

"Threats to Diversity and Academic Freedom in Higher Education"

People's Hearing by the Texas Progressive Legislative Caucus
Robert E. Johnson Conference Center, 1501 Congress Ave, Austin, Texas

August 12, 2026, 9am-noon

Chaired by Rep. Lulu Flores (D-Austin)

Panelists: Reps. Lulu Flores (D-Austin), Sheryl Cole (D-Austin),
Mary González (D-El Paso), and Suleman Lalani (D-Houston).

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Short (one paragraph) bio

Brian Evans is speaking for himself as a private citizen, and not on behalf of any group, institution, or organization. Brian is a tenured Professor of Engineering at UT Austin. At UT Austin, he's been a faculty member for 30 years and served as Faculty Senate President 2019-2020. From June 2022 to May 2026, he served as VP, Interim President, and President of the Texas Conference of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) which affiliated with the 66,000-member Texas American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Texas AAUP-AFT is a faculty-led group defending our rights to teach, research, and speak freely. Faculty, staff, and graduate student members benefit from [peer solidarity](#), [legislative advocacy](#), and [legal representation](#).

Testimony begins on the next page.

Testimony

> *Introduction*

My name is **Brian Evans**, and I'm speaking as a private citizen.

For the last three years, I served as President of the Texas American Association of University Professors (AAUP) part of the Texas American Federation of Teachers.

For the last 30 years, I've been a faculty member at UT Austin, where I'm a tenured Professor of Engineering and former faculty senate president.

> *Concerns*

I am testifying today about concerns over censorship of curriculum, research, and healthcare at our public colleges, universities, and health institutions.

I hope higher education administrators and the next Legislative session will address these concerns positively.

Our 1.4M students and hundreds of thousands of faculty and staff are counting on it.

I'll focus on public universities— similar issues are occurring in community colleges.

> *Aspirations*

In the age of AI, employers value people who can do what computers can't: think creatively, empathize, collaborate, and adapt.

Many students will enter careers that don't yet exist, making the freedom to learn more important than ever.

Free inquiry, expression, exploration, and dissent drive learning and innovation—and depend on faculty and staff having the freedom to teach, mentor, advise, and research *without* institutional censorship.

> *Censorship in teaching and learning*

I am not aware of any state or federal laws banning specific topics in courses at Texas public colleges and universities.

Neither SB 17 (2023) nor SB 37 (2025)¹ does.

Yet, public universities are censoring course topics, readings, and discussions.²

At least five Texas public university systems have restricted the teaching of topics related to race, gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation.³

Administrators are using automated reviews to flag thousands of course syllabi, requiring instructors to remove content or risk course cancellation.

Texas A&M banned Plato's *Symposium* in a philosophy course.⁴

Texas Tech System policies led to banning Plato's *Republic*, withholding race-related information from first-year law students studying *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, and barring medical education on treating racial and sexual minorities at health science campuses.⁵

Texas Tech censored content in biology courses.⁶

Many instructors self-censor to avoid having their courses flagged.

¹ Texas AAUP-AFT Blog, "SB 37 Implementation Concerns & Recommendations", June 9, 2025, <https://aaup-texas.org/blog/f/sb-37-implementation-concerns>

² Texas AAUP-AFT Blog, "Texas Faculty and Students Fight Censorship", March 12, 2026, and updated Aug. 10, 2025, <https://aaup-texas.org/blog/f/faculty-fight-censorship-of-students-and-teachers>

³ Texas AAUP-AFT Blog, "Texas Faculty and Students Fight Censorship", March 12, 2026, and updated Aug. 10, 2025, <https://aaup-texas.org/blog/f/faculty-fight-censorship-of-students-and-teachers>

⁴ Emma Whitford, "Plato Censored as Texas A&M Carries Out Course Review", *Inside Higher Ed*, Jan. 7, 2026, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/faculty/academic-freedom/2026/01/07/plato-censored-texas-am-carries-out-course-review>

⁵ Texas AAUP-AFT Blog, "AAUP, Texas AAUP-AFT file lawsuit against Texas Tech System", Aug. 3, 2026, <https://aaup-texas.org/blog/f/texas-aaup-aft-and-aaup-file-lawsuit-against-texas-tech-system>

⁶ Prof. Lisa Limeri, "Prof Resigns Over Biology Censorship at Texas Tech", <https://aaup-texas.org/blog/f/prof-resigns-over-biology-censorship-at-texas-tech>

Consider a student wanting to discuss a topic that is banned—or *might* be banned—by their institution. What does the instructor do?

- Moderate the discussion — and risk their job.⁷
- Leave the classroom — and miss the students' analyses and lose the ability to ensure a safe learning environment.
- Censor the discussion.

None of these options protects the freedom to learn and teach.

Universities are also limiting students' freedom to learn by eliminating degrees^{8,9}, courses¹⁰, and entire departments¹¹ related to race, gender, gender identity, and climate change.

Universities are removing choices for core curriculum courses required for every major, and even discontinuing low-cost minors and certificates.

⁷ Texas AAUP-AFT Blog, "2023 Texas SB 18 Tenure Bill or Faculty Firing Bill?", SB18 (2023) has provisions to dismiss a faculty member if they violate institutional policies related to faculty members. <https://aaup-texas.org/blog/f/sb-18-faculty-firing-bill>

⁸ Leonard Bright, "AAUP @ Texas A&M University Condemns Regents' Censorship", Nov. 22, 2025, <https://aaup-texas.org/blog/f/aaup-texas-am-university-condemns-regents-censorship>

⁹ University of North Texas is cutting nearly 70 minors, certificates, majors, and graduate programs in race, gender, gender identity, and climate change. UNT is closing the Linguistics Dept. and phasing out Environmental Studies. <https://www.unt.edu/budget-updates/academic-programs-update.html>

¹⁰ Samantha Ketterer, "University of Houston may cut 40% of core requirement classes in response to GOP law. See the list.", *Houston Chronicle*, July 21, 2026. <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/education/article/uh-core-curriculum-sb37-22352570.php>

¹¹ Lily Kepner, "UT is merging four ethnic and gender studies departments. What changes this fall", *Austin American Statesman*, July 10, 2026. <https://www.statesman.com/news/education/article/ut-ethnic-gender-studies-merger-changes-22334292.php>

> Faculty Recruiting & Retention

Faculty recruiting and retention take place in a national marketplace.

Faculty value the widely adopted AAUP principles of academic freedom¹² and their safeguards of shared governance, due process, and tenure.

In 2023, SB 18 weakened tenure and due process safeguards.

An August 2024 survey found too few applicants for Texas faculty positions, and more than a quarter of faculty having interviewed for jobs in other states.¹³

Key reasons for leaving include concerns about academic freedom, shared governance¹⁴, tenure, and salary.

In 2025, SB 37 limited shared governance by expanding administrative control over curriculum and Faculty Senates.

In the past three years, 130 AAUP members left Texas for out-of-state faculty positions because of institutional censorship or state laws affecting their ability to do their jobs.

This summer, Prof. Lisa Limeri resigned her tenured position at Texas Tech due to censorship of her biology courses.¹⁵

The cumulative effect is a loss of talented faculty and their innovation, a threat to Texas's competitiveness and national reputation, and, critically, an incomplete education for students entering a competitive job market.

I'm happy to answer any questions.

¹² "1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure" jointly formulated by faculty in the AAUP and college and university presidents in the American Association of Colleges & Universities. Adopted by more than 85% of four-year non-profit universities in the United States.

<https://www.aaup.org/reports-publications/aaup-policies-reports/policy-statements/1940-statement-principles-academic>

¹³ Sept. 5, 2024 – Large Majority of Texas Faculty Express Concern About Higher Education; More than a Quarter Consider Leaving Next Year, Survey Finds,

<https://www.texasaft.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/texas-faculty-survey-press-release-sept-2024.docx>

¹⁴ Shared Governance at the University of Texas System Institutions: A White Paper, 2016,

<https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/facultysenate-admin/19/>

¹⁵ Prof. Lisa Limeri, "Prof Resigns Over Biology Censorship at Texas Tech", <https://aaup-texas.org/blog/f/prof-resigns-over-biology-censorship-at-texas-tech>

From the press release of the **August 2024 survey** mentioned in the footnote one:

... The survey showed about two-thirds (61.0%) would not recommend Texas for a faculty position to their colleagues out of state. More than a quarter (26.3%) plan to interview elsewhere this coming year, and more than a quarter (28.3%) also said they have interviewed elsewhere since 2022. The top destinations for faculty seeking to leave were, first, California, second, New York, and third, Colorado.

Among faculty seeking to leave Texas, their greatest concern was the state's political climate, particularly with respect to academic freedom, DEI, and tenure in higher education as well as reproductive/abortion access and LGBTQ+ rights statewide. Academic freedom is the freedom for professors to teach so that students have the freedom to learn....

Respondents also said they have noticed large impacts on hiring due to tenure policy changes and political attacks on higher education. Among respondents, 56.4% mentioned having fewer applicants, 54.0% noticed faculty candidates expressing hesitancy in interviews, and 50.5% saw a lower quality of applicants, with more than one-fourth of all respondents (28.4%) saying that all three had occurred. More than 45% said they knew of faculty who had refused positions offered at their campus. Fewer than 20% knew of no impact on hiring.

From the **shared governance white paper** in footnote two:

"Shared Governance" is a concept of collegial, cooperative and trust-based organizational leadership that enables meaningful combined participation by administration and faculty in the management of an institution's operations. Outstanding universities across the globe apply this concept that involves a combined governance effort. Though the application of such democratic principles to the governance of a higher education institution in the US was first codified in 1920 in a report by the American Association of University Professors, shared governance in American higher education is almost 200 years old