

Date: July 8, 2009
To: Faculty Senate
From: D. M. Hank Walker
Chair, Legislative Affairs Committee
Subject: Legislative Affairs Committee Report 2008-2009

The Legislative Affairs (LA) Committee focused primarily on the following issues during this past academic year:

1. Development of LA committee bylaws. These were agreed upon by the committee and eventually approved by the Faculty Senate to make the LA committee a standing committee, rather than an ad-hoc subcommittee.
2. University budget issues. At the beginning of the 81st Texas Legislature, there was significant concern over the university budget. One issue that came up early on was faculty loads. Courtney Trolinger asked us to collect information on the time faculty spend on activities that are not included in the official load formula, such as advising student groups. We collected this information in an informal fashion. This issue later faded with articles showing that Texas A&M was ranked #1 in return on investment by *Smart Money* magazine, and the budget situation improved.
3. Tuition freeze. Several bills were introduced in the 81st Legislature to freeze or otherwise regulate tuition. In particular, one bill in the Texas Senate would have frozen tuition for two years, then limited annual increases to the CPI, and required majority student vote for fee increases. This bill had co-sponsorship by the majority of Senators. University of Texas budget analysts estimated this would cost UT more than \$500M over five years. The particular concern was that tuition was limited, but there was no corresponding requirement for the Legislature to provide the necessary university funding. This was of particular concern given that the Legislature has not maintained per-student funding over the last several budgets. The LA committee provided input to our state liaisons about the need to link tuition and funding. We communicated with the Student Senate so that our actions were compatible. Later the Texas Senate produced a compromise bill linking tuition and funding. The Texas House did not take any action, due to their concern that holding down tuition would require significant new higher education funding. The Regents of the various state university systems took Legislature actions as a clear message to hold down tuition, in order to minimize the chances of a bill passing in future legislative sessions. There were several bills introduced on textbook regulation, with a goal of reducing costs, but they did not go anywhere, and the LA committee did not take any action.
4. Concealed handguns on campus. Most of the committee's time was spent on the House/Senate bill that would permit concealed handgun permit holders to carry on campus. This bill readily passed the House, but was given little chance in the Senate, since it had little sponsorship. Surprisingly, it passed the Senate late in the

session. Note that it was co-sponsored by Lois Kolkhorst in the House. Fred Brown and Steve Ogden voted against it. The Senate rejected separate amendments that would have allowed gun-free dorm, gun-free suite or even gun-free room options. The bill later died in the House voter ID chub. The LA committee first collected faculty and staff petitions against the bills, and was working on a cover letter to transmit to our representatives. However, we decided after much discussion that the number of petitions was too few to have an impact, and requested a faculty survey instead. We had a strong faculty response against the bills and transmitted this to our Legislative representatives. We also communicated with the Student Senate, so that our actions were coordinated.

5. Concealed handgun future. The handgun bill is part of a larger effort by the NRA to eliminate restrictions on concealed handgun permit holders in many states. It was admitted during the legislative session that the NRA had written the bill. The LA committee expects them to try again in the 82nd session. The primary justification given for the bill is that it would protect faculty, staff and students in the case of a deranged gunman on campus, similar to the Virginia Tech shootings. In contrast, the faculty believes that it is much more likely for students to be killed by concealed permit holders in cases of jilted lovers (similar to the College Station murders this year), suicide, horseplay, or similar situations. The Texas campus police chiefs association also agreed and came out against the bill. We have had initial discussions with Texas A&M campus safety officials, who are undertaking a safety study, which we hope to show that concealed handguns are a bad idea on campus. We also hope to enlist the Aggie Moms clubs. In particular, the fact that the bills did not even permit a student to opt out of having a dorm roommate with a concealed handgun. Finally, the chancellor of UT mildly came out against the bill, and President Powers of UT Austin had a powerful editorial against the bill, noting that UT was the first victim of a mass campus shooting. I had urged President Murano to come out against the bill, but we were very disappointed in the noncommittal public statements by Texas A&M administrators. Officially, university employees cannot lobby the Legislature, but that did not stop Jerry Patterson from having a Texas Tech faculty member in favor of guns on campus to testify before the House committee.

I expect that tuition, budget and concealed handguns to be the main focus of the LA committee over the coming year, in preparation for the next legislative session. We had attempted to meet with Rep. Brown and Sen. Ogden during this past year, but the scheduling did not work out. We will again attempt to meet with them. Sen. Ogden is considering whether to retire, and I hope we can meet with him while he is still deciding. I would also like to schedule a meeting with Rep. Kolkhorst, since she was one of the sponsors of the concealed handgun bill, and perhaps Rep. Tim Kleinschmidt.