

Legislative Affairs Committee Report 2019-2020

The Legislative Affairs Committee met a number of times with Mr. Michael O'Quinn, VP of Vice President for Government Relations & Strategic Initiatives, to discuss state and federal issues that affect higher education. The impact of COVID-19 on the federal and state budgets is highly significant, and it is expected to be felt for a long time.

Federal funding and budgets related to higher education and COVID-19 –Universities are gaining more federal research money related to COVID-19 research

Texas budgetary impact from 2020 lost oil and gas revenues and COVID-19 - the next session originally was expected to be very good for higher education. With the decrease in revenue, and the increase in spending elsewhere, higher education now is facing a significant reduction in budgets for the future session.

Texas SB 25 - Passed in May 2019. From the bill "Relating to measures to facilitate the transfer, academic progress, and timely graduation of students in public higher education." Impacts are still being felt. Students now have to file degree plans at 30 hours, or by the end of their first semester if they come in with 30 hours. From this bill, Texas A&M must file a report explaining why transfer credits were not accepted when a student transfers in to the University, for all students. This is done on an annual basis. The end goal is to facilitate more students taking more classes at the two-year schools and transferring most if not all of their courses into the four-year institutions.

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) - The new THECB Commissioner spoke at the joint Texas A&M/UT meeting in the spring. He said that he had put a pause on new fields of study implementation and that the concept would be reviewed. This is also related to SB 25 which was passed in May 2019. The Legislative Affairs Committee was made aware that a new review committee was created, and that Texas A&M University has representation on the committee. However, we are concerned that the two-year institutions and community colleges may be more broadly represented than the four-year institutions and will continue to outvote the B.S. degree granting schools. The Legislative Affairs committee recommends that the letter of concern that was sent to the previously to the THECB now be shared with the current THECB Commissioner.