



The Advocate



AFT Lone Star College proudly presents our April – May 2025 issue of The Advocate. I hope all of you have had a wonderful school year as spring semester winds down and graduation festivities come onto the horizon.

Much has happened in our union since our January – February issue. On the one hand, we enjoyed our Spring Celebration at Swanny's. Treacherous weather made for a smaller than expected attendance, but we enjoyed good food, fellowship, and great live music. We will host another celebration this fall. Come join us! It's fun! [Check our Facebook for photos!](#)

Also, a delegation from AFT Lone Star made our way to Austin over Spring Break for Texas AFT Advocacy Day. Later in this issue, I have an article on our visit to the Capitol to meet with legislators and their staffs about issues before the Legislature of importance to Lone Star employees and students.

On a sad note, we lost one of our most faithful and long-standing union members, Michael "Dusty" Capistran. His memory will be a blessing to us all. You will find a tribute to our friend later in this issue.

Two articles in this issue are devoted to the activities of the Texas Legislature. I know everyone is tired of politics and wishes they could think about something else. At the moment, I think we are all on sensory overload from the chaos coming out of Washington. However, the Texas Legislature is working quietly on a number of bills that, if enacted, would have direct and daily impact on our lives at Lone Star and the lives of our students. Some of those bills are good. Others not so good. I present those issues as objectively as possible to promote understanding. We all need to know what could be coming our ways AND we all need to feel empowered to speak up if we have opinions about those issues.

Getting away from politics, we also have a special treat for you. The newest and youngest member of the LSC Board of Trustees, Daniel Meza, has submitted a wonderful guest article for us about his experiences at Lone Star College beginning as a student and how those experiences have helped shape his life. It is inspiring and it is great to get to know about the people who serve on the Board.

In addition, Steve Davis, offers his latest installation of his Column, "Dispatches from the Front". In this episode, entitled "Queering the Curriculum", he shares his personal story of adapting his history class to incorporate the achievements and challenges faced and overcome by our LGBT neighbors, and how those adaptations are impacting students.

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I take up the rear with a special “encore” installment of my Column “Know Your Rights”. We generally don’t do “rerun”s in the Advocate, but experiences that a few of our members have gone through in the last few months have made me realize that we need a refresher on one topic. We are reprinting an article from 2022 on the Progressive Discipline Process. This article outlines the process a supervisor must follow if they feel an employee is falling short of expectations and helps employees to understand both their responsibility to make changes, if needed, to better serve our students, AND the rights they have to due process and a supported opportunity to grow and improve. It’s definitely worth a second look for all of us.

So, I hope you will find this installment of The Advocate to be useful and informative. Our next issue is planned for September/October unless something of an urgent matter inspires a special edition over the summer.

Look for a new column next school year to join our current columns and special articles. Tentatively, I’m planning to borrow an old-timey labor phrase as the title of this column: “Good and Welfare”. Traditionally, going back decades, many union meetings end with a time for the members to share something from their personal lives that they either need support, warm thoughts, and prayers about, or that is just so good that they have to tell others. Watch for opportunities to submit a short paragraph about “good and welfare” either about yourself or a colleague (with their permission). As I often say, the union is a community, not an insurance policy, so we are introducing a space to celebrate and share in that community.

I wish you all the best for a great summer ahead AND, if you are not currently a member of the American Federation of Teachers (open to both faculty and staff), consider joining us on our journey to advocate for the people of Lone Star College.

John Burghduff, president
AFT Lone Star College



AFT Lone Star College Members Visit the Texas Legislature

Dr. John Burghduff, president AFT Lone Star College

On Monday, March 10, the first day of Spring Break, rather than going to the beach or to the mountains, three members of AFT Lone Star College travelled to Austin to talk to members of the Texas Legislature about issues of importance to education.

John Burghduff (LSC – CyFair), Rosalie Vasquez (retired, LSC – Kingwood), and Todd Thomas (LSC – CyFair) joined 500 other AFT members from K-12 school districts, colleges, and universities from across the state for the union’s Advocacy Day.



Traveling with our union siblings from the AFT local at the Cypress Fairbanks Independent School District, we left CyFalls High School at an insanely early hour and arrived at First Methodist Church Austin at 10 AM to hear from pro – public education legislators about bills of importance to students, faculty, and staff that are currently under debate in the Legislature. Then we fanned out across the Capitol going from door to door visiting with members of the Texas House and Senate and/or their staffs. We finished with a rally of all 500 of us on the steps of the Capitol building and got back to our respective homes after dark.

The three of us from Lone Star teamed up with other higher education AFT members from Austin Community College, Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, and sev-

eral four-year universities. We visited the offices of four members of the House Higher Education Committee: Charlene Ward Johnson, Suleman Lalani, Stan Lambert, and Terry Wilson. The first two are Democrats from the Houston area. The last two are Republicans from other parts of the state. We visited with legislative staff for the first three, but we were fortunate enough to visit with Representative Wilson, chair of the Higher Education Committee, in person.



We shared our views on a number of bills that relate to higher education. In another article in this issue of the Advocate I outline what these bills propose. Also, in solidarity with our K-12 siblings, we shared our views on public school funding and proposed private school vouchers. I report on those topics in yet another article in this issue.

I know that a lot of people think that all politicians are nincompoops and shysters. In fact, some of them are. They are the ones you most often see prancing and preening for the TV cameras. However, the fact of the matter is that many politicians, of both parties, are sincere, honest, and hard-working public servants doing the best they can to make life better for their constituents. The four legislators we visited are ones we know from long standing experience to be the good kind of politicians.

Everyone we spoke with was polite, friendly, and respectful. We were also. Some of them may not have agreed with us on every point but there was far more that we agreed upon than what we disagreed upon. At the end of the day, issues related to education are not matters of left or right, red or blue, but matters of what serves the citizens of our state.

As we headed back to our van late in the afternoon, we felt heard and valued. We believe that the repre-

sentatives we visited, and others that other union members visited, will do what they believe is best for Texas students and school employees. I have been to several Texas AFT Advocacy Days in the past. Our higher education contingency was better prepared and organized for this one than for any of the others I have attended. It was the first time for Rosalie and Todd. They both felt energized by the experience and glad that they had taken part in the legislative process. Frankly, it was fun!

As you read about some of the bills currently before the Texas Legislature, don't feel like no one will listen to your point of view. Find out who your Representative and Senator are. Call them or email them and tell them what you think. Read the other articles in this issue all the way to the end and I'll tell you how to do all that. If you are a member of AFT Lone Star College, you will also get emails from our state affiliate, Texas AFT, with ways to reach out easily to your legislators.

We probably won't make another organized trip to Austin this legislative session, although we will email all AFT Lone Star College members if we do. We absolutely will go again next time they are in session in 2027. Come with us next time! It's an experience worth having, and you can make a difference.



How I Got My Start

**Daniel Meza, Lone Star College Trustee, District 2
Civic Engagement Specialist, Aldine ISD**

Hello reader, my name is Daniel Meza and I am your newest and youngest trustee. I would like to introduce myself and thank you for being a part of this amazing institution that has given me so much.

I graduated from Lone Star College North Harris exactly 10 years ago with an Associate of Arts degree. If it wasn't for Lone Star College, I highly doubt I would be where I am today. Today, I am tasked with implementing civic engagement programming for the Aldine Independent School District as well as being a part of the governing body for one of the country's largest and, in my opinion, its best community college.

I credit Lone Star College and its faculty and staff for getting me on the path of advocacy and community leadership. It was at Lone Star College that I began to identify myself as a writer, a leader, and a voice for others. I developed my self confidence and public speaking skills during my time as Vice President of the Latin American Student Organization. Thanks to my Mexican-American literature professor, Tony Diaz, I made public appearances on Univision, a major Spanish-language media company, and got to tour various Lone Star campuses sharing poems and performing spoken word.

It was on campus that I got offered my first civic engagement job with Mi Familia Vota and discovered my passion for civic education, outreach, and community engagement. I was even offered the role of Houston coordinator at just 18 years old which I turned down to focus on my political science degree at University of Houston. After graduating college, I taught ESL and English at Dekaney High School. This experience was a challenging but rewarding one and it vastly grew my respect and admiration for teachers. I later transitioned to work with BakerRipley, 5 years after discovering them as Neighborhood Centers through an amazing Lone Star College program called Leadership High School which met at the North Harris campus. With BakerRipley, I further honed my community en-

gagement skills under Bo Fraga. I was tasked with implementing a 2020 Census and later voter outreach campaign throughout the city and county.

From this role, I moved to the Harris County Elections office for nearly two years until it became dissolved and returned to the Tax Assessor and County Clerk's offices. With Harris County Elections, I continued to grow in volunteer management, event planning, and voter registration outreach. I also learned about all the hard work and effort that goes into holding elections.

Needing a short break, I moved to Costa Rica, my father's native country, and taught English while living with two of my cousins. This allowed me to put many things into perspective as well as enjoy some much needed bonding with my family. I returned last year with renewed hope and vigor to affect positive change around me and in my community. I also returned to public education with a focus on civic education and engagement combining all of my past experiences and skills to bring knowledge and information to those that have been historically ignored and looked over.

While doing this work, I realized that it was time to begin giving back to the community that had helped get me here. Seeing an opportunity to run for public office in the same place that I grew up and worked, I took the chance and got lucky in winning my position as Trustee.

I look forward to working with my colleagues on the Board and our chancellor, Mario Castillo, who, with his new vision, also inspired me in a positive way to run for office. I believe that together we can effectively serve you, our faculty and staff, as well as constituents, taxpayers, and, most importantly, our students. And for anyone without a plan or not knowing where to start, start small and start close, because you never know how far you will go.





In Memory of “Dusty” Capistran

AFT Staff

We are saddened by the passing of our colleague and friend, Michael “Dusty” Capistran. Dusty was a long-time philosophy professor at Lone Star College–Tomball, known for his deep care for students, his thoughtful conversations, and his steady presence on campus. He was the kind of professor who made time—for questions, for ideas, for people. No task was too small, and no person was insufficient for his time and attention. Students praised him for his wisdom and kindness. Colleagues appreciated how easy he was to talk to, whether about board policy or Buddhist philosophy.

Dusty’s commitment to education was matched by his commitment to shared governance and union work. He was a faithful AFT member—always ready to show up, make calls, or speak out when faculty rights were on the line. He believed in fairness, in the value of what we do as teachers, and in standing up for each other. A former Faculty Senate President, professional obligation was a cornerstone of his deep sense of duty to the campus, to the work of the college, and to his teaching. He’ll be missed not just for the work he did, but for the way he did it: with humility, honesty, and heart. His sudden passing is a profound loss to all who knew him, but his legacy will continue in the lives and minds of those he taught, counseled, and befriended.





Legislation Matters – What's On Deck in Austin that Matters to Lone Star Employees

Dr. John Burghdoff, president AFT Lone Star College

Although most of the attention related to the Texas Legislature this year has gone to diverting public funding for K-12 education to private schools, there are also some bills at various points in the legislative process relating to higher education that could impact us as much as vouchers impact K-12 education. Some of them would radically change the way colleges and universities run, putting both shared governance and academic freedom at risk. Some would actually be a help to us and to our students. Most of them have not yet come up for a vote so there is still time for public voices to be heard, especially the voices of those of us who have dedicated our lives to public higher education.

Keeping up with what is happening in the Texas Legislature can be overwhelming. It is tempting to say “I don’t want to read any more about politics!” and “Why can’t the union write about stuff that matters to me?” but the fact of the matter is that what is decided in Austin WILL matter to you – both in your work at the college and in your personal life. The bills I’m going to write about in this article are all still up for debate. None of these have been decided for or against as of the writing of this article.

This is not a comprehensive list of everything related to community college education or higher education in general. In particular, I’m not going to write about funding. Most people feel pretty confident that community colleges will get decent funding. I’ve picked out some of the most notable bills that would affect us the most. Which of these will actually become law is impossible to say but how that turns out is something that you and I can still influence.

I’ll start with the scary ones and finish with the promising ones!



Senate Bill 37

As far as legislative proposals that would impact higher education in Texas, the 500 pound gorilla in the room is Senate Bill 37 authored by Republican Senator Brandon Creighton from Conroe. Creighton states the goals of his bill as follows:

“SB 37 ensures that our institutions [of higher learning] remain focused on their core mission – educating students, driving innovation, and securing Texas’ place as a national leader in higher education.” (quoted in the Houston Chronicle, March 18, 2025)

Those are values we could all support. Unfortunately, the proposed legislation doesn’t address any of these goals. Instead, here are some of the provisions in the bill:


Faculty Senates

If passed as submitted, SB 37 would mandate that current faculty senates would be disbanded by October of this year. Governing Boards (in our case, the Board of Trustees) would establish new faculty senates. The wording of the bill clearly has a university structure in mind so how Lone Star would implement the changes in mind is not clear. I’m not going to conjecture how we would do that. But here’s what it specifically says:

Each college and school will have two representatives on the new faculty senate. One of those representatives would be chosen by faculty vote as faculty senate officers are currently chosen. The college president would appoint the other one. The president of the college would also appoint the president of the faculty senate. It goes without saying that the role of the faculty senates in representing the voice of the faculty would be fundamentally changed.

Meetings of the faculty senate would be public and would be broadcast over the internet. (Currently at Lone Star, they are closed sessions restricted to members of the faculty.)

Votes on curriculum issues and no-confidence votes against administrators would be publicly tracked. (To be clear, curriculum recommendations at Lone Star arise from Curriculum Teams, not the Faculty Senate.

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<div data-bbox="97 195 779 451"> <p>Also, at all of the colleges and universities I am aware of in Texas and anywhere else, votes of no confidence by a faculty senate are non-binding on the administration. Furthermore, at least as far as I know, during my 33 years so far at Lone Star, no faculty senate at our institution has ever passed or even voted on a no-confidence resolution against an administrator.)</p> </div> <div data-bbox="97 493 779 823"> <p>Proposals or recommendations from the faculty senates would require the approval of the Board of Trustees to be enacted. (Lone Star faculty senates don't really serve as legislative bodies. They share perspectives and even proposals with appropriate administrators who ultimately make those decisions. Unless the proposal that is sent onward involves a change in college policy, the Board of Trustees is not currently involved.)</p> </div> <div data-bbox="97 865 389 905"> <p><u>Boards of Trustees</u></p> </div> <div data-bbox="97 909 779 1203"> <p>In addition to proposals coming from Faculty Senate, Under SB 37, college trustees would approve or deny postings for all tenured and tenure-track faculty positions EXCEPT for postings in STEM fields. (Lone Star does not offer tenure so what impact this would have is unclear. I have no explanation for why Creighton wants to exempt STEM positions from Board approval.)</p> </div> <div data-bbox="97 1245 779 1390"> <p>The Board of Trustees currently makes the ultimate decision about hiring a chancellor. Under SB 37, all hiring decisions down to the level of dean would be made by the Board.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="97 1432 779 1797"> <p>The Board of Trustees would conduct regular evaluations of the president of the college (perhaps that would be the chancellor in the case of Lone Star) based on performance goals (which the Lone Star Board already does) but those goals would include "efforts to ensure various perspectives among faculty and administrators". This would appear to mean a sort of DEI based, not on race, ethnicity, gender, or other categories, but on employee opinions, political and otherwise.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="97 1839 779 1911"> <p>The Board of Trustees would have the right to overturn any decision made by the college administration.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="828 195 1510 600"> <p>In other words, the Board of Trustees would take on a much more hands on role in the administration of the college. My conjecture is that, since most public university Board members are appointed by the governor, this would indirectly give him far more say in the day to day working of institutions of higher education. Community College Boards are elected by the people of the college district so that would not be the case with us. Our Board members, however, are unpaid. They would have to get ready to take on far more oversight than they currently do!</p> </div> <div data-bbox="828 642 1468 682"> <p><u>"General Education Review Committees"</u></p> </div> <div data-bbox="828 686 1510 1016"> <p>A new committee would be formed at each institution that would meet on an annual basis to make recommendations to maintain or eliminate courses from the core curriculum. We already have a Core Curriculum review process at Lone Star. What would be different is that this committee would answer directly to the Board of Trustees and, yes, the Board would approve or deny any of this committee's recommendations. College administrators would not be involved.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="828 1058 1510 1241"> <p>In addition, one of the goals of the General Education Review Committee would be to ensure that core courses don't endorse specific public policies or ideologies related to diversity, equity, inclusion, LGBT issues, etc.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="828 1283 1481 1323"> <p><u>"Office of Excellence in Higher Education"</u></p> </div> <div data-bbox="828 1327 1510 1472"> <p>SB 37 would set up this statewide office. The director would be appointed by the governor and the office would be put under the authority of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB).</p> </div> <div data-bbox="828 1514 1510 1732"> <p>This office would be responsible for receiving and investigating allegations of non-compliance by institutions to the provisions of this bill. Negative reports would be submitted to the Texas Attorney General for possible criminal investigation and would be made public.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="828 1774 1510 1957"> <p>In short Senate Bill 37 appears, first of all, to operate under the assumption that faculty senates have enormous governing powers that they don't have. In response to this imagined power, it would increase the power of boards of trustees and the state government</p> </div>		



in granular decisions about courses and programs, particularly with goals to promote certain favored points of view and to diminish other points of view.

And that's just one bill!! Here are some more.

House Bill 1830

HB 1830 would eliminate tenure at all institutions that have it. Faculty who already have tenure as of September 1, 2025 would be allowed to keep it but no future faculty would be eligible. All faculty would be put under an annual review.

Since Lone Star does not have tenure, the impact of this bill on us would be unclear. The impact on Texas universities in attracting new faculty would clearly be severe.

House Bill 1870

HB 1870 would establish the Texas Higher Education Accreditation Commission. The purpose of this commission would be to designate a set of accrediting boards to which Texas colleges and universities could apply for accreditation.

Currently, all public and private colleges and universities in Texas must be accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). The 10-year accreditation process all of us must undergo is incredibly rigorous. (Having served on the steering committee for the 2001 SACS accreditation visit, I can assure you that this is so!) We all fret and grumble over the process but, for all the headache we must go through, if a college or university passes their accreditation process, we can assure students, parents, government agencies, funding sources, and industry partners that our operations are squeaky clean and beneficial to students and the community as a whole. SACS criteria include strict fiscal accountability measures, shared governance, and academic freedom requirements. Some less reputable schools have difficulty meeting the rigorous demands of SACS, or simply don't want to. This is particularly true of for-profit private universities.

The Texas Higher Education Accreditation Commission could add easier accrediting options that would be

appealing to schools that can't meet SACS credentials – or that don't like the shared governance and academic freedom requirements. In fact, the Commission could choose to eliminate SACS from that list.

If an accrediting board is approved and then later determined to be unsatisfactory, any college or university accredited by that board would have to seek new accreditation from another board on the list. In fact, schools may be required to switch accrediting agencies at each cycle.

This Commission would consist of 9 members - 3 appointed by the governor, 3 by the lieutenant governor, and 3 by the speaker of the house, and would be answerable directly to the governor. At least two of the members must be corporate leaders from industries designated by the Texas Workforce Commission as high demand. Interestingly, current and former employees of US Department of Education are specifically banned from serving on the Commission.

Note: House Bill 1705 and Senate Bill 530 cover basically the same objectives as HB 1870.

House Bill 947 and Others

HB 947 is one of several bills currently under consideration with a stated purpose of protecting minors from being exposed to obscene material. Although they are not identical to one another what all of these bills have in common is the elimination of "bona fide educational purpose" as a defense against prosecution under obscenity laws.

What does that mean for colleges and universities? We do have students who are under 18 years of age and are considered minors. Many of them are dual credit students. Currently, if such a student or their parents became offended because, for example, an art professor showed a picture of Michelangelo's David, or a biology professor showed a diagram of the human reproductive system, and the student or parent accused that professor of exposing a minor to obscene material, the professor and the college would have a defense because there is a bona fide educational purpose in showing the material.



These bills would eliminate that defense making it potentially difficult for faculty to meet the required learning outcomes of their courses and opening them up to the specter of criminal prosecution.

House Bill 17

HB 17 references individuals who are not U.S. citizens, and not U.S. permanent residents, but who are citizens of China, Russia, Iran or North Korea and are in the United States on legal visas. If such people are “domiciled” in their home country, they are not permitted to own property in Texas. This bill would prevent graduate students, professors, and other professionals who have homes in one of these countries from also buying a home in Texas.

House Bills 160 and 232

These bills, although not identical, would both eliminate in state residency status for undocumented residents.

Under former governor Rick Perry, Texas authorized students who otherwise met residency requirements but lacked documentation of their right to live in the U.S., to be considered in-state for the purpose of college tuition. This opened the door for “dreamers” to attend college while working through other status issues. Perry himself argued that the State of Texas was better off having these students educated than not.

These bills would eliminate that status requiring such students to pay international student tuition. Of course, that will likely be the least of their worries in the current political climate.

House Bill 2339

HB 2339 would eliminate all degree programs, majors or minors in LGBT studies in public colleges and universities in Texas. Furthermore, the bill requires that all degree programs and courses must acknowledge the existence of two sexes. ALL state funding would be cut for colleges that don’t comply. Employees who individually don’t comply with the provisions of this bill would be put on unpaid leave through the current school year for a first offense, and would be fired for a second. Furthermore, students can sue a college or

university if they are required to take an LGBT studies course

House Bill 2548

HB 2548 would mandate that students cannot be required to take a course whose course description, learning outcomes, or assignments include any of the following topics: critical race theory, whiteness, systemic racism, institutional racism, microaggressions, implicit bias, intersectionality, social justice, cultural competence, reparations, race or gender based privilege, race or gender based marginalization, and a lengthy list of other similar topics. Such courses can be offered but not required.

If some or all of these bills leave you feeling depressed, there are also some really positive ones under consideration.

House Bill 1330

HB 1330 is named the Academic Fresh Start Act. This bill would mandate that colleges and universities disregard failing grades in a student’s GPA after 5 years. This bill is designed to help students who start college, don’t take it seriously, drop out and then realize later in life that a college education is important. Currently, such students are weighed down by the consequences of past poor decisions and struggle to come up to academic good standing. Under this bill those past poor grades would be erased after 5 years.

The State of Ohio had an Academic Fresh Start Bill in place when I taught there in the early 1980s. It enabled us to welcome far more non-traditional age students and freed them from the burden of past mistakes.

Senate Bill 1191

SB 1191 would mandate that school districts set an equal maximum grade point for Advanced Placement and Dual Credit classes. Currently, some school districts award a higher number of grade points for an A in an AP class than for an A in a dual credit class. This disincentivizes students from enrolling in dual credit classes that might otherwise be more in their best interest.



Senate Bill 709

SB 709 would exempt college textbooks from state sales taxes. No need for further explanation on that one!

House Bill 3326

HB 3326 would make it easier for adjunct faculty to obtain eligibility for the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program. Basically, any week in which they are teaching at least 9 contact hours could be counted towards the required years.

House Bill 4227

Last session's Senate Bill 17 eliminates diversity, equity and inclusion efforts on campuses. Currently SB 17 explicitly states that the content of courses is not impacted by these restrictions. HB 4227 would expand that exemption to research and grants.

House Bill 237

HB 237 would give all full-time employees of public colleges and universities a state funded annual salary increase of \$10,000. This increase would be uniform across all job classifications on both the faculty and staff side of the college. Because this is a flat amount rather than a percentage, this bill would especially benefit employees towards the bottom of the pay scale.

Furthermore, part time employees would receive a proportional apportionment of the \$10,000 based on hours worked. For example, a part time advisor working half of the hours of a full-time advisor, would receive a pay increase of \$5000.

The extra funds required for these salary increases would come from the State of Texas and would not be a burden on the colleges or universities. The same increases would be available for all other state employees also.

House Bill 1289

HB 1289 is named the Reducing Student Hunger Act. Under this act, food vendors on college and university campuses would have to accept supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP) benefits for pay-

ment. The bill further mandates and supports the establishment of food pantries on campuses, something all Lone Star College campuses already have in place. The bill would support schools in actively promoting participation in SNAP among students who received free or reduced lunch options in high school. For universities that offer meal plans, students would be allowed to share their benefits with other students if they so choose. The bill would also establish a statewide working group to explore other options to assist students with food insecurity.

House Bill 1784

HB 1784 is named the Helping Homeless Students Act. Under this act, institutions of higher learning that offer on campus housing would be required to offer priority assignment for students who are otherwise homeless or who are aging out of the foster system. Furthermore, such schools would be required to offer housing between semesters for these students. This bill would not impact Lone Star College since we do not currently offer on campus housing.



All of these bills are currently still actively under consideration by the Texas Legislature. As is often the case, a significant number of them may never make it as far as a floor vote in one or both houses, or they may be significantly amended. However, all of them have the potential of reaching a floor vote and should be of concern.

If you are interested in tracking the progress of these, or any other bills before the legislature, the State of Texas has set up an easy to use website that allows you to quickly do so as long as you know the bill number (which is why I have included them in this article). This site also contains the complete wording of each bill and updates that wording if the bill is revised.

The address for that site is:

<https://capitol.texas.gov/billlookup/BillNumber.aspx>



Important INFORMATION

Because these bills are still in play, you as a citizen have a right to contact your senator or representative to express your stance on the bill, whether for or against. If you are not sure who represents you in the Texas House and Senate, you can visit this easy to use website:

<https://wrm.capitol.texas.gov/home>

If you need to find out specifically how to contact your senator or representative you can visit these sites:

<https://www.house.texas.gov/members>

<https://senate.texas.gov/members.php>

If you are a member of the American Federation of Teachers, our state affiliate, Texas AFT, regularly updates our members on progress on bills related to education through emails and live webinars to which all members are invited. They also support letter writing or phone calling campaigns that allow you to easily contact your legislators to express your opinion one way or the other on key bills. They also provide training sessions if you would like to drive to Austin to testify directly to the legislature about a bill.

As we have already seen with the Voucher Bill, there are powerful and wealthy forces pushing bills that are important to them in Austin. The influence of ordinary Texans lies in our numbers, not in our dollars. Organizations like the AFT, the Texas Association of Community Colleges, the Texas Association of Community College Teachers, and others do our best to represent the interests of community colleges, but it is the volume of input that tells our legislators how important issues are to every-day Texans.

Our job, as AFT Lone Star College, is not to tell you what to think about any of these bills or what actions you should take. Those are matters you must weigh in your own heart. Our job is to do the best we can to inform you as objectively as possible and then to leave the ball in your court to take action.

I wish to especially thank and acknowledge Dr. David Albert, president of Austin Community College AFT for his tireless efforts in compiling the list of bills I reference in this article. For information about SB 37 in particular, I reference the article “Bill seeks to curb faculty influence” by Samantha Ketterer, in the Houston Chronicle issue of March 18, 2025.

For K-12: Vouchers are Coming, Adequate Funding is Not


Dr. John Burghdoff, president AFT Lone Star College

On April 17, at 2:05 in the morning, the Texas House of Representatives voted to divert one billion dollars from public funds to fund private education in the form of vouchers.

House Bill 3 authorizes up to \$10,000 per child to be used for private school tuition or other purposes. Although there are some differences with a similar bill previously passed in the Senate and a reconciliation committee will be required, the differences are small, and passage is virtually certain. Governor Abbott, who has received millions of dollars in donations from pro-voucher individuals and groups, will sign.

With average private school tuition running around \$20,000 per year and many private schools charging far more, vouchers are unlikely to be of any help to low income families who might be interested. Projections within Texas match the experience of states that already have vouchers that the majority of voucher funds will go to families who already have children in private schools.

Often voucher proposals are marketed as “school choice” bills. This is accurate in the sense that it is the private schools that have the choice of whether

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<p>to admit a student or not. Many will exclude special needs students or students with past behavioral issues. On the other hand, public schools accept all applicants.</p> <p>A proposed amendment to put the voucher bill up to the vote of the people of Texas in November was voted down. Some Republican legislators claim they were bullied by the governor into voting for HB 3.</p> <p>Earlier that day, the House passed House Bill 2 which provides for funding for public K-12 education. For the first time since 2019 the public school funding bill includes an increase in per student allotment. Many school districts, including Cypress Fairbanks ISD, for example, are facing severe budget constraints. The extra \$395 per student will certainly help. However, to account for inflation, an estimated increase of \$1386 per student was needed to bring public school funding back up to 2019 levels.</p> <p>Zeph Capo, president of Texas AFT, said “With the first increase to their basic state funding since 2019, our public schools can breathe a small sigh of relief. Emphasis on the small. The per-student funding increase is far below what is needed to make our schools whole, and I urge lawmakers to use their remaining time in session to reallocate funds wherever they can to remedy this fact.”</p> <p>On the plus side, HB 2 increases the amount of the basic allotment that must go to employee raises from 30% to 40% and the bill corrects past exclusions from raises for counselors, nurses, and librarians.</p> <p>Passage of the funding bill was nearly unanimous as it was imperative that the House come up with K-12 funding that would be acceptable, or at least tolerable, to most. The voucher bill, HB 3, passed by a much smaller margin with 85 representatives voting aye, 63 voting nay, and 2 absent.</p> <p>Continuing a practice started in the last issue of The Advocate related to the Social Security Fairness Act of</p>	<div data-bbox="568 220 1071 703"> <p>“A proposed amendment to put the voucher bill up to the vote of the people of Texas in November was voted down. Some Republican legislators claim they were bullied by the governor into voting for HB 3.”</p> </div>	<p>2024, we are reporting the votes on the voucher bill by all Texas House members serving the Lone Star College service area and the surrounding regions where LSC employees may live. As a citizen of Texas and the United States you have the right to favor or oppose school vouchers as your beliefs and values dictate. You also have the right to know how the person who serves you in the House of Representatives voted on this bill.</p> <p>Legislators are listed by their district number. If you are unsure which House district you live in and who your Representative is, please visit:</p> <p>https://wrm.capitol.texas.gov/home</p> <p>An “aye” vote is a vote in favor of authorizing vouchers. A “nay” vote is a vote opposing authorizing vouchers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Cecil Bell, Jr. - aye 12. Trey Wharton - aye 15. Steve Toth - aye 16. Will Metcalf - aye 18. Janis Holt - aye 23. Terry Leo Wilson - aye 26. Matt Morgan - aye 27. Ron Reynolds - nay 28. Gary Gates - aye 76. Suleman Lalani - nay 85. Stan Kitzman - aye 126. Sam Harless - aye 127. Charles Cunningham - aye 128. Briscoe Cain - aye 129. Dennis Paul - aye 130. Tom Oliverson - aye 131. Alma Allen - nay 132. Mike Schofield - absent 133. Mano De Ayala - aye 134. Ann Johnson - nay 135. Jon Rosenthal - nay 137. Gene Wu - nay 138. Lacy Hull - aye



- 139. Charlene Ward Johnson - nay
- 140. Armando Walle - nay
- 141. Senfronia Thompson - nay
- 142. Harold Dutton - nay
- 143. Ana Hernandez - nay
- 144. Mary Ann Perez - nay
- 145. Christina Morales - nay
- 146. Lauren Ashley Simmons - nay
- 147. Jolanda Jones - nay
- 148. Penny Morales Shaw - nay
- 149. Hubert Vo - nay
- 150. Valoree Swanson - aye

Dispatches from the Front #13 “Queering the Curriculum”

*Steve Davis, Professor of History, Lone Star College
-Kingwood*

In October 2023, I attended a teaching history conference sponsored by the American Historical Association (AHA). Among the presenters was Professor Rebecca Sharpless from TCU who spoke on her experience of teaching queer history. I had a “road to Damascus” moment, telling myself that this program is in Waco and she works in Fort Worth, neither community exactly a progressive bastion. Then why can’t I teach a queer version of the U.S. history survey at Lone Star Kingwood?

I proceeded from there, running the idea by my dean and department chair and getting their approval to schedule the class for Spring 2025. That gave me time to publicize the course and to do a dive into the LGBTQ historical literature, which was far from being an area of my professional concentration. I promoted this special version of HIST 1302 to my HIST 1301 students last Fall, got our graphics folks to design a special poster to display on hallway monitors and to send via email, and visited the Gender & Sexuality Alliance meeting to pitch it to those students. We put a special comments line into the schedule so as not to surprise anyone about what they were registering for. Much to my satisfaction, the class not only made, but filled a couple of weeks before the new term began. What a joy it has been for me to teach these students, espe-

cially given the climate of intolerance and fear that surrounds us!

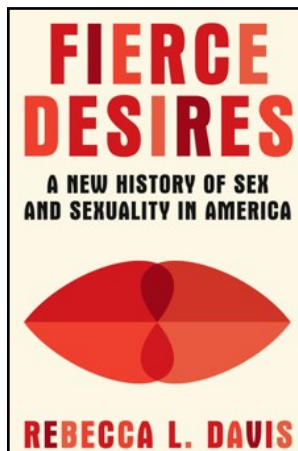
I knew the course this semester would be at best a good first draft as I needed to reorganize the standard version and feel my way through the new content. I made it a special priority to attend LGBTQ sessions at national meetings of the AHA and the OAH (Organization of American Historians) to ask questions and steal ideas. At one of those panels. John D’Emilio, one of the preeminent gay historians in this country, was sitting right next to me. I told him I had a silly question, asking how to properly pronounce “Mattachine” and “Bilitis”—as in the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis, the gay and lesbian rights organizations founded respectively in 1950 and 1955. Now I know! In one Q&A, I asked if there was a good collection of primary source documents for teaching queer American history as I had not been able to find one. The people in the room were the experts and they confirmed that no such book existed. Fortunately, I was able to find plenty of documents for classroom use from a study of the 1969 Stonewall Riots and from a reader on the history of American sexuality. At the AHA meeting in New York City in early January, I attended a panel on teaching queer history led by women professors from Norman, Oklahoma and Dallas. Once again, I came away emboldened that if they could teach such courses where they were based then I could do so in suburban Houston. After the Fall semester ended, I packed a bundle of books for my now traditional pre-Christmas sojourn to Lisbon, where I read works such as *Cures* by Martin Duberman, a bio of pioneering gay rights leader, Frank Kameny, and the important new study of sex and sexuality, *Fierce Desires*, by Rebecca Davis. All of this preparatory groundwork at least marginally eased my anxieties about leaping onto such new terrain.

Still, I was perplexed about how to structure the course, since most of the documented and important queer material comes in the most recent phase of American history. Sometime early during in-service week, I had the genius idea to flip the course, that is to start with the post-1945 text chapters, teach to the end of the chronology, then go back to the late 19th century traditional beginning of HIST 1302 and pro-



gress from there, ending with WW II. That has worked stunningly well. Students like the more contemporary history and this approach allowed me to get to the more-or-less present day without rushing. It meant that I could work in queer content and documents from the beginning, starting with the Kinsey reports, the early 1950s Lavender Scare, the fascinating case of Christine Jorgensen, and the rise of so-called homophile organizations like the ones earlier mentioned. From there we progressed through the epochal importance of Stonewall, the AIDS Crisis, Clinton's policy of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," and the triumphs of the Supreme Court rulings in *Lawrence v Texas* (2003) and *Obergefell v Hodges* (2015). These are just the highlights. Something I believe we have all enjoyed is analyzing key documents in class line-by-line. One favorite was the absurd 1954 article by a psychiatrist who claimed that Batman and Robin comics were a nefarious tool to recruit young readers to homosexuality. My students responded with a bemused dismissal that would have been unthinkable among their counterparts not so many years ago.

I've also used feature films and documentaries in the class with great success. The Oscar-winning *Moonlight* was an example of the former in its portrayal of the peril and pain of growing up gay and Black in Miami in 2010s. Colleagues have been a great source for me. My department chair (along with a student) alerted me to the 1990 documentary, *Paris is Burning*, about drag balls in NYC in the late 1980s. Another colleague recommended the recent Netflix documentary, *Eldorado*, which is a compelling queer history of Nazi Germany. I can't wait to see what students think when they write on it the week before finals.



The students have been wonderful. How I look forward to seeing them every Tuesday and Thursday at 8 a.m.! When my dean observed the class, he marveled at the level of interest and participation at that early hour as we discussed the film, *Rustin*. I started the term with 28 and still have 25, a more than acceptable rate of retention. Every single one of them has a good chance to complete the course with a passing mark, unless they simply quit in the last weeks of the semester. I imagine the great majority of them are straight, though there is no way for me to know for sure. On the first day, I had them fill out a short informational survey, one question of which was "how did you find out about this course and why did you sign up?" A couple of them answered that they did so because they were gay or lesbian. While discussing Stonewall, I displayed the website of the Stonewall National Monument, which reveals that the feds have recently removed the letters "T" and "Q" from the home page, leaving only "LGB." A student on the back row interjected that this was upon the order of the Trump Administration to underscore the recent executive order that there are two and only two genders. When I asked that student how she knew that, she immediately answered "because I'm trans and I follow this kind of news closely." How times have changed for the better in regard to the student mindset. It was impossible to have any kind of serious discussion of queer issues in my Kingwood history classes in our first years. The hooting and sneering and cries of "faggot" when I showed the documentary *The Times of Harvey Milk* (the 1986 Academy Award winner) back then was more than sufficient proof. These kids have shed so much of that pervasive homophobia. Oh, I don't doubt that bigots are still among us, but it's not surprising that they would self-select themselves out of this particular history section. Actually, it would be good if some of them registered and learned something.

What are the take away lessons from my experience this term? One is of the need to constantly reinvent ourselves over the course of long classroom careers. It's essential to stay fresh, to take on new approaches and preparations, despite all the extra work and stress that can entail. I am reinvigorated by my experience with these students and this material. It is spring in



more than one sense, given the feeling of energy and renewal the queer class has provided. Like anyone who works here, I snarl at times at all the nonsense we encounter and all the bureaucratic hoops we have to jump through. But there is no doubt I have been very lucky in my career. No one in administrative authority has ever rejected one of my creative ideas or told me I couldn't do something a bit different or edgy. I hope that during the years I was an administrator, that all the teachers I supervised felt the same. I hope this feeling characterizes every campus in our system.

Perhaps the most important message in this historical moment is to not be afraid. The iron hand of authoritarianism looms; its abettors count upon our submission and timidity. Trump and his vulgar circle of billionaires and bum kissers want to remake the country in their awful image. One day this national fever will break. In the meantime, we have to do all we can to limit the damage to our consciences and to the Constitution. We are fortunate to have a chancellor who is principled, who knows the law, and who will fight for academic freedom. And if that's not adequate assurance, then join the AFT and the legal protection it brings in case of trouble. That's just one of many reasons to be a member of our union.



I write almost exactly 250 years after the fighting at Lexington and Concord initiated the American Revolution, a revolution that in regard to its core values of liberty and equality, remains unfinished. For all the reasons referenced above, teaching queer history—and indeed queering the entire curriculum—is itself, in these times, an explicit act of rebellion. In the words of Patrick Henry, “If this be treason, make the most of it!”

Progressive Discipline

Know Your Rights



**By: Dr. John Burghdoff,
Professor of Mathematics. LSC– CyFair**

(This article was first published in the November/December, 2022 issue of The Advocate.)

Once or twice a semester I'll get a phone call from a worried AFT member who will start the conversation with the question “Thus and such just happened; will they fire me for this?” It is a reasonable and important question that I always take seriously.

Looking to the legal system for answers will probably not help. As much as I love my home state, Texas is a precarious place to be an employee. Going all the way back to the earliest Anglo colonists in the 1820s, Texas has prided itself on being “business friendly”, whether we're talking about the plantations and ranches of the 19th century, the high tech innovation centers of the 21st or, of course, the oil and gas industry that dominates everything else. Sadly, our state seems to take as a matter of faith that being friendly to business means being unfriendly to workers. Other states and other countries have definitively shown that the interests of business and the interests of workers can complement one another but that is not a Texas thing.

It has been rightly said that, under Texas labor law, an employee can be fired for any reason or for no reason. There is a story that gets repeated of a banker who was fired for wearing a Dallas Cowboy tie to work be-



cause his boss didn't like the Cowboys. According to the story, the courts upheld the bank's right to do so. I have never been certain whether the story is authentic or mythical, but the fact of the matter is that, under Texas law, employees can legally be fired for something as trivial as this.

The exception to this Wild West attitude towards workers is that Federal Law prohibits an employer from firing someone for belonging to an Equal Employment Opportunity protected class such as race, ethnicity, religion, sex, and so forth. A Texas employer can fire someone for wearing a Cowboys tie but not for being an African American woman, for example. The trick there is proving that the reason for the dismissal truly was discrimination and not something else.

Well, that's a gloomy picture isn't it?

The good news is that individual employers in Texas can choose to adopt policies and procedures that treat employees better than the state requires. In those cases, it is the employer's own policies that protect the rights of employees. There are many important reasons why an employer would choose to do this. First and foremost, treating employees in a callous and capricious manner is immoral. However, in addition, firing people at the drop of a hat is bad for business. A sudden vacancy means that coworkers have to take on additional duties and service to stakeholders suffers. Recruiting, hiring, and onboarding a replacement worker is expensive and time consuming, especially in a tight labor market.

The smart thing for an employer to do is to invest the time and effort to hold on to problem employees and try to help them to do better if at all possible. The Cowboy tie example is silly and petty. The guy in that example was likely not a problem employee, just an employee with misguided loyalties (from the point of view of this life-long Houstonian). There are true and valid employee performance issues that are harmful to the mission of the organization that employers should and must address. The smart thing for the employer to do is to try to take measures to assist the employee to overcome those issues. The vast majori-

ty of us don't want to be bad employees but that doesn't mean that we instinctively always know how to be good ones.

This brings me back to the panicked phone calls from union members afraid they are going to be fired. I am always pleased to be able to tell those employees that Lone Star College is one of those employers that recognizes the value of trying to keep employees

rather than throwing them callously away. Sometimes employees' supervisors are simply in the wrong. For episodes that fall into the Dallas Cowboy tie category when it looks like supervisors are being petty and capricious, Lone Star College has a grievance process that the union can and does guide employees through. (I wrote about grievances in previous installments of this column. Please see the end of this article for specific references.) If issues appear to be outright unlawful discrimination, I can direct employees to the LSC Office of Governance, Accountability, and Compliance which, in my judgment, does a very good job of thoroughly investigating such complaints.

Sometimes, however, employees will tell me (or will come to realize as we talk) that part or all of the problem lies with themselves. Employees will tell me that they know they made mistakes and they worry about what will happen next. In those cases, I can describe a procedure Lone Star College refers to as "progressive discipline". That may sound a bit ominous, but the procedure is actually an excellent one that is beneficial to employees and it is important for everyone working for Lone Star to understand. So, I am going to describe it in this episode of "Know Your Rights".

In May of 2020, the Lone Star College Office of Human Resources prepared a training, mandatory for all supervisors across the system, on the Lone Star College Progressive Discipline Procedure. The training was very helpful, and, in the remainder of this article, I will





largely be quoting from the PowerPoint from that training.

The training began with a statement of purpose which I quote:

“The Lone Star College (LSC) Progressive Discipline procedure is designed to align with LSC Cultural Beliefs to promote a high level of employee performance by:

- Correcting performance problems as they arise,
- Building genuine employee commitment to the organization, and
- Encouraging and promoting the development of effective working relationships between supervisors and their employees.”

What are some of the performance problems that this procedure aims to address? The HR presentation identified three broad categories.

- “Attendance – coming in late, leaving early, excessive absenteeism
- Behavior/Conduct – unprofessional behavior towards staff, co-workers, or students; insubordination, violation of LSC’s civil rights policies.
- Work performance – failing to meet targets: work requiring excessive revision/rework, time wasting and poor time management”

These categories are, indeed, broad and would mean different things depending on whether employees are faculty, staff, or administration but they do serve as a clear and useful categorization for both employees and supervisors to assess whether a given behavior is a true performance problem. Furthermore, these are valid concerns. The College has every right, and in fact has a duty, to make sure that concerns like these are addressed.

The “progressive” in the phrase “Progressive Discipline Procedure” refers to the fact that the procedure calls for a series of steps beginning at an informal level and “progressing” to more serious and formal levels ONLY when less formal steps have not achieved the necessary results.



STEP 1: INFORMAL COACHING



As the title suggests, if a supervisor identifies a specific area in which an employee needs to improve, the first step is an informal conversation in which the supervisor identifies the issue, listens to the employee to understand what that employee may need, and outlines clear expectations. Quoting from the HR presentation,

“During informal coaching, the supervisor has an opportunity to understand the cause of the employee’s performance, discuss possible solutions, and establish an appropriate time frame for achieving them.”

“Generally, the outcome of a coaching session is not documented in a formal memorandum to an employee; however, supervisors are encouraged to make a note of this activity in an employee’s file maintained by the supervisor.”

(As an aside, AFT often encourages employees to write an email back to the supervisor after a meeting such as this, not as a protest, but simply to memorialize the steps that were agreed to in order to make sure that nothing was forgotten or misunderstood and to affirm the employees’ commitment to the changes discussed.)

Note how the focus of the HR language is on finding ways to help the employee improve, not on getting the employee fired. Many issues will be resolved at this stage and will need to go no further.

On a personal level, I can recall as a very young man having a meeting along these lines with a supervisor at another employer because I had missed a deadline. In that discussion it became clear that I was having trouble prioritizing multiple assignments and the supervisor graciously agreed to help me think through that process. The coaching session solved the problem from his point of view and has been very helpful to me as I continued through my career.



STEP 2: PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT COUNSELING



If performance problems persist after informal coaching, the process progresses to “Performance Improvement Counseling”, a series of more serious conversations but still a step taken BEFORE formal steps of disciplinary actions are taken. To quote from the HR presentation

“Generally, the outcome of a performance improvement discussion is to develop a performance improvement plan. The supervisor will provide feedback and document the improvements in the employee’s performance improvement plan maintained by the supervisor.”

Lone Star College has a specific form used for Performance Improvement Plans that documents specific changes expected of the employee, a timeline for monitoring changes, and, importantly, steps that the supervisor will commit to do in order to assist the employee in completing the plan. This could include, for example, authorizing training the employee might need, and time set aside in the employee’s workload to participate in that training.

I have had the privilege of observing a Lone Star dean who used a Performance Improvement Plan (also known as a PIP) to assist a struggling employee. She met with that employee on a regular basis, suggested practical tools that would help, and authorized time off for important training that the employee needed. She invested a great deal of time and effort in assisting the employee and the end result was that the employee was able to make substantial improvement.

Note: There may be specific severe issues for which performance improvement plans are not appropriate. For example, an employee should not need counseling meetings and training to know that one shouldn’t beat a student. Cases like that escalate farther down the process quickly out of necessity to maintain the safety of students and employees. Su-

pervisors are encouraged to contact HR for further guidance about what issues might not be suited to a PIP. More on exceptions later.

STEPS 3 AND 4: FIRST AND SECOND WRITTEN WARNING



If informal coaching and performance improvement counseling fail to result in important changes in behavior, the process moves on to what are finally considered formal disciplinary actions. At first, these take the form of written warnings. Written warnings should use a specific form approved by Human Resources that clearly states across the top that this is, indeed, a written warning, documents steps that have already taken place to resolve the issue, and clearly states that failure to address the issues in the warning by the employee can ultimately result in further disciplinary action up to and including termination.

Supervisors are expected to prepare for meeting with the employee by completing a Pre-Meeting Checklist form that documents for HR what issues exist and what steps have taken place so far as well as what the expectations for change are. The employee is called to a meeting and informed in advance that the purpose of the meeting is to administer a written warning. The stated purpose of the written warning, according to the HR training is “to gain the employee’s commitment to change to an acceptable attendance, behavior/conduct, and/or work performance.” In other words, even at this stage, the goal is to try to salvage the employee, not to merely be a box to check to get the employee out the door.

There is to be a First Written Warning followed, if after a reasonable amount of time the performance issues remain, by a Second Written Warning.

A copy of the First or Second Written Warning will be provided to the employee and the employee will be



asked to sign the supervisor’s copy to confirm that the discussion took place. Signing does not necessarily indicate that the employee agrees with the content of the warning. An employee can refuse to sign. However, refusing to sign does not invalidate the warning.

In addition, the employee has the right to file a response to the written warning (whether it is a First or Second Warning) and submit it within five working days of the receipt of the document. If an employee believes the Warning is invalid, AFT encourages that employee to file a response to document that belief.

Whether it is a First Written Warning or a Second Written Warning, the supervisor files a Post-Meeting Summary, and copies of the Warning itself and any supporting documents with the Office of Human Resources.

It is at the step of a First or Second Written Warning that the union has noted some irregularities in some specific cases.

We have seen supervisors blind side employees by not telling them that the purpose of a meeting is to administer a warning. This puts employees at an unfair disadvantage unready to explain their sides of the story and should not happen.

We have seen supervisors file written warnings without going through the informal coaching and performance improvement plan steps. As stated before and reiterated later in this article, there are situations where steps can be skipped but they are extreme and rare. Writing someone up may be easy for the manager but Lone Star’s procedure is clear that there are efforts that must be made before that stage is reached.

We have seen supervisors file a Second Written Warning without a First Written Warning. Generally, the supervisor refers back to some previous communication and claims after the fact that that communication was really a First Written Warning. That can’t be done and violates the letter and spirit of the process. Employees have a right to know that a docu-

ment they have received has risen to the level of a Formal Disciplinary Action and not to be caught off guard.

We have also seen supervisors follow up a First Written Warning with a Second Written Warning within days. The spirit of Progressive Discipline is that we want to salvage employees and help them improve. Rapid fire serial warnings are contrary to that spirit. Any of these irregularities could provide grounds for an appeal or grievance. The union encourages members who encounter any of these irregularities to contact us for assistance to help us assure that rights to due process are preserved.

STEP 5: THIRD (FINAL) WRITTEN WARNING



If required changes have not taken place after a First and Second Written warning, the Third Written Warning is considered to be a FINAL written warning and the final formal step before termination proceedings could conceivably begin.

Like the first two written warnings, the supervisor is expected to prepare a Pre-Meeting Check list outlining efforts that had already been made to resolve the undesired behavior, and to inform the employee that they are being called to the meeting to be administered a warning. The employee still has the right to file a written response within 5 business days of receipt.

Even at this late and final stage, the purpose is still to illicit change and salvage the employee.

STEP 6: TERMINATION



As stated in the HR presentation, “A termination normally occurs when the steps of discipline outlined in the Progressive Discipline Procedure have failed to bring



about a correction in an employee’s attendance, behavior/conduct, and or work performance.”

Also, “It is LSC’s internal practice to require a signed Termination Recommendation Authorization Form (commonly referred to as the 5-Signature form) before ending employment.”

In the Termination Recommendation Authorization Form, the supervisor makes the case of why the employee should be terminated. Five levels of supervision including the Lone Star College General Counsel and Chancellor must agree with the decision and sign off. The purpose of this form is to ensure that the decision to terminate is not a personal whim or vendetta on the part of a supervisor. Multiple levels of administration have to be convinced that appropriate efforts had been made and documented to try to salvage the employee and that all of those efforts had failed.

Note: The exact process to terminate an employee is outlined in Section IV.G.3 in the Lone Star College Policy manual (www.lonestar.edu/policy) and depends on whether the employee is on contract or not. We will go through that process in a future issue.

The bottom line of this whole discussion is that the answer to the question “Will I be fired?” is “Not without following a carefully crafted process that gives you ample opportunities to fix whatever problems your supervisor identifies.”

In fact, it is possible for supervisors to back up a step if they think it will help. For example, if a performance improvement plan helps resolve an issue to a degree but not completely, supervisors can choose to start another PIP instead of proceeding to a formal written warning.



EXCEPTIONS AND SKIPPING DISCIPLINARY STEPS

There is an important caveat to note. The HR presentation clearly states that, should an employee commit a “serious offense”, the employee may be escalated past informal steps to a Formal Written Warning, even a Final Warning. Furthermore, it states,

“A termination is the appropriate action when a disciplinary problem repeats or when a single offense is so severe that any other disciplinary action would not be an appropriate remedy.”

The implication of the first part of this sentence is that, if an employee has a performance issue, goes all the way through the Progressive Discipline Procedure, and then commits the same performance is-

ssue, they may not be afforded the entire process the second time around.

The second part of the sentence is a bit vague. If an offense is sufficiently severe, steps in the process can be skipped and, potentially, the employee could be terminated without going through all of these steps. What constitutes

“sufficiently severe”? In one way, it makes sense not to try to come up with an exhaustive list of offenses that would qualify, or the process could end up looking like the book of Leviticus or the Texas Constitution. However, this statement requires a level of trust that the 5-Signature form would root out any cases of supervisors trying to circumvent the system.

The HR presentation includes a section on Administrative Leave. In this section, the presentation points out that the Chancellor can authorize an Administrative Leave (with or without pay) “when an inappropriate behavior is so serious that immediate removal from the workplace is necessary”. They list some examples of behaviors that could trigger an Administrative Leave and I think it is safe to surmise that the





kinds of behaviors that would trigger skipping steps or immediate termination in the Progressive Discipline Procedure would be of this magnitude. To quote,

“Though it is not possible to list all forms of behavior, the following are examples of situations where an administrative leave may be appropriate:

- Theft
- Threat of violence
- Destruction of college property
- Reporting to work under the apparent influence of alcohol or drugs (or reasonable suspicion of the same)
- Insubordination
- Arrest”

It is presumed that any such allegations would be thoroughly and fairly investigated before decisions are made. We will have to monitor whether this clause is ever used to circumvent what is otherwise a fair and thorough process. So far, we have seen no evidence to suggest that.

Besides formal terminations, there may be other reasons employees may lose their employment at Lone Star. Particularly, part time staff and adjunct faculty can be affected if enrollment drops and the need for their services disappears. There is not much anyone can do when that happens, sadly, but it is important to note that this scenario is not a termination. We would all be hoping that the employee could be brought back when situations improve.

Full time employees could become victims of “reductions in force” or “layoffs” if shifts in enrollment or other needs threaten to make a job position obsolete. In a future installment I can discuss what those policies and procedures are. This scenario is, first of all, extremely, extremely rare, and second of all, would not preclude the employee from moving to another position within the College if one were available.

What we would suggest is that any union members who find themselves at any stage in the Progressive Discipline Process should consult with one of the

AFT officers listed on the last page of The Advocate.

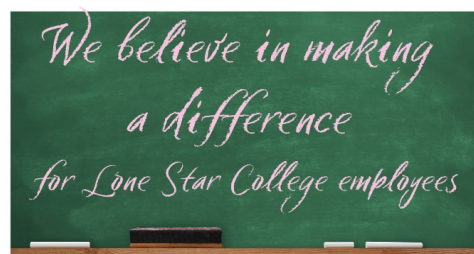
If there are indeed performance issues you are struggling with, we will encourage you to address those issues because, ultimately, we should all share the goal of doing the best job we possibly can of serving our students. However, we will also help to make sure that your rights to due process are preserved and that you are given a fair opportunity to improve.

References from previous editions of The Advocate:

“Know Your Rights – Informal Dispute Resolution Meetings, September – October, 2021, pages 11 – 14
http://aftlonestar.tx.aft.org/sites/default/files/article_pdf_files/2021-11/2021_the_advocate_september-october.pdf

“Know Your Rights – The Grievance Process, November – December, 2021, pages 9 – 13
http://aftlonestar.tx.aft.org/sites/default/files/article_pdf_files/2021-12/2021_the_advocate_nov-dec.pdf

We are here for YOU!

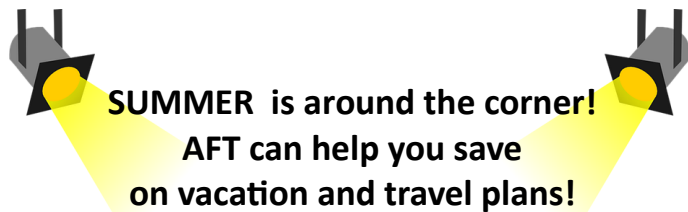


If you are interested in membership, benefits, or would like to discuss a work-related issue, our AFT Faculty and Staff Vice-Presidents are here to assist. Please don't hesitate to contact them. See the back page of this publication for contact information.





AFT Discounts & Savings: Travel and Vacation Perks Spotlight!



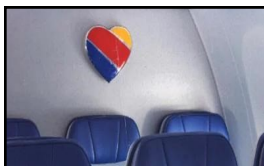
HOTEL DISCOUNTS

As an AFT member, you can choose from two options for hotel discounts—Hilton and Wyndham properties. You will save up to 20% off the 'best available rate' at over 9,000 participating Wyndham hotels worldwide; and 12% chain-wide discount at all global Hilton hotels.



SOUTHWEST AIRLINES

AFT members can receive discounts on domestic flights through our SWABIZ® account. SWA is offering an 8% discount off Business Select® fares, 6% discount off Anytime fares and a 3% discount off select Wanna Get Away® fares for travel, along with other benefits. (For members only; login required)



VACATION TOURS

Take the vacation of your dreams. Save on travel destinations around the world using your AFT discount.



CAR RENTAL

AFT members and their families save up to 25 percent with car rental discounts.



THEME PARKS

Members can receive great discounts on water and theme park admissions, including Disney, Universal Studios, Six Flags Sea World and many more.



ENTERTAINMENT & SHOPPING

Union members and their families can save big with discounts on shopping, restaurants, movie & concert tickets, and more!



AFT MEMBERS:

DO YOU HAVE HOUSEHOLD DEBT?

Get the funds you need today!

Texas AFT
A Union of Professionals

- Loans starting at \$2,000*
- Payments made over 16 months*
- Biweekly payments of \$75.00*
- Apply regardless of your credit score

The Texas American Federation of Teachers has partnered with BMG Money. Get access to reliable, affordable online installment loans to help you regardless of your credit history.

[BMG Money - Affordable loans and financial wellness solutions for employees and retirees](#)

Sign up now at

app.bmgmoney.com/signup and **TYPE** "Texas American Federation of Teachers" as the name of your employer

DO YOU HAVE STUDENT DEBT?

LOWER MONTHLY PAYMENTS

Enroll in income-driven repayment (IDR): IDR is a free federal program where repayment plans are based on your personal income. Summer helps find the best IDR plan to lower your monthly payments (with possible forgiveness as well).

LOAN FORGIVENESS

Certify for Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF): You may qualify for Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF), a program that will forgive ALL of your remaining loan balance after ten years. In order to enroll in PSLF, you must also be enrolled in an IDR

This is a **FREE** benefit
for **AFT Members!**
[Join today!](#)

Summer

- My Plan
- My Student Loans
- Tools
- Income-Driven Repayment
- Public Service Loan Forgiveness
- Forgiveness Finder
- Refinancing
- Extra Payments
- Resource Center
- Support



Joining AFT-Lone Star is the best thing you can do to ensure that you have a voice on work-related issues that matter to you!

Whether you have been at LSC for a long time or are just beginning your career, joining AFT-Lone star is the best way to ensure your voice at work on issues that matter to you.

Our Union has a solid history of going to bat for our members when they need help and speaking up on issues that concern our members system-wide.

- ☐ If you believe faculty and staff should have a voice in educational issues, you should join.
- ☐ If you believe employees should have a voice in the political process, you should join.
- ☐ If you believe in the value of employees advocating for each other, you should join.
- ☐ If you believe employees should be treated with dignity, fairness, and respect, you should join.

Your dues help support these values.

Membership should not be thought of as only for "protection," but if you need help in a conflict, we will be there for you.

Don't join because you think you might get into trouble; join because you embrace the values we embrace.

Join AFT-Lone Star

**Click here to Join
AFT Lone Star
TODAY!**

<https://bit.ly/AFTLonestar-JOIN>

Join Today!



A Union of Professionals

AFT-Lone Star College

A union of Professionals

- \$8 million in professional occupational liability insurance (in case you get sued)
 - Local staff and leaders ready to assist you when you need help and information
 - Legal defense funds (in case you need an attorney)
 - \$ 36,250 Accidental Death and Dismemberment policy
 - Strong leaders and lobbyists advocating for your rights at the local, state, and national levels
 - \$5,000 free term life insurance for your 1st year of membership
 - AFT PLUS savings and discounts for you and your family
 - Educational resources and publications
 - No conflict of interest– Administrators cannot join
 - Strong. Active. Vocal. When you join AFT-Lone Star, you join the best!
 - Pay your dues via bank draft or credit card by signing up online! <https://bit.ly/AFTLonestar-JOIN>
- <http://www.aftlonestar.org>

WEB: www.aftlonestar.org

PHONE: 281-889-1009

E-MAIL: aftlonestar@yahoo.com



AFT-Lone Star College

AFT Local Union # 4518

GOALS

- To promote academic excellence
- To protect academic freedom in higher education
- To preserve and protect the integrity and unique identity of each of the institutions of higher education in Texas
- To protect the dignity and rights of faculty against discrimination
- To ensure that faculty have an effective voice on all matters pertaining to their welfare
- To secure for all members the rights to which they are entitled
- To raise the standards of the profession by establishing professional working conditions
- To encourage democratization of higher education
- To promote the welfare of the citizens of Texas by providing better educational opportunities for all
- To initiate and support state legislation which will benefit the students and faculty of Texas
- To promote and assist the formation and growth of Texas AFT locals throughout Texas

**Membership provides
professional career
protection
and a united voice at work.**

BENEFITS

- \$8,000,000 Occupational Liability Insurance provides
 - security while teaching
 - protection against litigation
 - malpractice protection
- \$30,000 Accidental Death Insurance
- Legal Assistance
 - Free consultation and representation on grievances and job related problems
 - Services of leading labor attorneys
 - Legal Defense Fund protection
- Political Power
 - Texas AFT lobbyists in Austin
 - AFT lobbyists in Washington
 - Representation at the Coordinating Board
 - Support for local electoral work
- Affiliations
 - Affiliated with the Texas AFL-CIO
 - Affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers and Texas AFT
- Staff Services
 - Professional representatives to assist and advise in processing grievances

24-25 Monthly AFT Dues

Full-time Faculty	\$51.00
Full-time Professional Staff	\$33.00
Full-time Support Staff	\$33.00
Adjunct Faculty	\$20.00
Part-time Staff	\$20.00

Membership Eligibility

Membership in the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) is open to full-time and part-time faculty and staff up through the dean level. If you would like to join or find out more information about membership, please contact any of the officers listed on the back of this newsletter, or check out our online information and application at:

www.aftlonestar.org



www.texasaft.org

American Federation of Teachers
Texas AFT
AFL-CIO



www.aft.org

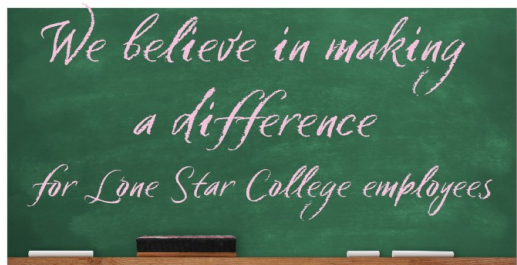


JOIN AFT - LONE STAR TODAY!



www.aftlonestar.org

We are here for YOU!



If you are interested in membership, benefits, or would like to discuss a work-related issue, our AFT Faculty and Staff Vice-Presidents are here to assist.

Please reach out to them!

See back page of this publication for a list of our officers.

Offset your membership dues by using your AFT PLUS BENEFITS to save money!

Union membership gives you discounts on things you need every day.

Our members enjoy savings on an array of goods and services with our **Union PLUS** benefits and discounts!

AFT SHOPPING DISCOUNTS:

- ◆ Computers and retail merchandise
- ◆ Dining, movies and entertainment
- ◆ Electronics
- ◆ Personal vacations, hotel & car rental
- ◆ Save on Southwest Airlines
- ◆ 15% off AT&T
- ◆ Plus much more!



AFT BENEFIT PROGRAMS:

- ◆ Life, auto, home, and pet insurance
- ◆ Credit counseling
- ◆ Home mortgage and home buying
- ◆ Dental, prescription, vision and hearing programs
- ◆ Scholarships for members and their family members
- ◆ Trauma coverage
- ◆ Plus much more!





New mailing address:

AFT- Lone Star College
PO Box 310404
Houston, Texas 77231

We're on the Web!

www.aftlonestar.org



Call for Articles

We invite all employees to send us their opinions, news, questions, and so forth. *The Advocate* is a forum for information and free interchange of ideas. Send your ideas. Send your articles to **John Burghduff** via e-mail: aftlonestar@yahoo.com , or submit to any of the following officers.

First Name	Last Name	Officer title	Campus
John	Burghduff	President	Cy-Fair
Alan	Hall	President Emeritus	At-Large
Earl	Brewer	Secretary	At-Large
Britney	Hall	North Harris Staff Vice President	North Harris
Pat	Chandler	Kingwood Staff Vice President	Kingwood
Cliff	Hudder	Montgomery Faculty Vice President	Montgomery
Martha	Neely	Montgomery Staff Vice President	Montgomery
Adrienne	Patton	Cyfair Faculty Vice President	Cy Fair
Cindy	Hoffart-Watson	Cyfair Staff Vice President	Cy Fair
Van	Piercy	Tomball Faculty Vice President	Tomball
Cathleen	Quayle	System Office, Staff Vice President	System Office
Katie	Truax	University Park Faculty Vice President	University Park

Our AFT Lone Star Organizers are on the campuses regularly!

Please reach out if you have questions about membership and benefits

Daler Wade	dalerwadeaft@gmail.com	Cyfair, Tomball, Creekside, Cypress, Fairbanks, Fallbrook, UP, Westway, Online, Process Tech
Dee Williams	Dee.Aftlonestar@gmail.com	Kingwood, North Harris, Montgomery, Atascocita, Conroe, E. Aldine, Greenspoint, Victory, Westway, System Office

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.

