



The Advocate

AFT Lone Star College is pleased to present the September – October 2025 edition of our newsletter, The Advocate.

This is our first “ordinary” issue for the 2025 – 2026 school year although we published a special edition in August. If you did not get a chance to read that issue, or if you would like to read ANY of our issues dating all the way back to 1979, please visit our archive at the following address:

<https://aftlonestar.tx.aft.org/sites/archives-advocate>

What a momentous, and often scary, time this is for higher education! In this edition we address some of the main challenges we are facing both here at Lone Star College, throughout the State of Texas, and around the country.

We moved our two regular ongoing columns, “Know Your Rights” by AFT LSC president John Burghduff, and “Dispatches from the Front” by LSC Kingwood professor Stephen Davis from their usual locations farther back in the publication right up to the front. Both col-

umns address the dramatic attacks colleges and universities have experienced related to academic freedom. Whether these attacks come from the Texas Legislature, from the administration in Washington, or from a host of private groups determined to embarrass and harass professors, if you are a faculty member you need to know accurate information about what is happening, what the laws actually say, and how you can persevere, remain true to your disciplines, and continue to boldly teach your students with confidence. Yes! All of that is still absolutely possible even when some people want to stop you from teaching truths they’d rather keep hidden!

Next, we tackle new Texas legislation related to flexible work options. The Covid pandemic and the years thereafter have shown us that the five day a week, 8 – 5, in an office model does not have to be the only paradigm for getting the work of a college done effectively. Not a panacea and not perfect, there have been growing pains, and the Texas Legislature has put some limits on what “telework” can and cannot look like. The union contends that the new law does not hinder the progress

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AFT LONE STAR FALL CELEBRATION!

Live Band (Featuring Karina Nistal)
spacious outside venue!
Complimentary Beverages!
Lots of Door Prizes!
Free Taco Bar!

WHO: All LSC Employees
DATE: Saturday, November 15th
TIME: 5:00 - 8:00 pm
LOCATION: Swanny's Bar & Grill
6224 Theall Rd. Houston, TX 77066

RSVP Required
bit.ly/AFT-LoneStar-FallCelebration2025



We're on the Web!

www.aftlonestar.org

E-mail:

aftlonestar@yahoo.com



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Lone Star has made for both staff and faculty. We explain in the article Senate Bill 2615 Revisited. Next we tackle dramatic cuts to federal grants on which colleges and universities rely to serve our students. We explore how cuts to grants have impacted a significant portion of Lone Star’s employee base, grant funded staff, and the shocking way these draconian cuts have been orchestrated based on Naughty Words. Long standing practices and poor outside funding leave an underclass of employees at all institutions of higher learning who can’t afford adequate food, proper health care, and safe housing. In The March Toward a Living Wage we highlight plans by the Lone Star College administration to move ALL college employees towards a wage at which they can live in dignity. At last something positive! Artificial Intelligence is changing the face of education and everything else, for that matter. Will AI open new opportunities to advance higher education or will it destroy it? The answer is complicated and nuanced and will take time to put into practice. The one thing that is certain is that AI is not going away. AFT at the national level is, in fact, opening an institute on properly and effectively integrating AI in education. This edition of The Advocate includes a thoughtful guest article, AI Literacy Only Matters if Literacy Comes First. We will follow this up with more discussion of AI, and the not unrelated subject of academic integrity, in our November – December issue of the Advocate. For our final article in this issue, we turn to some information about the upcoming November elections. Whatever you may think about the current state of affairs at both the state and national levels, whether for higher education or any other area, the one thing that has been dramatically demonstrated is that “elections have consequences”. And, yes, there is another one coming up this year! The election November 4 includes several school board races and some other races of importance to our area. It also includes a whopping 17 state constitution amendments. We, first of all, wanted to make sure this election doesn’t slip by you, and second of all, to provide you some resources to consider as you make your own voting decisions. In tumultuous times like these, we are reminded that surviving and thriving requires community. I have often encouraged our AFT members to view the union, not as an insurance policy, but as a community. So much of the shouting that characterizes public discourse focuses on dividing: on denigrating some groups of people, while consolidating power for others. Much of the tension comes from a world view of scarcity, often promoted by a small minority who want to keep everything for themselves. Yet, we live in the richest country in the world, in		one of the richest states in that country. We CAN find room at the table for everyone. We have become so tribal. If you do not look like me, talk like me, think like me, love like me, and pray like me you are not in my tribe and you are my enemy. Although we would not all frame the principle in the same context, perhaps we can all see the wisdom in the words of Saint John who wrote in his first letter “Those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.” We CAN find a way to treasure one another for the vast array of different life experiences and cultural backgrounds all of us can bring to that broad table. Although, sadly, these words have become “naughty words” we can celebrate our diversity, strive for equity among all peoples, and include everyone in the opportunity for a better future. That is the community we want to be as a union. Will you join us? Here are two small ways we can build community in the near future. 1) On Saturday, November 15, we will celebrate our AFT Fall Celebration open to ALL Lone Star employees and retirees! Please see the advertisement on the first page of this newsletter for information and come out and share a grand time with us. 2) Starting in the next issue of The Advocate for November and December, we will be adding a new column to the Advocate: “Good and Welfare”. I have no idea of the origin of this old-timey phrase, but it goes way back in union tradition. Historically, at the end of every union meeting, whether it was a union of teachers, or auto workers, or coal miners, or pipe fitters, there was time set aside to share personal trials and triumphs and to receive the support of union brothers and sisters. If you have news you would like to share – maybe something happy like a wedding or a new baby, or maybe something sad like the passing of a loved one or a health challenge, please email aftlonestar@yahoo.com before November 15. Keep it to a sentence or two and we will publish it and share our support with you. Enjoy this September - October issue of The Advocate and stand strong! We SHALL overcome! 



What is Happening to Faculty on Texas Campuses???

Know Your Rights



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

I'm sure by now you are more than aware of some of the shocking things that have been happening on college and university campuses since the start of the school year. If somehow you have been lucky enough to have been spared the details, let me list a few (among many more) highlights:

- 1) A student at Texas A&M secretly videotaped herself challenging a professor for giving a lecture about transgender themes in children's literature (in a class on children's literature). Promoted by a Texas legislator, the video went viral leading ultimately to the firing of the professor, the demotion of a department chair and dean, and the resignation of the university president.
- 2) A professor at Texas State gave a talk at a convention off campus and not speaking as an employee of the university making some controversial statements and was fired for his speech.
- 3) Both the University of Texas and Texas A&M Systems have ordered a review of all courses to make sure they do not promote points of view out of step with the dominant political perspectives of the state, related, among other things, to gender identity and expression.
- 4) Professors at Angelo State were ordered to take down any posters in their offices that express support for LGBTQ+ students and colleagues, and were ordered to remove preferred pronouns from their email signature lines.

All of these actions, and many more, have been taken under the auspices of following Texas state laws including Senate Bill 37 passed by this year's Texas Legislature. Adding on top of this federal efforts to regulate college behavior through cutting funding and denying visas to foreign students and faculty, it is no exaggeration to say that academia has not faced this level of assault since at least the McCarthy era of the 1950s.

With all of this going on, it is not surprising that I'm hearing reports of faculty across Lone Star self-censoring their courses to take out content that they think might get them in trouble.

In the clearest way I can possibly say it, my message is "DON'T DO THAT!" Teach boldly. Don't self-sensor.

I hope you saw our special emergency issue of The Advocate that we sent out in August that addressed the impact of new legislation including Senate Bill 37 (SB 37). If you haven't, please read it at this link (pages 5 and 6):

<https://aftlonestar.tx.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2025/2025%20The%20Advocate%20Special%20AUGUST%20Edition.pdf>

Although we wrote about this bill then in detail, I want to double down on what we said:

There is nothing either in Senate Bill 37 or any other piece of Texas legislation that regulates or restricts the content of what you teach in your classes.

Let me repeat that for emphasis:

There is NOTHING either in Senate Bill 37 or any other piece of Texas legislation that regulates or restricts the content of what you teach in your classes.

There is also nothing that regulates what you research, what you publish, or what you say in a public forum.

To prove to you that I am not giving you fake news, here is an extensive quote from SB 37 that, far from restricting content, affirms the academic freedom of Texas professors:

SECTION 1.02. Section 51.354, Education Code, is amended to read as follows:

Sec. 51.354. INSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY.

(a) The final decision-making authority on matters regarding an institution of higher education's degree programs and curricula belongs to the institution. The institution shall make the decisions on those matters under the direction of the institution's governing board.

(b) In addition to specific responsibilities imposed by this code or other law, **each institution of higher education has the general responsibility to serve the public and, within the institution's role and mission, to:**

- (1) transmit culture through general education;
- (2) extend knowledge;
- (3) teach and train students for professions;
- (4) provide for scientific, engineering, medical, and other academic research;
- (5) **protect intellectual exploration and academic freedom;**



- (6) strive for intellectual excellence;
- (7) provide educational opportunity for all who can benefit from postsecondary education and training; and
- (8) provide continuing education opportunities.

As you can see from the words of the bill, not only do faculty retain their academic freedom and their right to intellectual exploration, it is the responsibility of a college or university to protect those freedoms.

At the end of this article I include a link to the actual text of SB 37. Every faculty member and administrator in Lone Star College should read this bill in its entirety, keep a copy as handy as you would an MLA Handbook, a Periodic Table, or a copy of the U.S. Constitution, and have at least the bold-faced part of Section 1.02 above committed to memory.

Scour every word of SB 37 and you will see that nothing in this bill restricts a history professor from teaching a comprehensive view of U.S. history – both the heroic stuff and the horrible stuff.

Nothing restricts an environmental science professor from teaching about the impacts of climate change.

Nothing restricts a nursing or biology professor from teaching about the human reproductive system including the existence and care of intersex persons or the phenomenon of gender dysphoria.

Nothing restricts a psychology professor from talking about the full range of human experiences including sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

Nothing restricts a communications professor from teaching about communicating respectfully and effectively across all categories of race, gender, religion, and politics.

The bill makes clear that it is the institution that determines curriculum, not the state, and that what we do serves the public.

In the 2023 Session the legislature passed Senate Bill 17 (SB 17) which was designed to curtail diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts at college and university campuses. As detrimental as I claim those changes have been to opening the doors of higher education to more Texans, this bill also makes it clear that nothing in this legislation places any restrictions on the research faculty do or the classes they teach. I'm linking to a copy of that bill at the end of this article as well.

Another bill that I've begun to see quoted lately as justification for restricting course content is House Bill 229 from this most recent session. I am also linking to a copy of HB 229 at

the end of this article. This one is being quoted to specifically claim that faculty are not allowed to teach about gender identity and gender expression and may be the law the A&M student was referencing in her challenge to her literature professor.

What HB 229 addresses is the reporting of demographic information required by state agencies. In any such reports, the only genders that can be listed are "male" and "female". This bill has some really cringy definitions of the words "man" and "woman" that sound like something your papaw might say and would certainly make anyone in the biological or health sciences choke on their coffee. (Not my papaw, by the way.*) However, the bill has nothing to do with teaching or the content of teaching in any way, shape or form.

I hope I am not being vague or unclear in any way. If the course description, and/or the learning outcomes of your classes, or the very nature of being faithful to your academic discipline calls on you to teach topics that some people might not like, there is NOTHING in these or any other bills to stop you. Teach those topics bravely.

Authoritarianism reigns not only when speech is overtly censored but also when good people self-censor what they think MIGHT get them in trouble.

Having read this far, you might have two serious questions.

Question 1: Does everything you say mean that I won't be harassed in my class?

The answer to this question, sadly, might be no. After the publicity the Texas A&M student got, there will almost certainly be copycats, hoping for a few moments of social media notoriety and willing to get it at your expense.

The chancellor recently sent out some language from the Office of the General Counsel that faculty can use to disallow students from recording their classes (unless a student has special accommodations). For more information, please revisit the Chancellor's September, 2025 Monthly Digest sent via email on September 30, 2025.

We can set a no-recording policy for our classes. We can even submit an academic misconduct violation to students who violate this policy. If the student uses a video from class for financial gain, we can also pursue a copyright violation. It is highly unlikely that any of this will deter a student, hungry for fame, from taking a clip of your class, probably editing it heavily to make you sound like a terrible person, and posting it on Tik-Tok, and hoping it will go viral. Even if ultimately the student faces sanctions for their actions, the video will already have had its impact.



Our state parent organization, Texas AFT, shared with all of the local presidents a post on X on September 15 from an organization called the O'Keefe Media Group. Working with another organization, the Citizen Journalism Foundation, O'Keefe Media Group announced that they would be providing cameras to high school and college kids willing to secretly video their teachers and professors and training on how to edit their videos to "expose corruption and evil." Their stated objective: "It's time to rip the rot out of America's education system."

Videos are not the only potential threat. Anything you put in an email, or post on social media, whether acting as an employee of the college, or as a private individual, can be clipped, and forwarded to the inboxes of thousands of people.

Surely this only happens at the big universities. Nothing like that would happen to a faculty member at Lone Star, right???

Sorry. It already has.

To preserve the privacy of the affected employee, I am not going to share any details other than to say that the employee was a union member and came to me for help. A perfectly legal post unrelated to Lone Star College and not using LSC resources had been cut and pasted online and had gone viral perhaps with organized collaboration. The college was inundated with complaints and demands that the employee be punished. I promised our union member that we would bring to bear the full weight of our legal support to protect them, and I set up an appointment with our attorney. I promised we would bring in additional legal support from the state and national offices of AFT and I am confident that we would have been able to bring in additional support from other free speech organizations had that been necessary. I also reminded the employee that, should they be sued related to this incident and a financial judgement be levied against them, their AFT membership includes an \$8 million liability insurance policy to cover legal judgments arising from their role at the college.

What I most want to share is that, in spite of considerable public pressure on the College, the employee is still here and was supported fully by College leadership. Lone Star administration followed all college procedures and policies rather than caving into angry demands. That doesn't mean that this was not an immensely painful process for the employee, but it did blow over as trolls on the internet went on to whatever outraged them next.

My advice to all of us is that we not allow the possibility of a

viral event to bully us into shortchanging our students from essential if not always popular information. Even if a professor were to devote their existence to never saying anything other than the most innocuous information, someone could still cut and paste a video or post to make that person sound awful.

So, we might as well say what our disciplines need us to say!

There are a few things we can do to help prepare for the possibility of a viral attack.

- 1) This was a suggestion from the Chancellor. If you know that a course you teach is going to call on you to talk about something controversial (gender identity/ expression is the big one right now, but there are plenty of other topics) set up a meeting with your dean and/or vice president of instruction to show them how these topics align with the course description and state mandated learning outcomes. This will help them to be prepared and document that you had notified administration of your content.
- 2) At least to start with, assume that questions from students are good faith efforts to understand, and respond logically and calmly. That will be true 99% of the time so strive to be patient and supportive with questions. Avoid being defensive.
- 3) Have the content of the laws we've covered so far ready in mind. In the video from Texas A&M, the student claimed that teaching about gender identity was against the law. Be ready to reference SB 37, SB 17, and HB 229 to say that none of these laws restrict course content.
- 4) If a student is obviously trying to be confrontational, don't take the bait. Remain calm, and supportive. The goal of these efforts is to be thrown out of class or to have the police called. Try to avoid that unless the student seems to pose an actual, physical threat. The organizations that encourage students to be confrontational are fueling a narrative that higher education persecutes their point of view. It might be better to cut the class short that day. If the problem persists, seek the support of the Behavior Intervention Team (BIT) on your campus.

Question 2: If Senate Bill 37 actually endorses academic exploration and academic freedom, why are these things happening at Texas universities?

The answer is that it's not about law. It's about governance.

There IS a back-door connection to SB 37, and a significant difference between universities and community colleges comes into play.

Starting with the latter, Lone Star College is governed by a



Board of Trustees that is elected by the people living in the college taxing district. This is true of all community colleges in Texas. At Lone Star, Houston City College, and many others, trustees are elected by single member districts. So, voters choose their trustees from neighbors living in their neighborhoods with their neighborhood’s interests in mind.

By contrast, the Texas A&M University System, the University of Texas System, and all other public university systems are governed by Boards of Regents appointed by the Governor of Texas and confirmed by the Texas Legislature. Although university regents are supposed to represent the interests of the people of Texas, they do not answer to the people of Texas and certainly do not represent the interests of specific communities within Texas. They answer to the Governor. If the Governor has a political agenda that intrudes itself into the content of classes, he can’t use the law to push that agenda, but he can appoint regents who will pressure administrators to take action.

SB 37 actually expands the authority of college and university governing boards (Boards of Trustees or Boards of Regents).

Traditionally, the most visible role a governing board plays is the hiring of a chancellor. Under SB 37, that authority extends to hiring provosts (what community colleges would likely call a vice chancellor of academic affairs), and deputy, associate, or assistant provosts. These would be the chief academic officers most closely tied with curriculum and faculty.

Governing boards do not hire other administrators, but SB 37 gives them the right to OVERTURN hiring decisions down to the rank of vice president and even dean AND requires them to report all hiring/firing decisions they make to the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker of the House, and all members of the Texas Legislature.

In addition, SB 37 gives governing boards new authority to review the general education curriculum to make sure that courses in that curriculum are “foundational and fundamental to a sound postsecondary curriculum”, and are “necessary to prepare students for civic and professional life”. They also have the authority to approve or deny decisions about eliminating minors and certificates.

These provisions give governing boards significantly more oversight authority and significantly more say over administrative hires.

I feel absolutely confident that the current Board of Trustees

of Lone Star College would use this increased authority judiciously and would rely heavily on input from faculty, staff, and administration. That might not be the case for politically appointed regents beholden to the Governor for their positions. The regents of Texas Tech University, for example, recently appointed Texas Senator Brandon Creighton, the author of SB 37, chancellor of the university system.

The million-dollar question is whether a politically appointed board would pressure politically appointed administrators to violate the academic freedom guaranteed to the faculty elsewhere in the bill. This, we fear, is exactly what is happening in some of these high-profile cases and is likely to happen more frequently.

The million-dollar question is whether a politically appointed board would pressure politically appointed administrators to violate the academic freedom guaranteed to the faculty elsewhere in the bill.

We believe that, with a locally elected Board, Lone Star College is somewhat insulated from this political pressure. However, as we have seen already at the K-12 level, powerful and well-funded political organizations can mount hostile takeovers of school boards

that can then become very intrusive in curriculum issues. The citizens of the Lone Star district elect only a third of our board every two years so a takeover would take concerted effort over significant time and would somehow have to appeal to all of the communities in our service area. That would be a tough task but not a scenario that should be ignored.

While SB 37 expands the authority of governing boards, it constricts the participation of faculty in governance. This is perhaps the aspect of the bill that employees would be most aware of. Senate Bill 37 closes our faculty senates and only allows them to be reopened if they are restricted in size, if administrators appoint some of the senators including, specifically, the president, vice-president, and secretary, if administrators have the right to remove senators from office, if senate meetings are open to the public and broadcast over the internet, and, in the event of a vote of no confidence, or a vote on curriculum and academic standards, the votes of each individual senator are publicly posted.

That’s a lot!!

This helps explain why some universities, acting under political pressure from the outside and with less oversight on the inside, are taking such sweeping actions against faculty. We, in the AFT, including our state affiliate Texas AFT, our national parent union, and the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), which is now affiliated with AFT, contend that these actions cross legal lines – both lines protecting academic freedom under this very law, and lines of

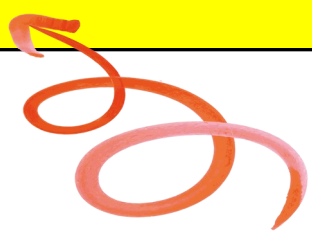


freedom of speech guaranteed under both the federal and state constitutions. Several union members across the state are among those who have been caught up in this turmoil. Texas AFT, our statewide parent organization, and the AFT at the national level, are providing legal support for these faculty at no charge to the faculty. There are numerous other free-speech and workers' rights organizations working in a coordinated effort with AFT to support as well.

This entire infrastructure is available to help if any of these extreme threats were ever to come to Lone Star College. I already mentioned that all members of the AFT are covered by an \$8 million dollar liability insurance policy in the event they are successfully sued. In the meantime, a small portion of the dues paid by members of AFT Lone Star College go to help in protecting our brothers and sisters at these other universities. This is the power of the union. We stand in solidarity with each other for mutual protection and for the ultimate benefit of our students.

The two most important things you can do to resist authoritarian efforts to silence the voice of truth in education are:

- 1) Don't give in to fear by self-censoring!**
- 2) Join the union!**



References:

Senate Bill 37 – official text

<https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/89R/billtext/pdf/SB00037F.pdf#navpanes=0>

Senate Bill 17 – official text

<https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/88R/billtext/pdf/SB00017F.pdf#navpanes=0>

House Bill 229 – official text

<https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/89R/billtext/pdf/HB00229F.pdf#navpanes=0>

*My Papaw: Walter Hebel left home at 15 to escape an abusive father and never attended high school. As a teenager he worked on building the levees along the Mississippi River. Both an excellent problem solver and gifted communicator, he worked his way up the ranks and was eventually appointed sales manager for South America for the Allis-Chalmers Corporation and lived in Buenos Aires, Argentina from the 1930s to the 1950s. Expelled from the country by the dictator Juan Perón, Mr. Hebel was a passionate opponent of authoritarianism as well as the kindest and gentlest of souls and the best grandpa a boy could ask for.

Dispatches from the Front #15 “Scoundrel Time”

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

It has been a tumultuous stretch of days in our national life since the assassination of Charlie Kirk on the afternoon of September 10. Let's get an obligatory acknowledgement out of the way. It is never acceptable to celebrate such a death no matter how contentious and objectionable the views of the victim. That is a matter of simple human decency, based upon the fundamental moral instruction of treating others as we would be treated. As I write, Kirk's memorial service is occurring in Arizona. This is not the time to examine and rebut his public stances point by point. We can return to that task at an appropriate point some distance from now. If Kirk's supporters are correct that his major strength was his willingness to engage in honest debate, then a critical examination of his politics should be understood as a gesture of respect.

What is most disturbing at this point is the determined effort of the Trump administration and the MAGA movement to reap benefits from Kirk's murder by using it as a pretext to quash opposition. When would the president find his Reichstag fire? An augury of such came with the beating of junior DOGE operative, Edward Coristine (aka “Big Balls”), on August 5 by a group of teenagers in D.C. This gave Trump an excuse to declare a law-and-order emergency in the capital and send in National Guard units from a number of red states. That incident was trivial compared to the impact of what happened on the campus of Utah Valley University. Every day brings fresh news of Trump attacking the 1st Amendment and attempting to shore up his authoritarian power. Earlier this weekend, he urged his lickspittle Attorney General, Pam Bondi, to ramp up investigations of political foes like Letitia James and James Comey, saying “we have to act fast.” This is no surprise, given Trump's incessant mutterings in last year's campaign that retribution would be a major aim of a second tour in the White House.

The repressive drumbeat actually predated Charlie Kirk's demise. The incident at Texas A&M that brought about the firing of a professor, the busting back to the ranks of a dean and a department chair, and the resignation of a much-esteemed president started with a classroom recording this summer. In the X clip which went viral, a young student challenges the legality of what her professor is teaching, saying it is out of line with Trump's executive order on there being two and only two genders. The dustup was clearly premeditated as the student reveals that she already has a meeting scheduled



with the president in which she will present her “documentation.” This is exactly the kind of thing an organization named Professor Watchlist (under the aegis of Kirk’s Turning Point USA) for years has promoted, busting teachers for voicing (like John Thomas Scopes in 1925) religiously or politically objectionable content. I wonder what might have happened had that A&M student been in my Texas history class in which I have more than once this semester referred to the body of water off our coast as the “Gulf of Mexico”? This after all is also not aligned with “the law” as proclaimed by the wannabe despot in Washington. My president’s office is right down the hallway from my classroom and would have been quickly accessible to such a complainant. I’m confident the same shameless caving-in would not have occurred in Kingwood that took place in College Station.

San Marcos was the scene of another capitulation when Texas State University history professor, Thomas Alter, was sacked on September 10, shortly after he made an online presentation at a left-wing conference. His offense? The university president accused Alter of “inciting violence.” Anyone who watches the video will see he did nothing of the sort. Alter is a self-described “revolutionary socialist” who is a member of a fringe group of Marxist-Leninist cranks called Socialist Horizon. In his brief talk, he engages in the characteristic rhetoric of that element by speaking of the ripening crisis of capitalism and the need to

organize the working class for societal transformation. I’ve heard that kind of stuff a million times and have never understood it to be any kind of call for overt action against constituted authority. If I could sit with Alter over a cup of coffee, I would counsel him to heed the advice of the apostle Paul in regard to his revolutionary posturings and “put away childish things.” Actually, the most objectionable part of his talk comes in the Q and A in which he jocularly advocates removing Lyndon Johnson’s statue from the Texas State campus. Well now, that’s right in line with MAGA thinking. After all, LBJ (who received his teacher training in San Marcos a century ago) stood for things they hate—public education, government-provided health care, immigration reform, and Black and Hispanic civil rights. I agree with Jesse Jackson that Lyndon Baines Johnson was a great president of the United States *despite* Vietnam. That’s one statue that needs to stay!

Alter’s remarks were politically marginal but no grounds for firing. He is suing Texas State and I hope he wins. I would gladly contribute a check to his legal defense if it’s needed.

ABC joined the ranks of “profiles in cowardice” with its cancellation of Jimmy Kimmel this past week. To be sure, Kimmel made maladroitness remarks in his monologue in which he proclaimed Kirk’s assassin, Tyler Robinson, as one of MAGA’s own. Not true, and Kimmel should have been much more careful. Still, going after comedians is a hallmark of the worst sort of authoritarian regimes. No dictator likes to be the butt of jokes and Trump’s buffoonish persona supplies an excess of opportunity. A formidable battery of humorists such as Jon Stewart, David Letterman, and Rob Reiner have unhesitatingly come to Kimmel’s defense. The most chilling aspect of this episode is the threat of FCC head, Brendan Carr, to pull the

licenses of networks whose programs excessively criticize the administration. This is right in line with his chapter in the Heritage Foundation’s Project 2025 blueprint to fundamentally reconfigure American policy at home and abroad. During the 2024 campaign, Trump repeatedly pled ignorance when queried about Project 2025: “I have not seen it,” etc. He was as honest in that response as he normally is.

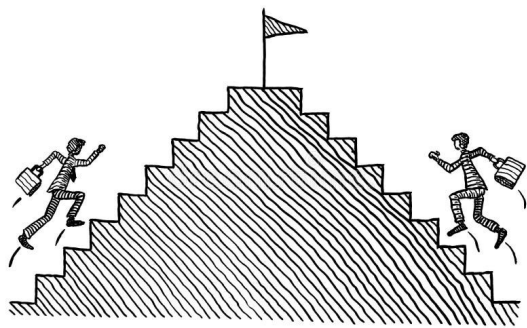
All over the country, teachers and others in the public eye have been targeted for social media postings and other statements about Charlie Kirk consid-

ered by MAGA trolls to be disrespectful. Dozens have lost their jobs and Mike Morath, the head of the Texas Education Agency, has even advocated that some public school instructors lose their certifications. A political science colleague of mine who is currently on leave in South Korea says that this crackdown reminds him of the atmosphere under the military dictatorships of Park Chung Hee and Chun Do Hwan when he was growing up there in the 1970s and 80s but with those regimes seeming comparatively benign compared to the prevailing mindset here in Texas. Indeed, Governor Abbott—a living exhibit for the case for term limits if there ever were one—is crowing the past few days over students being expelled from Texas Tech and Texas State for mocking behavior during Charlie Kirk memorials. When our ultra-righteous governor in an apparent effort at manliness uses a vulgar acronym like FAFO to sign off on his releases then things are truly FUBAR in Austin.

In this country, we always comforted ourselves with the notion that our commitment to the Constitution and to liberal values was so embedded in the political culture that “it can’t happen here.” Well, it has. We are truly living in what a notable writer called “Scoundrel Time,” one in which to quote William Butler Yeats, “the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity.”



A friend who lives in London and who works for democracy every day by supporting free trade unions around the world, says this is what it must have felt like to live in 1940. Tens of thousands of fascists marched in his city last weekend and the odious right-wing populist and Brexit architect, Nigel Farage, currently leads in the polls to become the next prime minister. Today's *New York Times* reports that Trump officials like J.D. Vance and Kristi Noem (in travels to Germany and Poland respectively) have promoted far-right parties and spoken with contempt for the European Union. In this country, we always comforted ourselves with the notion that our commitment to the Constitution and to liberal values was so embedded in the political culture that "it can't happen here." Well, it has. We are truly living in what a notable writer called "Scoundrel Time," one in which to quote William Butler Yeats, "the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity." The beast of which that poet spoke is no longer slouching toward Bethlehem but is ensconced in the highest seat of power. We are in a mess of our own creation given the choices voters (and non-voters) made in a free election. Trump's hellish alliance of Bible-thumpers and brologarchs rode to victory with the aid of our countrymen apparently flabbergasted by the price of eggs and/or incapable of imagining a Black woman in the White House. In this combustible context, a college dropout from southwestern Utah committed an unconscionable deed that not only took a life but also immeasurably worsened the situation. God help us.



In case you never got to read our previous issues of *The Advocate*, (along with all of the back issues of the newsletter going back to 1979) Please visit us at:

www.aftlonestar.org

Select the dropdown menu at "News" then select "Archives of *The Advocate*."

Senate Bill 2615 Revisited— Remote Work at Lone Star College

Dr. John Burghduff

In our special August edition of *The Advocate*, we addressed Senate Bill 2615, a law that pertains to remote work in public colleges and universities in Texas. To quote what I wrote in that article:

"I have been asked if this bill eliminates the legal authority for Lone Star College to offer remote work options for faculty and staff. It most definitely does not."

If you have not had a chance yet to read this bill and you want to know what the full story is about where flexible work options stand legally at this time, I recommend that you read Senate Bill 2615 in its final form for yourself. You can do so by going to this link:

<https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/89R/billtext/pdf/SB02615F.pdf#navpanes=0>

Although the purpose of SB 2615 is to place limits on remote work, what the bill refers to as "telework", the plain language of the bill makes it crystal clear that there are legal carve outs allowing for work from home in certain circumstances. To review what I covered in August, I'm pasting in the relevant passage from SB 2615:

SECTION 1, Subsection C

An institution of higher education may allow telework for an employee on a temporary or permanent basis if the employee:

- (1) has a temporary illness;
- (2) has a temporary or permanent medical condition or disability requiring the institution to make a reasonable accommodation under state or federal law for the telework;
- (3) is employed in a nonteaching position and:
 - (A) has demonstrated the ability to work well with minimal supervision;
 - (B) has a deep understanding of the employee's duties and responsibilities;
 - (C) has demonstrated the ability to manage the employee's time;
 - (D) has a record of thoroughly and efficiently the employee's duties; and
 - (E) is employed in a position that does not require the employee's day-to-day physical presence at the institution or in-person interaction with students, administration, or other employees;
- (4) is employed in a teaching position but is not a faculty member of the institution;



- (5) is employed in a teaching position and is currently assigned to teach only a course or program that the institution has:
- (A) approved for remote instruction in accordance with the institution’s academic oversight or faculty governance procedures; and
 - (B) designated as:
 - (i) distance education; or
 - (ii) a dual credit course or program provided by the institution;
- (6) is employed as a faculty member and is on a temporary research assignment located off the institution’s campus; or
- (7) is employed as a faculty member who provides tele-health services as part of the employee’s assigned clinical, research, or instructional duties.

This is the end of the quotation.

Now that two months have gone by, I want to share some thoughts and concerns about how this has evolved so far. I would like to talk about the impact on staff and the impact on faculty separately.

1) Staff

My contention in August, which I still stand behind now in October, is that, for staff employees in particular, the remote work policy that Lone Star College had adopted just a year or so ago is, to a very large degree, in compliance with the provisions of this bill. Practically speaking, the only significantly new requirement, although the bill does not explicitly call for this, is that documents need to be filed with the state affirming that the practices of the college related to remote work are in alignment with the provisions listed above.

It is not surprising that there needed to be a temporary pause placed on implementation within Lone Star to prepare the needed documentation. What is surprising to me, personally, is that the pace of documentation has been uneven across different campuses. Some departments, divisions, and colleges are largely back to the practices that were in place in May before SB 2615 passed. Others are either still in limbo or have even pulled back from the plans they were offering in the spring.

It has always been understood since remote work options

were first offered that different departments, divisions, and colleges would have different needs and that practices would not be uniform, but they would be equitable. A principle that was the hallmark of the plan through last year was that at least some benefit would be available to all employees. For some jobs, remote work does not make sense. For those jobs the hope was that some other type of flexibility would be available like alternative hours, four-day / ten-hour options, etc.

Whether a law had been passed or not, it is also clear that plans might evolve as departments, divisions, and colleges assess what has worked and what needs to change.

What does concern me, is that implementation across campuses seems to be drifting farther apart. I think we need to be concerned if experiences of employees in similar roles are becoming significantly different. I worry about the impact on morale of such differences. I worry about the impact on collaboration across the system. I worry that the concept of “One Lone Star” will come unraveled.

In addition, I think it is important for all of us to remember that our staff employees frequently have skills that are easily transportable to other employers, both in education, and in significantly different fields of work - a much greater transportability of skills than faculty. (Exxon Mobil may be hiring office managers, HR experts, and maintenance workers. They may not be hiring Philosophy professors.) Retaining workers and recruiting new ones becomes more challenging if the work environment is allowed to become less attractive. With major new employment centers, like the new Apple manufacturing facility opening soon near U.S. 290, Lone Star needs to be concerned about being a competitive employer.

Retaining workers and recruiting new ones becomes more challenging if the work environment is allowed to become less attractive.

The nature of work is changing; that statement is beyond obvious. The changes are coming less dramatically and slower than I imagined but probably faster than others had expected. Nevertheless, not participating actively in the conversation

about whether existing models of when and whether workers, and those we serve, engage in person or remotely is a dangerous choice.

Perhaps, the imbalances across the system will resolve as departments, divisions, and colleges finalize their plans. I hope so. Our success depends on it.



2) Faculty

SB 2615 offers fewer alternatives for faculty than for staff.

Only faculty teaching courses or programs that the institution has approved for remote instruction and designated as distance education (or institution driven dual credit) may work remotely. Virtually all faculty do some of their work away from the campus – grading, lesson planning, email, etc., so I believe the intention of the bill is that only those who teach COMPLETELY remotely are eligible to WORK completely remotely.

We have faculty who do that, mostly within LSC Online.

I have been told that there is specific work required to “approve” a course or program for remote instruction and to “designate” the class as distance education. The law says that this “approving” and “designating” is something the institution does. Perhaps there is some state reporting issue as well that the words of the SB 2615 don’t explicitly describe. In either case, if this is something that needs to be done, we could do it.

Aside from SB 2615, there is another factor that impacts remote work for faculty. In Lone Star College Board Policy, Section IV.F.1.2(b) states “To maximize faculty accessibility to students, the College expects teaching faculty to be on campus at least four days per week—preferably five.” Although I don’t know for certain, I think this clause is old. I am relatively sure it or something similar was in the policy manual when I started working for the college system in 1992. I would not be surprised if this wording goes way back to the school’s founding in 1973.

A few things have changed, and I would suggest that it is time, not to throw out a four or five day campus requirement, but to have a serious conversation about what the word “campus” means in 2025. When I started in this system in 1992, and even more so when I started my first full time community college job in 1982, it was totally clear what a campus was. We did not have D2L. We did not have Webex. We did not have email. We didn’t even have telephones! If a student wanted to see us, the only way that transaction could take place is if the student came to the physical campus, navigated to the physical building, and found my physical office.

In 2025, that vision of “campus” is still vitally important and relevant, especially for those of us teaching predominantly face to face. But is it time to have a conversation about whether that definition is completely adequate in the modern context? I, for one, would welcome a conversation between faculty teaching in all modalities to hear more about what

we each actually do regarding teaching and supporting students, where we do it, and at what times. There are too many stereotypes – both about online teachers lying around in their jammies and face to face teachers getting to walk out of the building empty handed at the end of the day.

That open conversation, across faculty and administrators would, I think, lead us to a consensus about what faculty work looks like in 2025 and how to support it.



Naughty Words

Dr. John Burghdoff

While much of this issue of the Advocate has focused on challenges to higher education from the State of Texas, it is important to remember that even more threats are coming from the Federal Government. The Trump administration has demanded monetary penalties from universities they believe are not hard enough on pro-Palestinian rights protestors. They have threatened the admission of foreign nationals on student visas. They have dramatically cut funding to the Department of Education.

Just as Lone Star College has, so far, been left somewhat unscathed from challenges at the state level, some of these threats from the federal level may seem far away from our doors as well.

However, we have already faced real and heartbreaking impacts from the Trump administration’s indiscriminate cutting of federal grants to education. In this article I want to highlight the impact these cuts have made on Lone Star College employees, but please bear in mind that every cancelled or scaled back federal grant means a loss of valuable services to our students – services for which we have no other funding source – services that matter to students and are not “waste, fraud, and abuse” about which the president constantly complains.

As grants began to be cut early in the year, I am proud to say that Chancellor Castillo and LSC System Administration worked very hard to shift grant funded employees who were



losing their funding (and therefore their jobs) to safe budget funded open positions within the college. They are still trying to do so as much as possible.

However, by June of this year, the number of grant-funded Lone Star employees who were going to lose their jobs as the cuts to grants became more and more severe had risen to 452 employees. That's roughly 6% of our total workforce. The sad reality is that the College does not have enough resources of its own to fund that many people. Many of them will be out of work. If the Union had the money to save those jobs, we'd give it to the College – but our own workforce consists of only two part time employees and a bunch of volunteers. We couldn't even cover one position with our budget.

If the United States had been in the midst of a cataclysmic recession or depression that forced the government to make draconian cuts, the loss of jobs would have been tragic but understandable. But we are not in a financial crisis, or at least we weren't in the first half of the year. If the cuts had been strategic, thoughtful and driven by a commitment to maximizing student success, that would have been a little better. But the cuts were indiscriminate and, frankly, silly.

In case you don't know what the process was and is that has put federal grants on the chopping blocks, what Trump administration officials did was perform a word search on grant applications and flag any of them that contained certain "naughty words". If grant documentation contained one of these words, it was subject to cancellation. Two target areas were grants funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) – both major funders of higher education. A comprehensive list of the naughty words (and phrases) being scanned for in grants funded by these organizations was leaked and was published in at least two highly reputable journals. Here are the articles if you would like to check them:

"These 197 Terms May Trigger Reviews of your NIH, NSF Grant Proposals"

Bruce Lee, MD, Mar 15, 2025, Forbes (online)

"These Words are Disappearing in the New Trump Administration"

Karen Yourish, Annie Daniel, Isaac White, Lazaro Gamio, New York Times, March 7, 2025

As this list became public, grants offices at colleges and universities all over the country frantically attempted to rewrite grant applications to substitute more neutral words for naughty words but that process was largely in vain.

I think it is important for Lone Star employees to understand how arbitrary, discriminatory, and unserious this process is. For example, the word "women" will flag a grant as suspect,

but the word "men" will not . . . unless it is part of the phrase "men who have sex with men". The word "pronoun" will get you in trouble (sorry to all grammarians), as will "equality" (sort of a big concept in math), and "Gulf of Mexico" is a big no-no.

Below is a complete unabridged list of the naughty words being scanned for in NIH and NSF grants. While we mourn the loss of colleagues to this indiscriminate and thoughtless process, ask yourself whether higher education in the United States, long the envy of the world, can remain viable under the weight of such foolishness.

197 Naughty Words and Phrases

- accessible
- activism
- activists
- advocacy
- advocate
- advocates
- affirming care
- all-inclusive
- allyship
- anti-racism
- antiracist
- assigned at birth
- assigned female at birth
- assigned male at birth
- at risk
- barrier
- barriers
- belong
- bias
- biased
- biased toward
- biases
- biases towards
- biologically female
- biologically male
- BIPOC
- Black
- breastfeed + people
- breastfeed + person
- chestfeed + people
- chestfeed + person
- clean energy
- climate crisis
- climate science
- commercial sex worker
- community diversity
- community equity
- confirmation bias
- cultural competence
- cultural differences
- cultural heritage



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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cultural sensitivity • culturally appropriate • culturally responsive • DEI • DEIA • DEIAB • DEIJ • disabilities • disability • discriminated • discrimination • discriminatory • disparity • diverse • diverse backgrounds • diverse communities • diverse community • diverse group • diverse groups • diversified • diversify • diversifying • diversity • enhance the diversity • enhancing diversity • environmental quality • equal opportunity • equality • equitable • equitableness • equity • ethnicity • excluded • exclusion • expression • female • females • feminism • fostering inclusivity • GBV • gender • gender based • gender based violence • gender diversity • gender identity • gender ideology • gender-affirming care • genders • Gulf of Mexico • hate speech • health disparity • health equity • hispanic minority • historically • identity • immigrants | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implicit bias • implicit biases • inclusion • inclusive • inclusive leadership • inclusiveness • inclusivity • increase diversity • increase the diversity • indigenous community • inequalities • inequality • inequitable • inequities • inequity • injustice • institutional • intersectional • intersectionality • key groups • key people • key populations • Latinx • LGBT • LGBTQ • marginalize • marginalized • men who have sex with men • mental health • minorities • minority • most risk • MSM • multicultural • Mx • Native American • non-binary • nonbinary • oppression • oppressive • orientation • people + uterus • people-centered care • person-centered • person-centered care • polarization • political • pollution • pregnant people • pregnant person • pregnant persons • prejudice • privilege • privileges • promote diversity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promoting diversity • pronoun • pronouns • prostitute • race • race and ethnicity • racial • racial diversity • racial identity • racial inequality • racial justice • racially • racism • segregation • sense of belonging • sex • sexual preferences • sexuality • social justice • sociocultural • socioeconomic • status • stereotype • stereotypes • systemic • systemically • they/them • trans • transgender • transsexual • trauma • traumatic • tribal • unconscious bias • underappreciated • underprivileged • underrepresentation • underrepresented • underserved • undervalued • victim • victims • vulnerable populations • Women • women and underrepresented |
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The March Toward a Living Wage

Dr. John Burghduff

I have a weird obsession that will sometimes keep me awake at night. I catch myself wondering what people 200 years from now will think about those of us living today.

200 years ago, the economy of this country was largely based on the premise that it was OK for one race of people to literally own another race of people. We look back on those times and we marvel that a society could embrace a concept that is, at the same time, so profoundly insane and so profoundly evil. What scares me is that so many of those who agreed with (or at least acquiesced to) this practice were, by every measure of society at that time, good people – people who loved their children, who went to church on Sunday, who spoke about a free country. And yet, they had this glaring ethical blind spot that far too few people seemed to perceive. Or, if they did, they thought it was just the way things were and there was nothing to do about it. Those who spoke out against this practice were thought of as extremists, radicals, un-American.

What blind spots do we have, those of us who believe we are good people (that I personally have) that people 200 years from now will look back at and marvel that we could embrace such evil? The list, I fear, is a long one and getting longer.

I anticipate that our descendants, who will be suffering the consequences, will be furious at us for not taking climate change seriously.

I think they will be bewildered that we passed up one opportunity after another over many decades to adopt a sane, practical, and compassionate comprehensive immigration plan, preferring chaos and the demonization of our fellow human beings instead.

I think they will be amazed at how easily we were willing to trade our historic freedoms for the false security of authoritarianism. Depending on how far down that road we go, they could easily hate us.

Transgender rights, foreign policy, gun violence, mental health, and, even more frightening, things we don't even perceive.

One item that I am rather certain will be on that list is that we tolerated an economic system in which people can toil for 40, 60, or 80 hours a week at hard but honest work, and not be able to make enough money to feed their children, to pay their bills, to obtain needed health care, and to live in a safe and comfortable home. Those who question the ethics of such a system are thought of as extremists, radicals, un-American. And so, the practice continues unchallenged and unchecked.

Except, when it doesn't.

Acting on the premise that everyone deserves a living wage, sometimes an individual, or a group, or a community college decides to do something to make things better – at least for the corner of the world that they can influence.

It makes me immensely proud that Lone Star College has committed to the long-term goal of making sure every person who works for this system is earning a living wage. I am proud of our chancellor for setting this goal. I am proud of the Board for funding a budget that moves us forward as quickly as we can (because this will cost a lot of money – an estimated \$65 million). I am proud of my colleagues for expressing their support for our lowest paid employees and not turning to the small and dark place of “What’s in it for me?”

Rather than relying on my own inadequate explanation of this plan, I want to close by quoting from a post that our chancellor, Mario Castillo, posted on Linked In, on September 14 as he outlined this vision:

“I challenged my colleagues to start digging deep so that everyone who works at our institution full time can earn a living wage.

“And so while every employee at our institution got a 3 percent across the board increase on September 1, **by December 1, the bottom-earning 500 employees will see an additional increase of at least 5 percent as we March Toward a Living Wage for Everyone** at my institution, with some seeing several thousands more a year in their salaries.

“It will test us.

“It will be hard.

“But, imagine the college we will build where no one makes below a livable wage in our region. We are not there yet, but we are one step closer.

“And when, at work, I sent out an email explaining this new priority to every single one of my colleagues, around 8000 people, well, my colleagues, especially the ones that will not directly benefit, proved to me that we do work at a great place to work where how we treat our most vulnerable employees matters.

“And where many are willing to hurt a little so that fewer and fewer don't hurt a lot.”

Amen.

Let's do the thing.





AI Literacy Only Matters if Literacy Comes First

AFT Staff

“A recent joint Walton Family Foundation/Gallup survey found that 6 in 10 teachers have used AI to help them do their jobs. ‘If that’s true,’ [Dr. José] Vilson, [Teachers College, Columbia University,] says, ‘then what does that say about the things that we’re pushing educators to do on a general basis that are unrelated to the actual core work of teaching and learning?’” --Liz Courquet-Lesaulnier. “Teachers Union’s AI Deal Raises Questions—and Concerns.” July 14, 2025.

Word In Black: ‘Black America’s Digital Daily.’

There’s a growing push to integrate “AI literacy” into education. This summer we learned that the national AFT has partnered with Microsoft, OpenAI, and Anthropic to launch a National Academy for AI Instruction. The California State University system and Ohio State University at the same time announced major initiatives of their own. The basic idea is to ensure students know how to use large language models and to train faculty to incorporate these tools into classrooms.

On July 8, [2025,] [the national] AFT [organization] [announced a partnership](#) with tech giants Microsoft, OpenAI, and Anthropic to launch the National Academy for A.I. Instruction, a \$23 million initiative that “will provide access to free A.I. training and curriculum for all 1.8 million members of the AFT, starting with K-12 educators,” according to a [release](#). (Liz Courquet-Lesaulnier, “Teachers Union’s AI Deal Raises Questions—and Concerns,” *Word In Black: ‘Black America’s Digital Daily.’* July 14, 2025)

The problem is that this push is happening on top of an unresolved literacy crisis. Too many students in college already struggle to read extended texts, analyze arguments, or write in their own voices. If that foundation isn’t there, then “AI literacy” becomes a way to mask weakness rather than address it.

Students can prompt a chatbot for surface-clear prose, pop in the assignment, “humanize” it, but do they have the literacy skills and follow-through to evaluate whether it’s accurate, useful, or even coherent? That’s the work that has to go into prompting in the first place: long, thought-out prompts and multiple prompts, revisions, adjustments, making it one’s own, and yet without discipline and without knowledge, where do those things come from? Without serious attention to literacy and information literacy, AI

literacy is hobbled. Think of a train trying to go somewhere without tracks having been laid down in advance.

Still, the rhetoric of “AI literacy” has become a centerpiece of higher education initiatives. National unions, major universities, and understandably eager corporate partners tout training programs that promise to prepare students and faculty alike for a future shaped by large language models. These announcements carry a tone of inevitability: AI is coming, and education must adapt. Proper proctoring, as Lone Star College, to its credit, seems intent on implementing, and academic integrity, all too often get left behind as afterthoughts to what one wants to call, irrationally perhaps, the rage for the machine. Other institutions, like Indiana University, have designed free, self-paced AI literacy courses. At IU, the course is divided into six modules and is titled “GenAI 101,” one tailored for students and one for faculty and administration. One can only applaud these constructive efforts to work with the assessment challenges of Generative AI. This is similar at least in spirit to UC Davis’s PAIRR peer review and AI protocols.

The difficulty is that the educational foundation on which a working “AI literacy” rests is already weakened. Large numbers of students arrive at college unable to read sustained arguments, to situate claims in context, or to provide sufficient detail beyond labeling things, not showing them in any concreteness but pointing generically at them. Did you know? The parents’ divorce caused the writer to suffer. And there’s an end of the telling without mentioning when, where, how, what age, what sort of suffering, with what responses or results? Let AI do the “tutoring” through a programmed walkthrough via a bot prompted by a professor for hundreds of students ever after. It’s sure looks like the old philosophical problem of the Same, the already-known, the codified, the formulaic, the rigid, the confirmed bias, the clichéd. It’s the opposite of critical

Before one can evaluate or synthesize machine-generated output, one must first have developed the literacy to weigh words, interpret texts, and navigate traditions of thought that stretch back thousands of years.

thinking. Nothing ever shifts the frame. Faced with this reality, asking undergraduates to become discerning users of AI in advance of an educated literacy is a category error. Before one can evaluate or synthesize machine-generated output, one must first have developed the literacy to weigh words, interpret texts, and navigate tradi-

tions of thought that stretch back thousands of years. As is widely known, more than one law practitioner has had to suffer the misfortune of, for example, supplying made-up (“hallucinated”) legal precedents in a brief to a judge. (“Court Cautions AI-Generated Legal Filings May Face Consequences.” WSHB, 17 July 2024, www.wshblaw.com/experience-court-cautions-ai-generated-legal-filings-may-face-consequences. Accessed 9 Oct. 2025.)



All this is not nostalgia for a vanished canon. It is recognition that the disciplines of philosophy, history, literature, and law together constitute the accumulated practices by which humans have learned to argue, reason, responsibly govern, and reflect. To become educated is, at least in part, to encounter for oneself this 2,500-year conversation—from Homer and Plato to Blackstone, from Augustine to Wollstonecraft, from Baldwin to Arendt—and to learn the methods of critical judgment that come with it. Without that grounding, students are left without criteria for distinguishing sense from nonsense in the polished, confident, generic prose that large language models deliver.

Here mentioning the Dunning-Kruger effect becomes relevant. Experts are less sure, while non-experts are confident. It's a strange phenomenon where the less someone knows, the more confident they tend to be in what they think they know. The inexperienced doesn't know that much work and higher level expertise is in the prompt. But we see the rise of inexperience all the time, even to the point where, as we see today on the national scene, expertise itself is distrusted. In favor of what? And AI magnifies this problem: it produces authoritative-looking text mirages that flatter the user into believing they understand more than they do. That nothing needs to be fact-checked. The danger is that underprepared students, already short on deep literacy, receive from the machine what looks like mastery, grammatically correct sentences organized by hypnotic, rotely patterned paragraphs, and then our person in question mistakes that siren song for genuine knowledge. What follows is the rapid multiplication of error disguised as clarity and understanding.

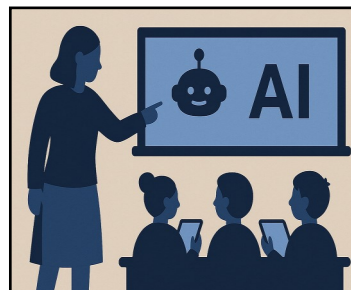
The consequences are serious. Students come to see writing not as an act of thought and improvement but as an outsourced (and often bizarrely sycophantic) service, while faculty educated and hired for their expertise in particular fields are drawn away from teaching, and developing their knowledge in those very disciplines, toward managing tools: detecting AI, redesigning assignments, policing assessments, or scanning Respondus Monitor videos like security officers peering into students' living spaces. It certainly has the appearance of deprofessionalization. Critics have aptly described AI's output as "slop" (Simon Willison) or "mid" (Tressie McMillan Cottom) and warned of a looming "textpocalypse" (Matthew Kirshenbaum). Each term captures the same risk: a flood of plausible text overwhelming the capacity to judge, especially in readers never trained to wrestle with difficult texts. The pedagogical goal, clearly, is not to throw suspicion and distrust at students, but to provide students with the leadership, guidance, and responsible and ethical uses of AI that keep human learning at

The pedagogical goal, clearly, is not to throw suspicion and distrust at students, but to provide students with the leadership, guidance, and responsible and ethical uses of AI that keep human learning at the center of what we do.

the center of what we do. This all seems to be the worthy goal of every teaching focused webinar or presentation about AI and education. But the problems keep looming: Anna Mills, a national leader in studying how to manage the effects of AI in education, led a recent (Sept/Oct) well-engaged discussion on the "ai-in-education@googlegroups.com" list about the very thing Lone Star College's own Tim Moussel warned us about six months ago on LSC's "Generative AI in Education" Viva Engage group: "Blocking AI agents from completing work in LMSes." As one of the Google Group responders stated, "agent capabilities are becoming standard across all major AI platforms, and the conversation we're having here about technical and pedagogical responses is becoming more urgent."

The post-COVID classroom has already seen diminished reading and rising distraction. One might add the addictive quality of mobile phones to the mix. Into that con-

text, AI appears as a savior, a way to bypass difficulty and stress. Difficulty of course is the point. Education is not meant to be frictionless; it is meant to cultivate patience, working through a problem, rigor, reflection, and further exploration. Educators are usually taught about the Vygotskian Zone of Proximal Development, a sort of margin or space where the problems posed to the student are just outside their grasp and where a skilled teacher can productively bridge the gap so that the student keeps going, learning to work through frustration and delay gratification (or quick resolution or closure) in finding a solution. The humanities (philosophy, literature, history, and law) have long insisted that growth happens when one endures struggle with text and idea and oral delivery. That is what makes education transformative rather than transactional. How do we connect AI use to the learning process so that it is not merely transactional?



AI is a tool, useful for routine work or information retrieval, quick reference and research, but it is not a teacher, and it is certainly not a substitute for immersion and real practice in the traditions that have shaped human judgment for millennia. To speak of "AI literacy" without first securing

literacy and sense-making, at that more fundamental level, is to confuse confidence with competence, the classic Dunning-Kruger trap, and to trade formation for convenience. AI isn't going away, as we are told constantly. The task seems to be not to reduce a real education in the bargain.



NOVEMBER ELECTIONS

It's easy to forget that, even though this is an odd numbered year, there are important elections coming up in November. Turnout will likely be low but the impact of some of these races will be high.

Several area school districts have school board races coming up. Included among these is the largest school district in Lone Star College territory, Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District. If you live in this part of town you will know that the current board is often controversial. Please be sure to educate yourself on the candidates running for the open positions if you live within CFISD and make sure you vote. Our sister AFT local that serves employees of Cy-Fair ISD has endorsed a slate of candidates they feel will do a great job leading the district. If you would like to see their endorsements, please visit this website:

<https://cyfairvoices.com/>

Fewer of us live within the boundaries of the Houston Independent School District. They also are electing board members. For the time being, the HISD school board is essentially a government in exile as the district remains under state occupation under the rule of Mike Miles. The citizens of HISD currently have no say in the running of their school district. When and if that occupation is lifted, however, the elected school board will once again take the reins, so the membership of that board is important. Houston Federation of Teachers, the AFT local that serves HISD employees has also endorsed a slate of candidates. You may find that list at this website:

<https://www.endthehisdtakeover.com/>

There are also open positions on the Boards of the Al-dine Independent School District and Houston City College as well as an open seat on the Houston City Council. The Texas Gulf Coast Area Labor Federation, of which AFT Lone Star College is a member, has endorsed candidates in these races. The TGCALF also affirms the endorsements of Cy-Fair AFT and HFT for the Board races in CFISD and HISD. To see a complete list of all of these endorsements please visit:

<https://www.gcaflcio.org/endorsements>

Of great importance this year, there are seventeen proposed amendments to the Texas Constitution on the ballot. There is also a special election to find a replacement for Sheila Jackson-Lee and Sylvester Turner in the 18th U.S. Congressional District which overlaps a portion of our service area. The labor movement in the greater Houston area has not made endorsements for these amendments or this race but it is important to know as much as you can. The Houston League of Women Voters, as they always faithfully do, has published a voter's guide with information about all of these races. The LWV is non-partisan and does not make endorsements but provides arguments both in favor of and against the constitutional amendments and publishes responses from all the candidates to key questions. This voter's guide is available online here:

<https://digital.houstonvotersguide.org/nov2025/>

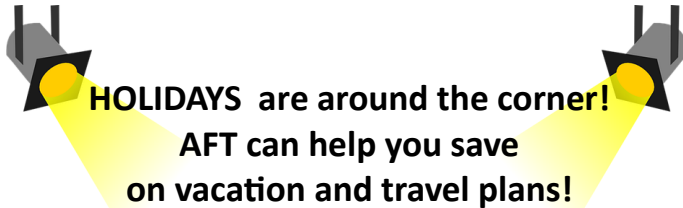
**Early voting runs from
Monday, October 20
through Friday, October 31
and election day is
Tuesday, November 4.
Make sure your voice is
heard and go vote!!!**



**your VOTE
is your VOICE**

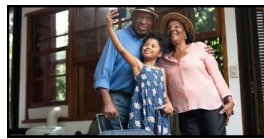


AFT Discounts & Savings: Travel and Vacation Perks Spotlight!



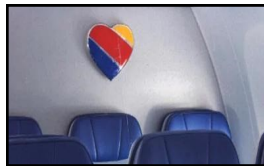
HOTEL DISCOUNTS

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 on issues in the workplace, 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 together and 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.

If you need help with an issue or conflict at work, we will be there for you. Join not only for the peace of mind at work, but because you embrace the values we embrace!

Let's advocate together!

**BECOME A
MEMBER**
JOIN TODAY!

www.aftlonestar.org

SIGN UP TODAY

AFT Lone Star College

SCAN ME!



A Union of Professionals

AFT-Lone Star College

- \$8 million in professional occupational liability insurance (in case you get sued)
- Local staff and leaders ready to assist you when you need job-related help and information
- Legal defense funds (in case you need an attorney)
- \$36,250 Accidental Death & dismemberment policy
- Strong leaders and lobbyists advocating for your professional rights at local, state, and national levels
- \$5000 free term life insurance for your 1st year of membership
- AFT PLUS savings and discounts for you and your family
- Professional educational resources and publications
- No conflict of interest-Administrators cannot join
- We are strong, active, & vocal. AFT-Lone Star is the best organization to represent you at work!
- Pay your membership dues via bank draft or credit card by signing up online:

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



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

25-26 Monthly AFT Dues

Full-time Faculty	\$51.50
Full-time Professional Staff	\$33.25
Full-time Support Staff	\$33.25
Adjunct Faculty	\$20.12
Part-time Staff	\$20.12

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

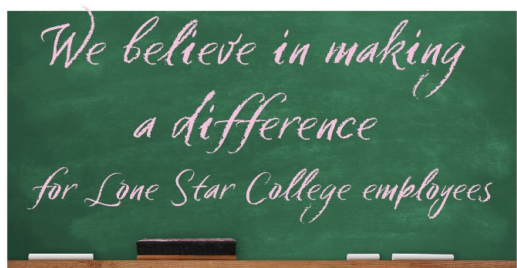


JOIN AFT - LONE STAR TODAY!



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
Erik	Oslund	Treasurer	Montgomery
Travis	Scott	North Harris Faculty Vice President	North Harris
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
Dierdre	Hayes-Cootz	Tomball Staff Vice President	Tomball
Cathleen	Quayle	System Office, Staff Vice President	System Office
Katie	Truax	University Park Faculty Vice President	University Park
Hilary	Harris	Online College Faculty Vice President	Online College

Our AFT Lone Star Organizers are on the campuses regularly!

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.

