The biggest news this fall at Texas A&M University is that we have not only lost our President (Robert Gates, who is now Secretary of Defense), but we lost our Executive Vice President and Provost (David Prior, who went to the University of Texas), and our Associate Provost (Bill Perry, who moved to the Presidency of Eastern Illinois University). Other positions of lower rank are now being filled by interim people as well.

The Presidential Search Advisory Committee completed its work two months ago and supplied a list of acceptable candidates to the Board of Regents, but the Board has not yet made a final selection.

In August, honorary doctorates were awarded to Robert and Becky Gates, to recognize the many ways in which they moved our university forward.

Texas A&M University is one of the larger universities in the country with an enrollment of 46,540, including 37,357 undergraduate students, 5,364 masters students, 3,314 PhD students, and 505 professional students. We are dedicated to serving the state and the nation with our strong research programs, and to serving the people of Texas with demanding instructional services and useful extension work. We have recently opened a 500,000 square foot engineering building at our branch campus in Qatar. On the College Station campus, we have several buildings under construction at a total cost of close to $500,000,000. These buildings are all to be used in our teaching and research functions.

Excepting temporary openings due to resignations or leaves, our Faculty Senate consists of 100 Senators, made up of at least two Senators from each College, including two from our branch campuses in Qatar and four from our branch campus in Galveston (six total). Reapportionment periodically is done to keep the Senate fully representational of the faculty. Membership is by election of the faculty and is open to all faculty, including lecturers. The Senate is supported by a full-time Assistant to the Faculty Senate, a full-time Administrative Assistant, a substantial budget, and dedicated office space including a meeting room sufficient for a meeting of 15 or so people, which suffices for most of our committee meetings. We are expecting a move to better and larger quarters in the next two or three years. In our May 2007 meeting, Senator Angie Hill Price became Speaker, and Senator Clint Magill was elected Speaker-elect.
To provide Senators from Qatar and Galveston ready access to Senate meetings, we have arranged for a video telecommunications set-up with them. Funding for this equipment came equally from the Qatar Foundation and the Office of the Vice President and Associate Provost for Information Technology. It was first used in our August meeting.

Several years ago, we initiated a "W-course" program, in which certain courses in each of the disciplines are designated as "writing-intensive" and have one credit of their grade dependent upon the quality of writing that the students do. This program continues to be successful. In addition, a year ago we approved the University Studies Degree, a new kind of degree program in which there is no major, and instead there are requirements for an area of concentration (21 to 24 credits) and two standard minors with at least one in a college other than the area of concentration. It is intended that this degree will serve two disparate groups of students: students in good standing in the university who have been unable to qualify for their chosen majors, and students with broad-based interests, as it would permit them to shape a unique degree program. We have approved several areas of concentration for this degree program, including ones in Dance (March 19), Geography (March 19), Leadership Studies (March 19), Agriculture and Life Sciences Studies (March 19), Race, Gender, and Ethnicity (April 9), Business (May 14), Mathematics for Teaching (May 14), Marine Environmental Law and Policy (July 9), Biomedical Sciences (August 13), Global Arts, Planning, Design, and Construction (August 13), Science for Secondary Teaching (October 8), Mathematics for Business (October 8), and Mathematics for Pre-Professionals (October 8).

In response to recent shootings on campuses across the nation, President Davis instituted a cell phone and internet warning system called "Code Maroon." In addition, he has put together a Task Force on Campus Emergencies, which is investigating other ways in which emergencies of all sorts can be addressed in advance.

In its May meeting, our Faculty Senate approved a standardized set of non-tenure track faculty titles, thus providing departments the means of offering career ladders for such faculty. This appears in a document titled "Guideline to Tenure-Track, Tenured, and Non Tenure-Track Faculty Titles."

Each year, our Faculty Senate makes awards to students who show outstanding courage and determination in the face of adversity while attending Texas A&M University. These are funded by donations from the senators themselves. During its September meeting, the Faculty Senate Aggie Spirit Award was given to two students, each of whom received a certificate and a $450 award.

The President of the University is invited to address our Faculty Senate at least once each year. During the September Senate meeting, Interim President Dr. Ed J. Davis discussed the history and status of the CDC investigation into the handling of Select Agents, pay and hiring issues, and continuing space problems.

An on-line course evaluation system (PICA) has been introduced and is suffering some growing pains. We hope it will be used in a way that positively affects teaching here.