

## SRG Bulletin Six

28 August 2020

### To our SRG Class Agents and their Classmate SRG Members,

SRG email Bulletins, as the needs arise, are supplements to our Newsletters so that we can keep you informed in a more timely manner on topics as they unfold; and so you can then lend support and share it as you see fit. We kindly request that the class agents do not call The Association and ask them to distribute it for you. If you wish to comment to those who are the campus leaders, below are the addresses for you to voice your opinions:

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### Regents Meet and Address Funding Losses due to COVID

The TAMUS Regents met during the week of 18 August and discussed the impact the pandemic has made on System funding. Total losses were reported to be near \$150M for the 11 universities and eight agencies. The CFO, Billy Hamilton said “the situation was not good, but we can deal with it. When things like this happen, there needs to be flexibility.” And there were safeguards built in. To help with the mitigation challenge, there were reductions in new hiring and other measures. He added that in April, TAMU received \$40M provided from the CARES Act.

### The TAMUS Board of Regents Sends a Letter to the “Aggie Family”

*by TAMUS | Aug 21, 2020 | System News*

*The members of the Board of Regents at The Texas A&M University System cannot remain silent or inactive after recent social media posts and actions by faculty members who should be held to the highest standard of our core values.*

*First and foremost, the board respects and celebrates the constitutional right to free speech. We also believe that free speech can – and should – incorporate decency, respect and a good amount of listening.*

*We have not seen enough civil discourse around campus lately. To that end, the board strongly condemns the recent vulgar, disrespectful and divisive language of a few members of the faculty at the flagship university in Bryan-College Station. We expect – and know – our faculty to*

*be among the best in the nation and to exercise the academic freedom that comes with being a member of this great university. That freedom, however, does not include speech that is full of hate and serves to destroy our campus community. Aggies should not tolerate such divisive behavior, and we should hold each other accountable to preserve the spirit that generations of Aggies have forged for us.*

*Our issue is not with debate. In fact, we welcome it. Our issue also is not with academic freedom. It is of paramount importance to the board. Further, we also do not oppose peaceful protests. We want everyone to be heard.*

*As Aggies, we lead by example. The board believes that we can show other universities how to engage civilly, appropriately and with mutual respect.*

*All we ask – actually insist upon – is a dialogue that is productive, thoughtful and consistent with our core values of Excellence, Integrity, Leadership, Loyalty, Respect and Selfless Service.*

*The Texas A&M University System Board of Regents*

A start! But we suggest adding that with the precious right of expression in our Constitution to say what one wants to say – comes the truth of life's accountability and responsibility with the consequences. We hope we can not only add this point, but teach and practice it. Please see the next piece about the rules and guidance.

### **Checking up on the Rules on TAMU “Expressive Activity”**

We have received a lot of inputs from you about both faculty comportment and behavior standards, and “expressions” on campus. We looked it up and have the TAMU briefing that covers it all. We recommend you read it (see below) in its entirety, but we also call your attention to two of our most asked about topics.

CAMPUS SIGNAGE - 51.99.99.M0.02 (2.2.4) • *Temporary signage may include other types of signage including, but not limited to, flyers, posters, or chalking. – 2.2.4.1 Flyers and posters may not be placed on structures such as light poles, street posts, trashcans, newspaper stands nor can they be placed on or in landscaping such as trees, shrubs or gardens/garden beds. – 2.2.4.2 **Chalking is allowed** only with water-soluble chalk on flat, horizontal surfaces (e.g., pedestrian sidewalks/walkways) and must be fully exposed to the rain. Chalking is not permitted on any vertical surface including, but not limited to buildings, steps, signs, statues, benches, picnic tables, and walls—including the walls of the Pedestrian Passageway and the Vehicular Passageway, both off of Wellborn Road.*

UNIVERSITY STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM, RESPONSIBILITY, TENURE, AND PROMOTION 12.01.99.M2 *Each faculty member is entitled to full freedom in the classroom in discussing the subject being taught. Within the bounds of professional behavior, faculty members also have full freedom to express disagreement with other members of the university community. Although a faculty member observes the regulations of the institution, he or she maintains the right to criticize and seek revision. **Faculty members also are citizens of the nation, state, and community; therefore, when speaking, writing, or acting outside the classroom, they must be free from institutional censorship or discipline.** On such occasions faculty members should make it clear that they are not speaking for the institution.*

You can access the briefing here: <https://provost.tamu.edu/Provost/media/Assets/pdfs-essentials/Access-Expressive-Activity-0618.pdf>

Good news postscript! As we posted the rules here, because of the good work of one our members who happens to have the last name of Rudder '62, TAMU announced a change to the chalking policy! We'd also like to salute Bee and Terry Gossett '62 for all the incredible work they did in chalk “expressions” cleaning duty on the campus

sidewalks! Here is the crux of the change: *August 26, 2020; This serves to notify the campus community that Texas A&M University Standard Administrative Procedure (SAP) 51.99.99.M0.02, Campus Signage, has been revised. The policy prohibits chalking for messaging on campus surfaces. This update was prompted by advances in technology and communications channels since the protocol began 10 years ago, as well as issues tied to the removal of chalk itself as detailed below, and you can find that at <https://rules-saps.tamu.edu/rules-saps-college-station/>*

### **The Saga of the TAMU Admission “Essay” (actually Question) on Diversity, and “College Matchpoint” on How to Write It**

It was recently reported to us several times from our members that their grandchildren were being required to answer a question on “diversity.” For a while, we could not verify this even after logging on and checking out the Texas college admission application. But persistence prevailed and this is what we found out: It was added “recently,” and it is a TAMU added requirement and not from the State of Texas. It’s not an “essay” per se but a question (we were told unspecified length, but “College Matchpoint” says 250-300 words). The reason that we could not find it on the website in which one locates the form is that “the website has not been updated yet.” The Question goes like this: “TAMU believes that diversity [no definition provided] is a key part of academic excellence and our Core Values. Describe the benefits for you personally and for the campus community.”

We have been on this topic for a while now, and you can review exactly what we said: the SRG April 20 Newsletter, “Diversity. Inclusion and Integration Imperative;” 9 July SRG Bulletin One, “It’s More about Diversity at TAMU;” and 14 August SRG Bulletin Four, “The Commission has First Meeting.” In Bulletin Four we included our 6 August letter which the SRG Board of Directors wrote to the two Commissioners, conveying our inputs on several topics including diversity. It is interesting when one reads the body of literature that “diversity” is the measurement for data on a cohort’s characteristics regarding three categories – ethnicity, origin, and sex. These are required by Federal and State laws. It is used for comparisons of a cohort with the population make up of other cohorts. As the TAMUS Chancellor Sharp said recently, “We want our System University schools to look like Texas.” So, one cannot get at this question without “diversity” data. You can look up TAMU’s diversity definition on the TAMU website and make up your own mind about it. And, as we have already recommended, you can look up what TAMU’s current diversity objectives are in The Plan.

Seems in this whole narrative that we have the “cart before the horse!” We believe, as we have been saying consistently and repeatedly, that there is no question that “diversity” is America and TAMU! It is key because it is us! But, in itself, it is divisive! TAMU is great because we are transcendently “one” via our culture, history of service and the call to duty, our Core value system, all manifested in our Traditions. If we do not start with this part, which IS DEPENDENT on assimilation and integration into “us” in a welcoming manner, then our whole will be equal to one part - and THAT IS NOT what we want! We want the sum to be greater than the combination of all the diverse parts!! So, if we are not welcoming in that process, then let’s work that and fix it. But start with preserving who we are and recognize “diversity” is a supporting part of that – NOT the

supported basis of it! And the question/essay on why you want to be a Fightin' Texas Aggie (in a large diverse student body with a famous common spirit and record) should be the subject of the question! OBTW, we need to change the Diversity Plan to say this and include the integration piece. And if you don't want to be an integrated part of that and a fulfilling life afterwards because you experienced it, then there are plenty of other places one can choose!

Back to the requirement to answer the admissions question in the application to attend TAMU – we have some questions (re Bulletin Four again) about this. Why was the TAMU definition not included in the question? What was the objective concerning selection? When? By whom? And how is it used in the selection process for a 16-year-old applying? We remain on this, as we have been for some time, and will stay on it.

Meantime, this is what “**College Matchpoint**” offers in terms of assistance to applying students on their web site:

### *The Keys to Writing the New Texas A&M Diversity Essay*

*In college admissions land, August is always full of surprises—and this year was no different. Texas A&M released a new required essay on diversity. Here's the prompt:*

*Texas A&M University believes that diversity is an important part of academic excellence and that it is essential to living our core values (loyalty, integrity, excellence, leadership, respect, and selfless service). Describe the benefits of diversity and inclusion for you personally and for the Texas A&M campus community. (250-300 words)*

*Diversity is a broad term, so before students start writing, they should think about all the implications. Diversity can include race, gender, sexual orientation, religious and cultural beliefs, socioeconomic background, physical disabilities, and neurological differences, among many other things. Students should also be sure to think about inclusion too—diversity is one thing, but any environment needs to be inclusive (accepting and encouraging the diversity) in order to allow the diverse group to thrive.*

*Once they've taken a step back, it's time to focus on the two parts of the prompt:*

- *Describe the benefits of diversity and inclusion for you personally*
- *and for the Texas A&M campus community*

*First, they'll need to zoom in to their personal experiences: What kinds of diverse communities have they been a part of? How have those communities helped them? How did they personally grow from their experiences within those communities? They can keep those values that A&M describes (loyalty, integrity, excellence, leadership, respect, and selfless service) top of mind while they brainstorm.*

*Then they need to think about why it's important for a college community to be diverse and inclusive. As a thought experiment, students can imagine themselves in an environment with people with a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs: in*

*what ways will that make their college experience richer—both inside and outside the classroom?*

*As students write, they should pull from personal examples. They only have 250-300 words, but that should be enough for a quick anecdote. And if a student doesn't come from a diverse background, they can use this space to talk about why it's important for them to be part of a diverse culture on campus and how it will help them grow.*

**Helpful tip:** *Here's what A&M says about diversity on their diversity page:*

*We define diversity as the inclusion and support of individuals from all groups, encompassing the various characteristics of people in our community. Diversity is the exploration of differences, identities, and ideas in a welcoming and nurturing academic environment. The educational benefits of diverse learning environments includes: civic learning, engagement, and preparation to live in complex global settings.*

### **President Young Responds and Comments on the Forum**

*Thank you for writing me regarding your impression of Texas A&M left by Professor Castro. Clearly, these vitriolic and abhorrent comments do not reflect the core values of the university or the ideals we aspire to teach our students. While there are some members of our faculty with whom I disagree on various subjects, it's still important to honor freedom of expression.*

*Your concern cuts right to the heart of what a university is. It is my hope that our students take away from their education at Texas A&M the best of what we offer, especially the principles that align with our core value of respect. As a land-grant institution, we have always supported freedom of speech, but that does not imply that the university agrees with viewpoints that are contrary to our core values. However, as a professor and as a citizen of this great country, he/she enjoys the right to make his/her opinions known, even if those perspectives are not held by the entire academic community.*

*Thank you for sharing your passion around these sensitive issues. Although this may not be the remedy or response you want to hear, I felt it important to respond.*

*Sincerely, Michael K. Young*

Here are some of the comments which followed:

*- "Most likely came from the PR department, However, by saying this; "Thank you for writing me regarding your impression of Texas A&M left by Professor Castro. Clearly, these vitriolic and abhorrent comments do not reflect the core values of the university or the ideals we aspire to teach students. While there are some members of our faculty with whom I disagree on various subjects, it's still important to honor freedom of expression." So, he (Young) called him out by name. There should be a press release specifically mentioning this professor, not just generic faculty."*

- *“So now it is all about freedom of speech. A couple months ago it was rush to judgement and calling the student body racist. With no proof. This wasn’t a genuine reply. This was a ‘I side with and agree with the racist and hateful professor’ email.”*
- *“Print this and stick it under his windshield wiper when leaves....”*
- *He politely told you ‘thanks’ and move on.”*
- *As I predicted yesterday, he’s hiding behind free speech. A&M has the best lawyers in the world. Fire these leftist radicals and deal with the consequences. The money from former students would come pouring in if they showed a backbone.*
- *“Freedom of speech doesn’t mean freedom from consequences. What Castro said had nothing to do with academic freedom, it bordered on political hate speech. Just about what I expected him to say.”*

### **An Outstanding Texas Aggie Former Student Sends Letter to Regents and other TAMU Leaders**

The author of this letter is a Fightin’ Texas Aggie who we spoke to and received her permission to include her letter here. She told us her son was in basic training at Fort Jackson, and when he attends Texas A&M University, she wants it to have the values that she loves and well knows. Here is her letter. Thanks:

*Hello: I am writing as a former student of TAMU who is horrified by what is happening at my beloved university. Never in my life would I have thought TAMU would be in a battle for its very soul. I know the voices that are shouting loud are the minority in numbers, but they are shocking in their words and that is exactly what they want to do. They are using language and accusations that are hard to get around, but you the Board of Regents for TAMU must take this fight head on and not be afraid to do what is right.*

*TAMU is NOT a systemically racist university. This is language is part of a much larger agenda that is trying to dismantle this country piece by piece. Can there be racist and bias people at TAMU, absolutely but that is not the same as the institution being racist. That is a heart issue of the individual not the institution and you can never root that out anywhere on the planet.*

*Revisionists are trying to rewrite the history of TAMU and Sul Ross. They want only the myopic view of his participation in the Confederacy. No one deserves to be judged by the worst days of their lives. Especially when you are ripping it out of context and looking through the morals of 2020. The conversation cannot just stop at he was a confederate soldier. There would be no TAMU if it were not for Sul Ross and for that he deserves to be acknowledged. And if you really think that taking down that statue is going to solve things then you are being very naive. It’s okay to let some people go their own way if they are not happy with the services. If you know who you are as an institution and the values you have, then stand strong and let the haters hate. If you capitulate to their unreasonable demands, then they will never stop demanding. They don’t want compromise; they want to forever change TAMU into something it was never meant to be. And if you allow that to happen, that is not progress that is annihilation of generations of Former Students and the work and dedication they gave to this university.*

*Those who are against taking Sul Ross down are not for racism. It is not a binary choice. We are for truth. We don’t deny his past, but we want all of his history to be spoken that far*

*outweighs his association with the confederacy. We absolutely support all students at TAMU and want a positive experience for everyone. We agree there are places we can improve that experience and include honoring POC that were a huge part of TAMU. But the demands of BLOC are not reasonable. And we should not feel we are failing as a university to be part of the solution because we don't support these unreasonable demands.*

*My ask is that the Board of Regents for TAMU not be swayed by mob rule. Please realize there are outside influences that could care less about TAMU and just want another notch in their belt. Protect your conservative students. They are being targeted and attacked and that should be just as wrong as any POC who is targeted and attacked. Stop the chalking. Stop allowing radical professors to be the voice of TAMU and influence students with biased opinions and encourage them to be hateful. That is not the Aggie way. You must protect the soul of TAMU and let those who disagree choose to stay or go. If you change with the wind then you stand for nothing.*

*The Former Students are a powerful organization. Do not discount us as a voice in this conversation. You come to us for financial support and we have responded. If you abandon us now to mob rule, then we will respond to that as well.*

*Sincerely, Christine Kjosa '91*

## **Two TAMU Sororities Placed in Quarantine**

Two TAMU sororities were placed in quarantine after it was self-reported following positive COVID tests of members. Dr. Danny Pugh, the TAMU VP of Student Affairs said that “officials learned about the cases because the students followed the university protocols and self-reported through the school’s online portal.” Dr. Pugh reported that the majority of the students are following the protocols and following the rules, but they are also continuing to reach out with reminders. President Young addressed the student body as school reconvened with a video, urging everyone to follow the rules to slow the spread of the virus. He reported that 76% have returned to the campus this semester for in-person learning. “We simply will not be able to stick with in-person classes if we are reckless and dismissive.”

## **Kellen Mond Presser**

During his press conference remarks on 20 August, he was asked about the choices he was presented with during the summer months “away from football.” As the protests were held, “he decisively chose to let his voice be heard” as reported by [The Eagle](#).

His outspoken activism both online and in public demonstrations against police brutality and for the removal of the LSR statue caught the attention of university administrators. He was named to the President Young Commission on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (and Representations) in mid-July. “It was truly a blessing to be appointed to that. Even with my conversations with him (Young) before that. I think we had great conversations. I think he understands that certain changes need to be made. He knows that he wants what is best for the whole student body and not for myself.”

Coach Fisher said “he’s always been mature, but you’re seeing him growing up. He’s turning into a man.” But as The Eagle said, “with his outspokenness came criticism.” To which Mond said “no matter what type of pushback that I get, I’m going to be open-minded. But I’m also going to stand firm on what I believe in.”

### **TAMU Professor charged with working with the Chinese Government**

As reported by The Eagle, TAMU Professor Cheng was arrested Sunday the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August and charged with conspiracy, making false statements, and wire fraud according to the Justice Department. He was also accused of working for the Chinese government and Chinese owned companies while doing research for NASA. He is also accused of participating in talent recruitment programs established by the Chinese government that the US says entices professors at American universities to steal cutting edge research that can be provided to China. He allegedly did all this while receiving grant money while being barred from collaborating with China at the same time.

John Sharp, the Chancellor of the TAMUS, said “We worked closely with the FBI on this case and we shall gladly work with them again if we have to.” Cheng was hired in 2004 as an assistant professor in the Department of Chemical Engineering. He was promoted to associate professor in 2010. The US attorney Ryan Patrick said the talent recruitment programs exploit “our open and free universities. China is building economic and academic institutions with brick stolen from others all around the world.”

The SRG has previously reported on these kinds of incidents, and we have been also working with the International Affairs Department under the TAMU Provost to highlight these kinds of activities and the safeguards TAMU employs. We shall continue to do so.

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