specific procedures, no matter how detailed, derive from and must be consistent with this document. Section V

covers all matters related to Instruction and Section V.I deals with Academic Freedom and Responsibilities – concepts that must be kept in constant balance. The AFT recommends that all faculty and all other employees who support instruction in any way find some time to read all of Section V.

In the context of the current times and concerns, we feel it is valuable to all of us to include here Section V.I in its entirety. The passage above is the preamble. The remainder is copied below. As noted above, the policy references “instructional employees” recognizing that faculty are not the only employees whose duties intersect with instruction. Comments will follow each subsection.

V.I.1.1 (a) Rights of Instructional Employees

- Every instructional employee and employee's family member has the right to speak or write as a citizen of the nation, state, and community without fear of institutional censorship or discipline so long as the employee is clear that

“Lone Star College Policy actually has a very strong definition of academic freedom.”



they do not speak on behalf of the College.

- Instructional employees have the right to teach class content, including arguably offensive or controversial class content, according to their professional judgment within the guidelines established by the curriculum team, state governing bodies, accrediting agencies, this manual, and as required by federal, state, or local laws. Absent the limitations in this section, instructional employees have the right to remain true to their pedagogical philosophies and intellectual commitments when teaching.



Note that this subsection covers the rights of instructional employees both inside the context of the classroom and outside. Lone Star College employees and their family are free to write letters, contribute op-ed pieces to newspapers, attend and speak at rallies, lobby the legislature, and participate in any free speech activity guaranteed by the First Amendment of the U. S. Constitution without fear of reprisal from the college as long as they do not claim to be speaking on behalf of the college.

Inside the classroom, faculty have broad protections when staying within the bounds of course content both regarding content and teaching style in accord with their own professional judgment even if the content might be considered controversial or offensive. This author, for example, would need to be prepared to give an explanation of my reasons, but would be completely within the scope of these rights if I spoke about the contribu-

tions of non-European cultures to the evolution of mathematics in relevant places of certain courses (which I do) even if a student found that offensive.

Note also that, although we are primarily focusing in this article on the content that is taught, this section of the Policy Manual also addresses pedagogical philosophy. Objections to the methodology used in teaching a class are covered to the exact same degree as objections to the content.

V.I.1.1 (b) Responsibilities of Instructional Employees

- Faculty members will strive to be accurate, to exercise appropriate restraint when necessary, and to avoid creating the impression that they speak or act for the College when speaking or acting as private citizens. Every instructional employee maintains competency in their field through continued professional development and demonstration of such competence in the teaching environment. As such, they have the right to be supported by the College in professional-development efforts to help maintain competency in their disciplinary fields and instructional skills.
- Faculty members will respect the rights of others to hold and articulate opinions, whether or not the faculty member shares the opinion—especially the instructor's students that disagree with the instructional employee's opinions. Instructional employees will maintain academic standards with respect to learning outcomes and the accrediting body's requirements.

This section rightly balances section (a) with the recognition (currently often forgotten in the broader culture) that every right is balanced with a corresponding responsibility.

V.I.1.1 (c) Challenges to Academic Freedom

- Challenges to the content of a course may be



brought to an instructional employee's dean or vice president. The appropriateness of the content will be determined by the Vice President of Instruction.

- Should a faculty member feel his or her academic freedom has been infringed upon by a student, colleague, or supervisor, the faculty member should express concerns to the Chief Academic Officer of the college.

What is particularly interesting about section (c) is that challenges to academic freedom remain completely on the instructional side of the Lone Star house. They do not go to the General Counsel's office, for example, or even to the Chancellor. This respects the academic nature of these concerns and tends to insulate them from outside political or business pressures. An upset student or community member might complain to the Board of Trustees about the content of a class in an open session, as we have seen elsewhere, but the Board has no say in adjudicating the complaint.

Also, these challenges remain on the campus where they initiated. It bears watching that inconsistencies do not develop between campuses but, overall, keeping the challenge process at the lowest level possible should be a good thing. Nothing in this policy would preclude a faculty member or other instructional employee from employing the grievance process if needed. In practice, the reader might be glad to know, instances in which a faculty member's actions are overruled have been exceptionally rare.

AFT – Lone Star College, as a key component of the service we offer, will assist any of our members in navigating this process including providing representation if an issue goes to the grievance process.

Throughout the history of education, loud and powerful voices have worked to suppress open discussion and exploration of ideas they do not like both at the K-12 and college level. Specifically which ideas are targeted change with the times. The current flashpoint is uncomfortable truths involving race, gender, sex, and sexuality (and other topics). Threats are real and cannot be ignored. We must be prepared to address them.

However, as things stand right now, based on policies from the Coordinating Board, SACSCOC, and Lone Star College, professors who are thoughtful about the relevance of a topic to their course, are ready to explain the pedagogical decisions they make, and are respectful of the rights of students to hold their own opinions, should be confident

that they can explore uncomfortable truths in class. Other instructional employees can address those truths in their own contexts with equal confidence. The needs of our society to be more just, fair, and open to the full participation of all citizens demand that we do so.

"AFT – Lone Star College, as a key component of the service we offer, will assist any of our members in navigating this process including providing representation if an issue goes to the grievance process."

John Burghduff, President
AFT-Lone Star College

Professor of Mathematics,
Lone Star College - CyFair



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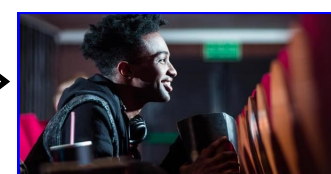
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The union encourages employees to join because they believe that college employees should have a voice in their professional lives. We don't encourage employees to join because they anticipate conflict or are already engaged in a conflict. In fact, if they are already embroiled in a situation, we are unable to help them. It is all too common for someone to approach the AFT and say something like, "I've been an employee for the district for several years, and I've just recognized the importance of joining." Typically, following that comment is, "I'm in trouble and need help." I finally lost track of how many times in the last year I've had to say, "I'm sorry, but member benefits don't cover anything that pre-dates membership." The individuals to whom I had to give this message were invited to join and provided some advice on how to proceed with their situation, but assistance

ended there. Were they members, a host of benefits would have been available.

The AFT provides its members with advice and guidance as well as representation in conflict resolution and grievances. We have our own local attorney and can seek legal advice and counsel for members. We maintain a local legal defense fund. In addition, membership dues include, at no extra charge, \$8 million in professional liability insurance for claims arising out of professional activities.

Most of our members don't join because they believe that they may need the AFT's help in a conflict. They join because they believe in the values of the AFT— that employees should be treated with dignity and respect, that employees should help each other, that employees should

have a voice in their professional lives, that employees deserve fair pay and good working conditions, and that the district needs a system providing checks and balances. They join because they want to support an organization that helps others in so many ways. A nice benefit is that, if they do need help, AFT is there for them.

If you believe in these values and are not a member, now is the perfect time to join. If you believe in our values, take action now and join the AFT.

