Things at Texas A&M University in College Station continue to go well in spite of the State's call-back of funds. The callback hit our summer program fairly hard, but by freezing hiring of staff (but not faculty) and by cutting back on summer offerings, we were able to return the funds without long-term damage to the University and its programs.

The President of Texas A&M University, Dr. Robert Gates, has announced a plan to hire 447 new faculty members (in addition to replacements for faculty who leave) during the next five years. We are authorized to hire the first hundred and fifty this year. These positions have been parceled out to the colleges, and departments that have documented that they are capable of raising their rankings through such hires will receive the lion's share of the new positions.

TAMU is proceeding with closing its Department of Journalism. This department was attempting to handle students (numbering as high as 900 two years ago) with 7 faculty members and no department head. Rebuilding the department was seriously considered, but the cost was prohibitive. With the closing, all the faculty are being given places in other departments, and the students currently enrolled for a degree in journalism will be able to take all of the courses necessary to complete the degree. A committee has been formed to examine the future of journalism at Texas A&M University. While there will not be a department, other alternatives for training and education in journalism are being examined.

For many decades, TAMU has required that each PhD student's committee have on it a Graduate Council Representative, appointed by the Graduate Office. This requirement is not followed at any of the peer institutions of the University, and so the requirement was ended by the Faculty Senate in a vote last spring.

Several years ago, the Texas A&M University Faculty Senate passed, and the President approved, a requirement for all entering freshmen that they complete 3 years of a foreign language while in high school. This requirement was to begin this fall. However, we found that the requirement was unrealistic and the necessary alternative university courses could not be provided. The Faculty Senate rescinded the requirement in its September 2003 meeting.

Several years ago, the Faculty Senate voted to require that, by 2006, each graduating undergraduate will have completed two writing-intensive courses in his or her major. These courses will be created by the departments of the majors and will be content-driven courses, but one credit hour of each of these courses will be graded on the basis of writing assignments. These courses are designated "W-courses". The regulations governing W-courses were completed last spring, and departments are currently developing the courses.

The Senate Academic Affairs Committee has been charged with examining the possibility of reducing the minimum number of credits for an undergraduate degree at TAMU from its present 128 hours to 120 hours. Further, the Academic Affairs Committee reported, and the Senate passed, a resolution that the departments conduct a review of their student evaluation processes. The resolution reads,

"Resolution on Review of Student Evaluation Processes: Whereas, The Academic Affairs Committee has reviewed current processes and procedures for student evaluation of teaching as described in the Review of Student Evaluation Processes Report; and Whereas, Many colleges and/or departments have not reviewed or revised their processes and procedures for student evaluation of teaching in some time, yet all are required to utilize student evaluation information in promotion, tenure and post-tenure review processes for teaching faculty; and Whereas, Individual departments and colleges are free to develop methods for student evaluation of teaching most suitable for their
particular situations; therefore be in Resolved. That departments and colleges develop mechanisms for periodic review of processes and procedures used for student evaluation of teaching; and be it further Resolved, That the format for student evaluations of teaching should be designed by individual departments or colleges to provide information needed in promotion and tenure review processes and for any other uses deemed necessary by the department or college, with minimum content to include a section asking students about the amount of time and work they put into the course to establish student responsibility for the evaluation and a section to assist faculty members in improving their courses; and be it further Resolved, That material support for student evaluation procedures be provided by the college."

We completed the first of two planned pedestrian underpasses to connect the two primary parts of our campus. This pedestrian underpass runs under the railroad tracks and Wellborn Road, a 4-lane highway. The nearly $15 million for this underpass were supplied from funds for a parking garage attached to it. A second pedestrian underpass is planned near the bell tower on campus, but funds have not yet been identified to pay for it.

We have hired James A. Anderson, a nationally recognized authority on diversity, to fill our new position of Vice-President and Associate Provost for Institutional Assessment and Diversity. He has served as the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Affairs at North Carolina State University for the past 11 years.

President Gates instituted a Freshman Convocation for our entering freshmen this fall. The idea is to give the students and their parents a sense of beginning university life, to match the ending of graduation. During the convocation, academic integrity and the Aggie Honor Code were emphasized.

President Gates set up the Academic Integrity Task Force last spring, chaired by now Speaker Martha Louder of the Faculty Senate. This task force is charged with putting meaning into the Aggie Code of Honor, "An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal or tolerate those who do." The Task Force has recommended, and the President has approved, the creation of an Honor Council which will hear cheating cases. Punishments may range from a lowering of a grade, through the giving of an F* for the course, to suspension or expulsion. The Honor Council is advised to expel students who commit two infractions. The star on F* goes on the transcript and indicates that the grade came about because of cheating. The student can have the star removed (but not the F) by taking a training program to be set up by the Honor Council office. Presently, student rules are being written and we are searching for a Director of the Honor Council office.

Texas A&M University has joined with other universities in creating Education City in Qatar. The TAMU branch campus will be offering degrees in engineering. These will the same degrees as offered in College Station with the same courses required. We are also offering supporting courses in the core curriculum.

President Gates has set up four planning councils to help guide the University during the coming years. These councils have separately defined areas of interest, but those naturally overlap, and the councils are working together in the areas of overlap.

The Council on Educational Environment is focusing on assuring excellence, ethics, assessment, diversity, and a favorable social and intellectual climate for faculty and students.

The Finance Council is focusing on the challenges to our finances of hiring 447 additional faculty, and providing them with support services, laboratory space, start-up funds, and classroom space. It is looking at the University's energy practices as a possible source of savings, at deregulated (flexible) tuition as a source of new funds, and at flexible term summer sessions as a way to accommodate more students and provide needed classrooms from our present inventory.

The Council on the Research Environment has been dealing with immediate problems first. The most urgent problems were those of the reduced state contribution to graduate students' insurance and the increases in tuition and fees for those students. The reduced insurance contribution has been made up by principle investigators for those students they support and by the Provost's Office for the other students. Additional funds for the students to help them with tuition and fees has been provided through cuts in other University spending.

The Council on the Built Environment is concentrating on the buildings presently on campus and planned for the future. A very serious problem is that the building boom in the 1980's used up our bonding authority until about 2013. The Council is looking at ways of moving administrative activities off campus, thus freeing up some existing space. It is also looking at the possibility of constructing short-term buildings (e.g., buildings with an expected life of 50 years or so) in peripheral areas of the campus.