

March 28, 2025

# TCFS NEWS

A Message to our Member Institutions



TEXAS COUNCIL OF  
FACULTY SENATES

## Our Spring 2025 Meeting in Austin, February 21-22



## Message from the President

Faculty colleagues and member institutions,

Thank you for your participation in the Spring 2025 Texas Council of Faculty Senates (TCFS) meeting in Austin. The discussions, panels, breakout sessions over the two days made this meeting a tremendous success, reinforcing the essential role of shared governance in our universities. Here's an overview of the great work we accomplished.

Brian Evans (President, Texas AAUP-AFT) started us off with an overview of several Texas Senate Bills such as SB 452 and SB 1489, as well as several Texas House Bills such as HB 1705, HB 281 and HB 254—highlighting their potential impact on quality-control in higher education and the future of faculty governance. He specifically drew attention toward legislative efforts to increase the role of Boards of Regents in decision-making typically entrusted to administrators while other pieces of legislation aim to limit the role of faculty senates.





Following Brian Evans' presentation, we heard and engaged with a panel discussion on key pieces of legislation from legal, academic, and governance perspectives, preparing faculty leaders to responsibly engage in dialogue on their campuses,

The panel suggested several ways for faculty to get involved, including providing testimony in Austin, staying informed about legislative developments, and mobilizing colleagues to advocate for academic freedom. Faculty were also

encouraged to join the Texas AAUP-AFT to strengthen collective advocacy efforts and support policies that protect shared governance and institutional autonomy.

I encourage Texas faculty to join the [Texas AAUP](#), the [Texas Faculty Association](#), and/or the [Texas Association of College Teachers](#). These groups champion academic freedom, shared governance, and faculty rights, complementing the work of TCFS, which is why their officers join us at TCFS meetings.



## Spring 2025 Roundup Report Themes

A major deliverable to the citizens of Texas, TCFS identified ten themes of trends, achievements, challenges, and faculty governance concerns across Texas university faculty governance leaders:

### 1. Enrollment Challenges and Strategies

- Many universities report **stagnant or declining enrollment** (e.g., Sul Ross, UHV, SHSU).
- Strategies include **dual credit expansion, online program growth, and targeted recruitment** to boost enrollment.

### 2. Shared Governance and Faculty Concerns

- Universities express concerns over **faculty governance, administrative transparency, and decision-making authority** (e.g., Texas A&M International, TAMU-CC, Texas Tech).
- Faculty senates are actively working to ensure **greater input in major decisions, particularly regarding leadership and program changes**.

### 3. Impact of State and Federal Legislation

- A **"wait and see" approach** is common, with universities monitoring **legislation related to DEI policies, tenure, faculty dismissals, and funding**.
- Some institutions (e.g., Texas A&M, University of Houston-Downtown) are **already adjusting programs and governance structures** in response to recent laws.

#### 4. Budget Constraints and Faculty Compensation Issues

- Several universities (e.g., UHV, UHCL, TAMU-CC) cite **budget cuts, salary concerns, and financial instability** due to declining enrollment and state funding changes.
- Faculty senates are advocating for **salary adjustments, inflationary raises, and improved financial transparency**.

#### 5. Academic Program Expansions and Cuts

- Many universities are **introducing new degrees**, especially in **STEM, business, healthcare, and AI** (e.g., SHSU's **Polytechnic College**, Texas A&M's **AI in Business Minor**).
- However, some universities are **cutting low-enrollment programs** (e.g., Texas A&M eliminating **38 certificates and 15 minors**).

#### 6. Administrative Turnover

- Many universities are experiencing turnover at the president and provost positions.
- There is a general concern about the lack of faculty participation in presidential searches.

#### 7. Faculty Workload, Tenure, and Policy Revisions

- Universities are revising **faculty workload policies, tenure review processes, and post-tenure evaluations** (e.g., Texas Tech, Tarleton State).
- Some faculty senates are working to **protect tenure and advocate for equitable review processes**.

#### 8. Research and Graduate Program Growth

- Increased focus on **doctoral and professional degree expansion**, particularly in **health sciences, cybersecurity, business, and criminal justice** (e.g., Texas A&M, Texas State).
- Universities are seeking **external funding and grants** to support research, with some experiencing **concerns over federal funding uncertainties**.

#### 9. Digital Learning, AI Policies, and Emerging Technologies

- Universities are **expanding online programs and integrating AI-related disciplines** (e.g., Texas A&M-Central Texas' discussions on AI policies).
- Faculty senates are debating **ethical use, academic integrity, and AI's role in education and research**.

#### 10. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Adjustments

- Some institutions (e.g., **University of Houston, UHD**) are navigating **the impact of DEI legislation**.
- Universities are **restructuring or renaming DEI initiatives** while continuing to support **student success and faculty diversity efforts**.

These themes reflect the **major institutional priorities, concerns, and challenges** that Texas universities are facing in Spring 2025.



## Roundup Roundtables



One of the most impactful aspects of the Spring 2025 meeting was the roundtable discussions that emerged from the roundup report themes. Faculty leaders from across Texas universities engaged in dynamic, problem-solving conversations, addressing the key trends, achievements, and challenges identified in the Roundup Reports. These discussions centered on six critical themes that reflected the state of faculty governance across the Texas higher education landscape: 1) Research Designation Changes and Tenure & Promotion Policy, 2) Shared Governance, 3) Administrative Turnover, 4) Institutional Discussions about Legislative Changes, 5) Compensation Studies & Budget Issues, and 6) Faculty Workload.

Through these collaborative discussions, faculty governance leaders were able to share best practices and propose actionable solutions that could be applied across institutions. Ideas emerged around improving transparency in governance processes, fostering more effective communication between faculty and administrators, and revising tenure and promotion policies to ensure fairness and principled procedures considering increasing demands for research productivity. The roundtables not only provided a space for exchanging ideas but also set the stage for long-term collaboration and implementation of strategies that will benefit Texas universities statewide.

These discussions are a testament to the power of shared governance and the importance of collective problem-solving in higher education. By addressing these challenges head-on, TCFS continues to play a pivotal role in advocating for meaningful change across Texas universities.

*Many thanks to our banquet speaker, Tony Cucolo, Major General, US Army, retired, & former Vice Chancellor, UT-System*

One of the highlights of the meeting was our banquet, where we were honored to hear from former UT-System Vice Chancellor and retired Major General, Tony Cucolo. His keynote address serves as a wakeup call regarding the government of colleges and universities.

Drawing directly from his experiences in higher education and his long career in military leadership, Tony made it clear that faculty governance needs to be viewed as a valuable component of collaborative decision-making, just as the best military strategies begin with valuing the intelligence and input from all ranks. Further, Tony expressed the importance of university decision-making to be based on valid data as opposed to anecdotes.





As we move forward, let us remember that the strength of our universities and the future of higher education in Texas rest upon the joint responsibility and joint effort of faculty, administrations, and governing boards to govern colleges and universities, guided by principles and fueled by a steadfast commitment to academic excellence. Faculty, administrators, legislators, governing boards, and the citizens of Texas all play a vital role in shaping the next generation of leaders, thinkers, and innovators.

Together, we face unprecedented challenges, but through open dialogue, mutual respect, and a shared vision, we can ensure that our institutions continue to thrive. Faculty senates are not just a voice for professors—they are a voice for progress, for reason, and for the future of Texas. It is through our collective effort that we can uphold the principles of academic freedom, safeguard the quality of education, and inspire the next wave of intellectual and economic growth in our state.

I urge each of you—whether a faculty leader, an administrator, a policymaker, or a concerned citizen—to join us in this mission. Together, we can build a future where Texas universities are stronger and more impactful than ever before. Thank you for your continued dedication to this important work.

## *Final thoughts*

As we look ahead, I am excited to welcome Dr. Tabitha Morton as our new TCFS President. I will pass the baton on May 1<sup>st</sup>, but I will remain in a supporting role for one additional year as Immediate Past President.

The date and location for our fall meeting will be announced soon. On the heels of the 89<sup>th</sup> legislative session, our meeting will offer us another opportunity to continue our discussions and work towards strengthening the role of faculty governance across the state.

Thank you once again for your dedication to improving Texas higher education. Your active participation is what makes TCFS such a strong and effective organization, and I look forward to seeing you in the fall.

With optimism and gratitude,

**Joseph Velasco, TCFS President**

### *A Special Thanks to Our Partners*

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the Texas A&M University System, the Texas State University System, and the University of Houston System for their continued partnership and unwavering support of the Texas Council of Faculty Senates.

Your commitment to fostering strong faculty governance across Texas universities is invaluable, and we look forward to continuing our collaborative efforts in advancing the mission of higher education in our state.

